Total Drama: Cartoon Multiverse

by SteveAtwater

Summary

22 characters from 22 different shows compete on Total Drama for a million dollars. Each challenge takes two chapters, one for the challenge and one for the campfire ceremony. Alternating viewpoints.

Notes

Firstly, this fic will most closely resemble the format of Total Drama Island. Twenty-two campers enter the island, one leaves victorious. Although I did take the cannon from Pahkitew and slap a new coat of paint on it.

Secondly, of all the series here, Total Drama is the one I'm least familiar with. Because of this there are going to be not that many references to past seasons, and I might screw up canon a bit. If I do this, I apologize.
Thirdly, Chris and Chef both know this is a fanfic. The contestants think it's a reality show.

Fourthly, a note on ages: everyone who was under sixteen in their canon universe is now 16 unless otherwise noted (if you're a KND fan, please just go with it). Everyone else is assumed to be approximately their canon age. If no age is given but they're presumably adults, then they're also presumably adults in this.

Finally, this fic will shift to the first-person perspective of one of the campers for each challenge. Just a heads-up to try and avoid confusion.

Those are the basic things you should know before this begins. I'd also like to mention that this was heavily influenced by TheMasterKat's *Total Drama Everything*, another multiverse fic where various fictional characters compete on the island. I'd highly recommend you read it; it's only on Fanfiction.net, but it's definitely worth checking out.

Now let's get on with the show!

See the end of the work for more notes.
The sun was high in the sky over a densely wooded island with a small campground at its forefront. From the looks of things, it was about ten o'clock in the morning. Standing on the dock was a man in his late twenties with the type of million-dollar smile only orthodontia and genetics can provide. He looked directly at the camera and smiled.

"Hello loyal readers!" piped Chris McLean. "Readers? Viewers? Whatever, it doesn't really matter. I'm your host, Chris McLean, and what does matter is that this is a brand new season of your favorite reality show, Total! Drama! Cartoon Multiverse!

"Now you all know how this works, so I'm sure I don't need to go too deep into the details. Long story short, we've got a great slate of competitors lined up from a bunch of different cartoons, ready to compete for the grand prize of one million dollars! It promises to be a long run of thrills, chills, and spills. Especially spills. And the best part is that since these are cartoons and this is just a fanfic, we won't have to test any of the sequences for safety! Stick that one in your Friz Freleng! By the way interns you're all fired. Now, because the producers say I can't stand here and blather on all day— that's a direct quote, we all know I don't blather and that a show consisting solely of me talking would send ratings through the roof—but anyway, it looks like it's about time to meet our first camper!"

Right on cue, a boat pulled up to the dock. From the boat disembarked a green-skinned man wearing a top hat, black pants, and a dark gray jacket. He had a handlebar moustache that he twirled evilly around his finger and an evil-looking smirk rested on his lips.

"It is my great pleasure to welcome the man who has foreclosed more mortgages than Citibank, who has tied more people to railroad tracks than there are in Canada, who has had to evade the Mounties more frequently than Izzy, the one, the only, Snidely Whiplash!" Chris proclaimed.

"Charmed, I'm sure," Whiplash responded.

"And, in order to pad out this chapter some because the author is a talentless hack—" Chris smirked. Snidely merely looked confused until Chris continued. "Why did you choose to join this show?"

"I once brought an elephant to Canada to win a dogsled competition over ten thousand dollars," Whiplash said. "Canadian dollars, by the way. Obviously, I'm here for the money."

"You're not the only one," Chris said, and winked at the camera. "But, no time to chat, here comes our next contestant!"

The next boat carried a man in a lab coat and goggles. His hair was bright red and stood straight up. He stepped onto the dock.

"Gentlemen, BEHOLD!" Chris proclaimed. "Steve!"

"Uh, yeah. Hi," Steve said.

"So Steve, how was the trip here?" Chris asked.

"And why are you here, Steve?" Chris asked.

"I uh, I put in my two weeks notice at the lab a while back...I haven't really had any work since," Steve said.

"Fascinating," Chris said sarcastically. "Not really an interesting character, are you, Steve?"

"Well, I--"

"Yeah yeah whatever here's our next contestant!"

The next boat carried a ten-year old boy dressed in a heavy orange parka.

"Oh are you kidding me?" Chris hissed gleefully before clearing his throat. "Here he is folks, all the way from South Park, Colorado, the one and only Kenny McCormick! Welcome to the show, Kenny!"

The boy stepped onto the dock and said something that was drowned out by his parka but sounded suspiciously like "Suck my balls."

"Hey, I read that!" Chris yelped. "Now what are you doing here?"

Kenny's response was once again muffled by his parka.

"Yeah, good luck Kenny," Chris said, before turning to the camera and whispering "Get him off my show."

The next boat to the dock carried a blue-haired young man. The man stepped off the boat and smiled as he walked down the dock towards Chris.

"Our next contestant is a veteran of reality TV," Chris proclaimed. "A one-time member of The Real World, it gives me great pleasure to introduce Andy French!"

"Hey, Chris," Andy replied. "How you doin'?"

"Alright, and how about yourself?" Chris asked.

"Ah, you know, it's just great to be here," Andy said.

"Great!" Chris chirped. Andy made his way down the dock, and Chris turned back to the camera and whispered "What a suck-up!"

The next boat up to the dock carried a very short figure clad entirely in black. The figure would have been assumed to be a child were it not for the male-pattern baldness and the sinister moustache. The man hopped off the boat and strode down the dock as Chris looked at his script.

"Oh no. You can't be serious," Chris implored the camera. The cameraman nodded, and Chris sighed. "Ladies and gentleman, allow me to introduce that master of disguise, that most no-good of all nogoodniks, that Pottsylvania plant--"

"Say the name," the figure smugly intoned.

"Boris Badenov." Chris rolled his eyes as he completed the spiel.

"Thank you kindly," Boris smiled. "And I'm here for the money."
"Nobody asked," Chris muttered. Soon, his face resumed its smile. "And now, all the way from Bunny Island, allow me to welcome the one and only Major Doctor Ghastly!"

A redhead departed from the newly-arrived boat. She was wearing goggles and tight leather clothing. The five male contestants who had already arrived ogled her as she walked down the dock toward Chris.

"Welcome, doctor!" Chris proclaimed. "Or should I say, Major Doctor? What's a woman of the medical profession doing at Camp Wawanakwa? Besides the obvious, of course."

Doctor Ghastly blinked. "Well, I'm on vacation from E.C.C., so I figured I'd try and make some money here. Maybe find some new recruits."

"New recruits?" Chris queried.

"If you're dumb enough to go on this show, you're dumb enough to work for us! That's our slogan," Major Doctor Ghastly responded perkily.

"Riiight," Chris said. "Well, anyway, here's contestant number seven: Elise [REDACTED]. Wait, did you just redact that? I can't say that her name is Elise [REDACTED]?"

Off the next boat stepped another redhead. She was dressed in a white t-shirt, tight jeans, and sneakers. On the ring finger of her right hand gleamed a sparkling diamond ring.

"Welcome, Elise [RED–" Chris started. Before he could finish, Elise whipped her foot into his face, knocking him over. She continued down the dock and Chris stood up shakily. "Right," he said. "I guess I shouldn't say her last name. Anyway, moving on to yet another redhead—that's four out of eight thus far for you counting at home—we'd like to welcome all the way from Gravity Falls, Oregon, Wendy Corduroy!"

The lumberjack's daughter easily hopped off the boat. She was clad in a woolen hat, plaid shirt, blue jeans, and cowboy boots. She walked up the dock towards Chris.

"Hey," Wendy greeted the contestants and host.

"Hey," Chris replied. "So, what brings you to the island?"

"...let's just say things are weird at home and leave it at that."

Wendy joined the others on the end of the dock as another boat pulled up. Off the boat stepped a teenager with his head shaven bald and a goatee. He was clad in a white t-shirt, blue jeans, and tennis shoes. One of the most notable things about him was that he was shorter than most of the other contestants, barely reaching five feet in height.

"And now, our ninth contestant, the man, the legend, the party animal, the guy who got his show banned in India, the one and only Gandhi!" Chris announced.

"Uh, actually, it's Gary Coleman," Gandhi corrected as he walked up the dock.

"You sure about that?" Chris smirked. "Because all my notes say you're Gandhi."

"Well the League of Shadowy Figures said I'm Gary Coleman, so I guess I'm Gary Coleman," Gandhi replied.

"Are the League of Shadowy Figures MTV?" Chris suggested.
"Uh–no comment." Gandhi said as he headed towards the rest of the campers.

"Wait, hold on, before you become another face in the crowd–" Gandhi flinched. "–could you tell us why you're here?"

Gandhi turned back to the host with a manic grin on his face. "To party with some cool bros!" he said excitedly. "Ow!"

"My kinda guy. Gary."

Another boat approached the dock. This one carried a 16-year-old who was better made up than Chris, with great skin, a perfect tan, and meticulously coiffed hair. His wardrobe was no slouch either, as he was wearing loafers, gray dress pants, a pink collared shirt and a white sport coat. He stepped off of the boat and smiled widely.

"Hi, I'm Chaz Monerainian, and this is Total Drama: Cartoon Multiverse. I'm here with a bunch of other people, none of whom are as fabulous as me. With me today is–"

"Whoa whoa whoa hold up!" Chris angrily interjected. "What do you think you're doing?"

"I'm Chaz Monerainian, and I'm taking your show from snoring to soaring!" Chaz smoothly responded. "Now, I–"

"No, you're not," Chris testily replied. "This is my show, and–"

"And it totally needs the Chaz treatment to succeed. Hi, I'm the Chaz, and–"

"Shut up!" Chris screeched. "Shut up, get to the end of the dock, and stay there with the others! I don't want to hear another word out of you. E-ver."

"Ah, but they do, hi how ya doin' audience, I love ya." So saying, Chaz strolled towards the other campers and stood there waiting as Chris resettled himself. Chris managed to calm his nerves and lofted a strained smile at the camera.

"We're at about the halfway point now, folks, as we're just about to have our eleventh contestant join us. In fact, here comes her boat now!"

The camera swung out towards the water and focused on a boat speeding towards Camp Wawanakwa. On the prow of the boat was perched a young woman with long black hair clad in tight black leather. As the group watched, the woman sprang into a handstand, then changed her perch to just her left hand. It was at this moment that the boat hit a sudden swell, and the woman lost her balance and toppled overboard. Underwater, her body was caught by the propellers, and everything south of her ribcage was ripped away. The leftovers—her upper torso, head, and the entirety of her spinal column (which stuck out of her)—flew out of the water and soared through the air, rising over a hundred feet before beginning their downward descent towards the dock. The gathered contestants scattered, except for one: a little boy who looked up, eyes wide, and muttered to himself "Oh, fuck."

Their skulls collided, and Kenny died instantly. Rats swarmed from seemingly out of nowhere onto his body and began nibbling at the dead flesh, and the other contestants reacted with disgust. Chaz began puking over the side of the dock, Gandhi furiously rubbed at his eyes to try and take the image away, Wendy looked at the scene with a mixture of horror and familiarity, Ghastly and Andy fainted, and even Snidely and Boris blanched at the image. The only ones who didn't find themselves instinctively repulsed were Steve and Elise, who stared at the scene with an odd mixture of curiosity, fear, and recognition. Even Chris was affected, as he looked to the sky and said softly "Why couldn't
she have killed that Chaz kid instead?"

Soon, though, Chris regained his senses. "Interns! You're rehired!" he barked. "Clean up this mess, stat! Campers, get off the dock, we're gonna take fifteen."

Fifteen minutes later, it was as though the horrific death scene had never occurred, as the only reminder was the fear in the faces of some of the contestants. Chris was back to normal, standing at his spot on the edge of the docks. Another boat approached; this one carried a small figure clad entirely in red with glowing yellow eyes surrounded by icy blackness. The figure hopped off the boat onto the dock.

"I was waiting forever!" the newcomer whined. "Evil does not wait!"

The new arrival looked around and noticed the fear on the faces of the other contestants. "Excellent!" he proclaimed. "Tremble in fear before the mighty Voltar, for I swear, before this day is through, you all will know the meaning of true evil!"

Chris cleared his throat. "So, this is Voltar," he said. "And why are you here, Voltar?"

"I heard you had...a cannon," Voltar responded. "And I...will use it!"

Several seconds passed before Chris was able to speak. "You're here. To use. The cannon," he reiterated.

"Yes!" Voltar proclaimed. "For what is more evil...than a cannon? Well, me, of course, but besides that nothing!"

So saying, Voltar strode down to the end of the dock. "Ew, it's all wet down here!" he complained to nobody in particular. Chris, meanwhile, focused on the new boat, which carried a teenage girl with short black hair wearing a midriff-baring top with a skull and crossbones printed on it, a black skirt, and black lipstick.

"Well, please welcome the obviously gothic contestant, daughter of a necromancer, and all around scary chick, Triana Orpheus!" Chris proclaimed. Triana's expression didn't change as she exited the boat and looked down the dock.

"So, what happened here?" she asked.

Chris, thrown, tried to respond. "W-w-what do you mean, what--what are you talking about?"

"Well, I had to wait an extra fifteen minutes, the dock has a weird odor, and everyone else looks like they're at a funeral only worse. So what happened?" Triana asked again.

"They are trembling before the might of the mighty Voltar!" Voltar exclaimed triumphantly.

"Uh, no, actually, ah, there was a death here about twenty minutes ago. That's uh, that's all," Steve corrected.

Triana raised an eyebrow but walked down the dock, where she joined the other campers. Another boat approached the dock.

"Everybody, please welcome our newest contestant, a decorated member of the Safety Patrol and valedictorian of X Middle School, Ing--"

The dock collapsed into the water midsentence. Chris bobbed to the surface angry and spluttering.
"Why did we build that thing on a timed mechanism? We should've know that someone would mess up!" Chris complained.

"You mean, by dying?" Triana suggested.

"Yes! Now it's going to take two hours to get my hair presentable!"

An hour and a half later, the dock was back up and Chris's hair had been fixed.

"Well, if there are no more delays, let's get on with it. Our fifteenth contestant plays bass in a rock band, recently broke up with the lead singer but remains on good terms with him, and is a redhead. Again. Please welcome Marlowe...I'm sorry, what's your last name?" Chris stared at the new arrival

"Eh, it doesn't really matter. Just Marlowe is fine. Nice to meet you, Chris," she said.

"Likewise," he responded. "So, why are you here?"

"I could use the money and maybe I'll make some new friends," she replied.

"Wow, that's original." Chris rolled his eyes and turned back to the camera. "Next up we have a scientist—"

"Already here!" Major Doctor Ghastly piped up.

Chris cast a stern look her way and then turned back to the camera. "As I was saying, we have a scientist who gets so angry, you might even call him...mad!"

"NOOOOOO!" An olive-skinned, hunchbacked man leaped onto the dock. "AN-GU-RY! I AM AN ANGURY SCIENTIST! WHY IS NOBODY IN THE BEING OF GETTING MY NAMING RIGHTNESS? NOT MAD, ANGURY! ANGURY! ANGURY! ANGURY!"

Chris waited a few seconds, and then said "So, I take it you're here for our anger management seminar?"

Suddenly calm, the Angry Scientist replied "No, I am here to win a million dollars and not have to deal with that infernal sheep!"

"Sure. Just move along now, okay?" Chris asked. The scientist complied, and Chris focused on a new boat. "Alright, here we have the pretty blonde from Peach Creek herself, Nazz Van Bartonschmeer!"

From the boat disembarked a girl with short blonde hair clad in a black t-shirt, a white tank top, blue pants, and sneakers. She walked up the dock, favoring everyone she saw with a kind smile.

"Hi everyone. I'm Nazz, and it's very nice to meet you all," she said. "I'm here for the money, sure, but I hope we can all be friends. By the way, that's a nice hat."

Wendy, who had watched Nazz approach with a carefully cultivated air of disinterest, blushed. "Uh, thanks," she said. "I uh, like your haircut."

"Thank you!" Nazz grinned widely at the compliment and took her place with the other campers.

"Um, right," Chris said, still surprised at having his thunder stolen. Regaining control, he faced the camera again and smiled. "With us now, our 18th contestant, all the way from Detroit, Michigan, Megan Allman!"
Megan got off the boat, thrust her nose in the air haughtily, and marched over to the other contestants. Chris's jaw dropped, shocked that he had been ignored by two contestants in a row.

"Well," Chris started, irritated, "I hope this next contestant is more interesting than you were, Michigander. From Gloomsville, here to show us the bright side of the dark side, is Ruby Gloom!"

A girl with pale white skin and bright red hair wearing a black dress departed the freshly arrived boat. "Hello everyone," she waved shyly. "I'm Ruby. Ruby Gloom."

"Welcome, Miss Gloom," Chris said. "Has anyone ever told you that you look like a doll? But I digress, what brings you to Camp Wawanakwa?"

"Oh, Iris said it would be an adventure," Ruby replied. "And well, Iris does know adventure."

"Well I can guarantee you you'll find adventure here," Chris smirked.

"Hooray!" Ruby said, and headed down the dock towards the other sixteen campers.

"Well, it looks like we have a woman dedicated to bringing down her enemy after he ruined her life up next. Allow me to introduce the woman with simple solutions for simple problems, the woman with practical plans for a practical world, the awkwardly named and even more awkwardly attractive Aunt Grandma!" Chris said as the woman disembarked. "Tell me, can we call you Priscilla?"

"Of course not, dear," Aunt Grandma responded kindly. "I am Aunt Grandma, everyone in the world's aunt and grandmother. And I am here to show everyone the power of practical thinking."
She then muttered "Also because being Aunt Grandma takes a lot of money."

"Of course, of course," Chris relied, smiling widely. "Welcome to the show, Aunt Grandma."

"Thank you, dear," Aunt Grandma said and joined the other contestants. Chris, meanwhile, turned back to the camera, only to stop when he saw another boat already at the dock. This one carried a lanky man in a red shirt, blue jeans, an orange baseball cap and mirrored sunglasses. He stepped out of the boat onto the dock and lit a cigarette.

"Uh, no smoking on the show, sir," Chris said.

"What? But I gotta have my smokes! Who do you think you are?" the man asked angrily.

"Look, I don't really care, but if you smoke on TV a bunch of parental organizations will be all over us. Trust me, just don't do it," Chris told him.

"Don't you frequently have people get into deadly situations on this show?" the man asked.

"Yes," Chris replied.

"And don't you have like a bunch of sixteen-year-olds running around with almost no supervision?"

"Yes."

"And aren't you pretty much a sadistic jerk?"

"Hey, you say sadistic, I say entertaining."

"Also somebody already died!" Wendy announced.

After a pause, the man turned back to Chris. "Right, so, why would parental organizations care if I
"I didn't say they were smart," Chris replied. "Or logical. Or useful. But they're well-funded and super annoying, so we just try to avoid them as much as possible, okay?"

"Chicken! Bawk-bawk-bawk!" the man replied.

"Whatever, at least I'm not bald," Chris retorted. The man gasped. "Yeah, that hat's not fooling anybody, Rusty. Now get to the end of the dock, we have one last contestant to announce."

Grumbling, Rusty Shackleford joined the others at the end of the dock, and one final boat approached Camp Wawanakwa.

"And now, ladies and gentlemen, our final contestant, the one and only, Nu--" Chris stopped. "Oh no are you serious?" he chortled. "Really? Okay then, everyone give it up for Number Two!"

A skinny teenage boy wearing flight goggles and an aviator cap stepped off the boat. "Actually, that's Numbuh Two," he corrected Chris.

"Listen, kid, I don't wanna tell you how to run your life or anything," Chris chuckled, "but are you sure you want to go around being called Number Two?"

"Uh, yeah, I am Numbuh Two," Numbuh Two replied. At this, much of the dock burst out laughing.

"Right, right," Chris gasped, pretending to wipe a tear of laughter from his eye. "So, why did you decide to be on the show?"

"Well, I wanted--"

"To come in number two?" Chris blurted before cracking up. Numbuh Two cast Chris an annoyed look and then headed for the end of the dock, where he joined the other nineteen campers. Chris turned to the camera. "That innuendo? Not intentional," he whispered, and then turned to the campers and resumed a normal tone of voice. "Alright, everybody, it's time for the big group photo we use for publicity! Everyone gather on the end of the dock, and--"

"Won't the dock collapse?" Marlowe asked.

"What, no!" Chris hastily denied.

"Uh, I already saw you pull this trick," Ingrid said. "Today, in fact. Did you really think we'd be stupid enough to fall for it?"

"Yes," Chris said. Everyone cast him an incredulous look, and Chris shrugged. "Okay, everyone up to the fire pit. That's where you'll be sorted into teams."

Soon, everyone was up by the campfire pit, waiting to be sorted. Chris walked in after everyone was already there, trailed by Chef.

"Now, you're probably wondering why Chef's here," he began. "Well, let's just say that it involves the next challenge." Chef grinned evilly. "But first, it's time to break you up into two different teams! We'll start with our first team, the Mad Scientists!"

"AN-GU-RY!" barked the Angry Scientist.
"I'm not mad, I'm quirky!" complained Major Doctor Ghastly.

"Oh no, not again," Steve said, quivering.

"Meh," said Triana.

"YES!" Voltar exclaimed. "I will obviously be the boss, as I am the most evil, and I already have a mad scientist on my side! Doktor Frogg, demonstrate!"

Everybody looked at Voltar oddly.

"Uh, Doktor Frogg?" Voltar looked around. "Hel-looo? I'm waiting!"

"Yeah, about that, you're not allowed to bring your own lackeys," Chris said. "Unless you're me, of course, but unfortunately, none of you are. Now then, let's name the members of the Mad Scientists!"

"AN-GU-R-Y!"

"It's a team name, genius, not you. Although, the first member of the Mad Scientists is... the Angry Scientist!" Chris announced. The Angry Scientist grumbled, but Chris moved on. "Also on the team are Marlowe, Ingrid Third, Major Doctor Ghastly, Nazz Van Bartonschmeer, Snidely Whiplash, Elise, Steve, Megan Allman, Voltar, and Numbuh Two!" The eleven campers gathered with each other. "And facing off against them are the Bumbling Moose, composed of... the rest."

"Hoo boy," Boris muttered as he got together with the rest of his team.

"Wait," Nazz remarked. "There's eleven of us, but only nine of them. Is that fair?"

"What?" Chris blinked, startled. "Lemme check that..." He looked over his list. "Oh, yeah. Kenny and Æon were originally Moose. Too late now I guess."

"Hey, that's no fair!" Boris complained. "And I know unfair!"

"Yeah, I don't care," Chris said. "Except for the fact that a lame duck team makes for horrible TV—that's right Team Victory, I'm looking at you—so I guess to make things fair, we'll be sending someone over from the Mad Scientists—"

"AN-GU-R-Y!"

"—to the Bumbling Moose," Chris finished, ignoring the outburst. "Now, who will it be? Eeny, meeny, miney, you."

Chapter End Notes

EDIT (March 19, 2019): So I don't usually do notes, at least on this story, since I think they break up the flow of the tale, BUT this awesome dude called NondescriptNobert liked the story enough to make some fanart. Check it out!

The Bumbling Moose
The Mad Scientists
Both of these are the shaded versions; for unshaded versions, go ahead and take a look over here: Mad Scientists, Bumbling Moose.

Once again, a super huge shout-out and thank you to NondescriptNobert. Seriously, you rock.
Chris's finger pointed at me like the barrel of a snub-nosed .44. I stared right back at him, eyeing him up like a starving man eyes a submarine sandwich. Chris stayed unwavering, and I slowly crossed the line, heading towards the other team. They stared at me like deer in headlights, not sure whether or not I was going to hit them and unable to move out of the way until it was too late and there I was, part of the Bumbling Moose.

"So," a teenage girl said. She was pretty, skin pale like moonlight spilling over a crime scene and hair red like arson flames. "Welcome to the team! I'm Ruby."

"The name's Numbuh Two, dollface," I replied. She giggled—a strange reaction to a hardboiled private eye like myself, but maybe it was just nerves.

"You remind me of Skullboy," she said. "His ancestors may have been detectives."

"Well ma'am," I smoothly replied, "the mystery game is my beat." At this, another girl snickered—this one clad in a Jolly Roger t-shirt with hair darker than coal train at midnight. "And who, might I ask, are you?" I questioned her.

"Triana," she said. "You kinda remind me of a guy I know—Hank Venture. Ever heard of him?"

"Can't say I have, ma'am. I don't think we travel in the same...circles. But I could, if you're asking me to and the money is right."

"Uh, no, I'm not," she said. "Just noticed that."

"So." I whirled around. Behind me was the pretty boy. His hair had more product in it than most supermarkets get in a year. He arched a perfectly maintained eyebrow at me and smirked. "You're the new kid. Number Two. Tell me twosie, how'd you get a name like that?"

"I dunno, where'd you get that shirt?" I snarked. Seriously, pink shirts on a dude? Generally not a good idea. Then again, I'm not a fan of pink, even without its feminine implications. Pink, always weaker than wet cardboard and more garish than the neon sign outside Rudy's. Unfortunately for me, the pretty boy was incapable of understanding sarcasm, and had started to yammer on about his style. Thinking that ignoring him would get the point across, I turned and looked over the rest of my new team.

After looking them over I decided to approach the guy my age. "Hey, kid," I started. "What's your name?"

"Gandhi," the redhead girl said before Gandhi could react.

"Not Gandhi, Gary," the kid said, his eyes betraying nervousness. Lying? Almost certainly. But why? Something was amiss, and there was only one way to find out what it was.

"So, Gary," I began. "How's about we get to know each other."

"Sure," the kid said. He smirked. "Number Two."

The kid cracked up. I could see he wasn't very mature, and decided to correct him. "It's Numbuh Two, you know." This only made him laugh more. "Gandhi."
The kid stopped laughing. "Hey," he said softly. "Why'd you have to go there?"

"It's your name, isn't it." It wasn't a question. He tried to deny it, but I knew I had him. "What's wrong with your name? Gandhi was a famous peacemaker. A great man. What's wrong with that? Why's it bother you?"

Gandhi stared at me sadly. "You know, not all of us can live up to our names," he said. I would've retorted were it not for a voice cutting in.

"Okay already! Now that everyone's gotten to know each other with a little tea party, let's get back on topic," Chris said. "As you all know, despite just arriving, one of you will be leaving tonight. Now, this isn't necessarily a bad thing, since you won't have to sleep in the grody cabins; but, the flip side is that you get shot out of a cannon—"

"Ooh!" Voltar said.

"—and lose your chance at the million dollars. Of course, if you're lame enough to be voted out first you probably never really had a chance anyway, but hey! Hope springs eternal. Now, standing behind me is Chef. In his hand is a club. Chef has also read our files on all of you; he knows your strengths, your weaknesses, your friends, your enemies, he knows your life!" Chris said. "And why does that matter? Well, it's fairly simple. Instead of setting up some insane obstacle course or making you jump off a cliff or anything, today your job is to convince everyone else on your team not to vote you off. And where does Chef come in, you might ask? Well, if you tell a lie about yourself while campaigning, Chef will notice. And if you tell five lies, Chef will knock you out. The winning team is the one with the fewest players knocked out. The losing team is sending someone home. Who's it gonna be? Find out next, on Total! Drama! Cartoon Multiverse!"

You know, the life of a detective is a hard one. And it's even harder when you're being jammed into tight, uncomfortable spaces. Especially when everyone's looking at you, trying to figure out are you friend or are you foe. And annoyingly enough, that's exactly the position I was in: stuck in the mess hall with a mess of people I'd never met before, trying to make them like me so that they wouldn't vote me off. The only saving grace is that I wasn't the only one who had to act like a bankrupt hooker; everyone else was in the same position. But like in any good detective story, nobody was talking. At least on our side. The Mad Scientists were chatting it up like teenage girls with unlimited minutes—and believe you me, I know what that's like. My keen detective senses couldn't help but pick up on some of the chatter, and as I listened in I heard the hunchbacked guy constantly yelling "ANGURY!" whenever somebody mentioned their team name and another one of them prattling on about the evil they would unleash upon the world.

Evil. Funny concept, that. I've dealt with a lot of people who called themselves evil, and they were always less of a threat (and inclined to do less harm) than the psychos who say they're after the greater good. Seems like lying to themselves makes it easier to be bastards. The ones to watch out for are the ones with grand plans for humanity that need to crack a few eggs to make their omelette. Problem is, I don't like omelettes.

I scouted the rest of my team again. I knew Gandhi was the immature one, Triana was the nice goth, Ruby was the nicer goth, and the pretty boy was Chaz; that left five others. The one seated across from me had red hair, a propeller beanie, and wore pants held up with rainbow suspenders. She was pretty, but aging fast, and you could tell that she was doing everything she could to keep from looking her actual age. The spark of psychosis that glittered behind her eyes wasn't a good sign either; it sat there like a dead rat in a puddle, harmless now but still able to spread its disease, claws endlessly reaching out for salvation that would not come. Her neighbor wasn't exactly a prize, either: a young man with blue hair and a look in his eyes that smacked of dullness and depravity and fear.
above all, eyes that revealed him as a low-rent grifter eaking out a living off the kindness of others, a leech seeking only his own pleasure, self-absorbed and lazy and scared that he might one day look within and find nothing there. A couple seats away from me sat another disturbed figure, this one the bald man in the orange ball cap. Though it was impossible to see his eyes behind his sunglasses, there was a definite sense that they were constantly shifting about the room, watching everyone. I'm not a shrink, but if I had to hazard a guess I'd say he was paranoid—but of what I couldn't tell. Next to me sat another paranoiac, although his was much gentler; he didn't watch the rest of the room as though they were threats, he watched them like prey. An alley cat with bad whiskers and worse breath, his muscles were constantly on alert, and though he had a relaxed smile on his face it was the type of relaxation that comes from someone certain that he can kill everyone in the room easily and never pay for his crime.

And then there was the last one, the redhead dame. She'd be a femme fatale if this were a cliche story: long red hair, put together well, always smiling. The problem with that was the smile, though, it was open and inviting and reached her eyes even though behind those eyes there seemed to be a mind constantly ticking, churning, shifting. And still, no one spoke, not even the pretty boy, as he'd become absorbed in admiring himself in a mirror he had taken from his pocket.

"So, shall we get started?"

My eyes latched on to the source of these words: none other than the desperately young gal herself. She'd taken the first step forward, and as I watched she procured a smile—a tense, strained, worried smile that showed nothing but teeth. The smile held, held, held, never wavering as the muscles in her jaw continued to clench while nobody followed her cue.

"Get started on what?" the bald man asked. "Way I see it, we don't say anything, we don't get in trouble."

The blue-haired guy snorted. "Yeah, right," he said. "Listen, this isn't my first time around the reality show merry-go-round. You gotta give the producers what they want."

"Huh?" Ruby asked.

"Look, it's simple," the blue-haired guy said. "They want us to talk, reveal some embarrassing secrets, maybe get caught in a lie or two. Makes for decent TV. We don't do that, they probably declare that this round is forfeit and we end up having to vote somebody off anyway. We gotta talk."

"Then start talking," the bald man said harshly. "All I know is, nobody's gonna get any of my secrets."

"So I take it we have to talk, have to tell the truth, and have to get people here to like us if we want to survive this round?" the short man asked. Upon seeing much of the table nod, he exhaled heavily.

"Hoo boy. Okay, who goes first?"

"I will!" Gandhi said. "Okay, so like, is this a getting to know you thing, or is it like truth or dare only without the dare part? Because if its like talking about ourselves that's totally cool apart from how lame it is but truth or dare is my jam! I'll tell any truth, do any dare, oh yeah!" He held up his hand for a high-five. Nobody responded. "C'mon, don't leave me hanging."

Finally, Triana, who was sitting across from him, returned his high-five. "Alright!" he said. "Almost as good as getting one under the table!" Triana's nose wrinkled. "So, like, I'm a clone, from like, Exclamation U.S.A., and I'm here somehow but the last thing I remember before this was the big prom at the slaughterhouse where I almost dry humped Marie Curie but decided to try abstinence instead and also JFK and Joan totally slept together! And there was this board of shadowy figures..."
and Scudworth, our principal, totally stabbed John Stamos the Prom King in the eye with the Prom King Crown! And uh, I also once got really really high on raisins. Like, super really high. There was like this psychedelic journey through the mind and everything, man, with this hunkeycorn. It was trippy."

I, along with everyone else at the table, stared at him, amazed. Chef didn't hit him over the head, however, although we waited for about fifteen seconds.

"Huh," said Wendy. "I guess we can actually lie?"

Behind us came the unmistakeable sound of wood hitting skull, and turning around, I saw one of the blonde Mad Scientists go down like a bad piece of bologna.

"Guess not," was Ruby's response. Behind us, we heard Chef yelp in pain and then saw an angry young woman storm out of the mess hall. "Two down for the Mad Scientists," came Chris's announcement from outside.

"AN-GU-RY!" yelled the Angry Scientist.

"I suppose that it all rests on a simple question: can we trust each other," the short man said.

"So it does," the redhaired woman said. "If we're all good people, we should have no problem telling the truth, but whomever lies is automatically untrustworthy."

"That doesn't matter to me," the bald man said. "I don't trust any of you anyway."

"Really, Rusty?" the short man asked. "Not even me?"

"Nope. None of you," Rusty said.

"Good choice," the short man said. "Allow me to introduce myself. I am Boris Badenov, spy, thief, scoundrel and nogoodnik extraordinaire. And now that you know that, you know I am automatically untrustworthy. But, I'm supposed to be convince you to keep me, aren't I? Well, my friends, look this way: I'm on your side, and you're on mine, and we have a common enemy sitting mere feet away. Since you all know that the point of reality shows is to win and cheating is encouraged, I am easily a benefit to all of you, as I know how to cheat better than anyone. You will need a cheater, because you will need to cheat. And that, my friends, is why you need me: I am a scoundrel, a cheat, and a villain--and I know it. And because I can do the dirty work, you can pretend that you aren't just as bad for ordering it done. And if I'm lying, which I usually am, where is the big ugly to teach me a lesson?"

Chef rose up behind Boris like a bad piece of bologna and growled, but didn't hit Boris over the head. If I knew anything, it was that either Boris was telling the truth or he had some deep dirt on the man, and this wasn't the sort of thing most people lied about.

"So let me get this straight," the red-haired woman said. "You're trustworthy because you're untrustworthy?"

"Ah, Granny, Granny, calm yourself," Boris said. "If you know I'm evil, and can be reliably counted on to do evil, you know I am reliable!"

"...I don't even know where to start with that logic," the not-femme fatale said. "Okay, well, if we can trust you to be bad, shouldn't we get rid of you as soon as possible?"

"Wendy, Wendy, Wendy!" Boris said. "Of course not, because who else is going to fight dirty?
Something flashed behind Wendy's eyes, but in an instant it was gone. "I might," she said quietly.

"So tell us about it," Boris said.

Wendy inhaled deeply and then started to speak. "So, I have a bunch of brothers. We're a pretty normal family I guess, but growing up with brothers you learn to fight to win, so I've learned to play dirty when I need to. And yeah, I don't do it very often, but when push comes to shove I suppose I cheat but I'd really rather not. And now you're probably gonna want me to give my life story, but there's not really much of interest there. I live in a pretty normal town, work at a tourist trap called the Mystery Shack, occasionally go on dates, you know, typical teenage stuff. And I can't say that I've got a lot of stress or anything about how you think of me, I just don't have that interesting a life. So I guess--"

Chef clubbed her like a baby seal. "Five lies, you're out," he said.

"Okay, Rusty, you wanna go?" asked Boris.

"No way, how about Andy?" Rusty said.

"Alright," Andy began. "So, I'm in my mid-twenties, I live in an apartment complex called Mission Hill with my brother and some friends, and I'm an alcoholic wannabe cartoonist. And I'm supposed to convince you to keep me on now, so I'm just gonna say this: I was on The Real World, I know how shows like these work, and if you need a guy to fight dirty you definitely need a guy to direct his dirty fighting so it doesn't backfire. What I'm saying here is I'm more valuable than the Ruskie--"

"Pottsylvanian," Boris interjected.

"Whatever," Andy said. "I'm useful."

"Well that's three so far," Granny said. "Two honestly horrible people, one liar."

"Whoa hold up," Gandhi said. "Am I an honestly horrible people?"

"No, you--wait, why should we keep you on?" Granny asked.

"Well, I'm good at sticking things up my nose, I have A.D.D., I love to party, I once worked at a suicide hotline and told a guy to kill himself. Why?" Gandhi responded.

"None of that is particularly convincing."

"But it's all true," he said suavely.

"Fine. Rusty, how about you go now?"

"How about the new kid starts talking?"

And suddenly, everyone was staring at me. I looked right back at them and knew that I'd have to shoot straight. They didn't know who I was, what I was doing, or what my plans were. But when you're a gumshoe, you learn to tell people just enough truth but not too much.

"The name's Numbuh Two," I spat. "And you should keep me on because I'm completely and utterly average. I don't say much, I don't do much, but I listen. I don't seem like enough of a threat to make it to the endgame, but I won't hinder the team. You need me so that you can pick me off later once you're done making your power plays and figuring out how it shakes out."
Rusty's head shook like a bowlful of gelatin. "Weak argument, kid," he said.

"Oh really, Rusty? Is yours going to be any different?" I asked pointedly. Rusty flinched.

"Well, yeah, I have attributes besides being average—not that I'm average!" he blurted.

"Let's all calm down. This is supposed to be a fun adventure," Ruby said.

"Oh really? Well how about you tell us why you should be kept on?" Rusty said.

"Well, I guess because I like to help people, and make sure everyone has fun and enjoys themselves, and because I generally want people to be happy, and I don't really understand why we have to cheat or anything. I mean, I understand that that's what you're used to doing—Boris and Andy, I mean—but I don't see why we have to be mean to win. Why can't we just have fun and go on adventures and enjoy the game rather than obsessing about winning and trying to cheat our way to victory?" Ruby asked.

The table fell quieter than a funeral parlor where the guest of honor just got up and left.

"Oh yeah, that'll work," said Granny sarcastically. "And what color is the sky in your world again, Ruby?"

"Um, it's usually gray or dark blue or black, although sometimes it's dark purple. There was this one time the sun came out and it was orangey-yellow, but that was a bad day. Why do you ask?" Ruby replied.

"Whatever," Granny said, rolling her eyes. "Now, Rusty, how about you tell us why you should stay."

"Fine—"

Chef's club smacked Rusty on the noggin, and he went down. As I looked around, I noticed that the mighty Voltar was missing; apparently he had told some fibs and been knocked out, thankfully stopping his unending stream of ruminations on how he was amazing and evil.

"What'd he say?" Granny asked.

"Five lies," Chef replied, and then stopped to think. "Actually, the same lie five times. Still counts though."

So saying, Chef walked away. I looked around the table.


The pretty boy looked up. "Oh, I'm sorry, are you done being boring?" he said. "Ha, doesn't matter, everyone wants to see more of me anyway. Hi, I'm the Chaz, and I'm well-loved back at A. Nigma High, hi peeps, and I'm here to share this with the world, I mean who wouldn't want to see all of this, am I right? So, as the most interesting person on the island, I gotta say, I am mucho bored with the lack of juicy gossip around here. I mean hello, lying? Cheating? Stealing? Yawnfest! Now here's the scoop, people, the Chaz is the hottest thing going on this team and without me this team is going nowhere! I me—"

Another knockout. Chris's voice came over the intercom. "Tie game, three all! Next liar loses the game completely!"
Triana and Aunt Grandma engaged each other in an Old West style staredown, waiting for one of them to blink. Before they could, however, I overheard the following from the opponents table: "No, I am most certainly not a villain!"

Whomp.

Knockout.

We win.
When Megan awoke, she found herself in the girls’ room of the Mad Scientists' cabin. Nazz was sitting beside her bed, a concerned look on her face. "Are you alright?" she asked.

Megan nodded. "Yeah." She stood up and found her head was pounding. Nazz offered a helpful shoulder. "Thanks," Megan said.

"Don't mention it," Nazz replied. "So hey, back in the cafeteria, when you said that you were super popular and stuff—" Megan groaned. "Why'd you lie about something like that?"

Megan hung her head. "Look, I just–have you ever wanted to reinvent yourself? To be someone you're not? To just suddenly wake up one day and be cool?" She scanned Nazz. "Of course not, you're already cool. And popular. And everyone loves you."

"Who says they don't like you, too?" Nazz asked. "I mean, I thought you were pretty cool when you ignored Chris."

Megan groaned again. "That was me trying to be cool. I was actually trying not to collapse into a gibbering mess, I mean, he's a celebrity and I'm just a girl from Detroit. Even if he's a jerk."

"Well I thought that was pretty cool," Nazz told her. "And I thought you were kinda cool as well, and I'd like to hang out some more. You in?"

Megan looked at her hopefully. "You sure? I mean, I did lie to everyone, and we probably lost the competition because of me."

"Yes, I'm sure. And it wasn't just you, it was also Elise, and Voltar, and that Snidely guy. I bet that if we both voted for Voltar, we might be able to get rid of him instead," Nazz replied. "Besides, I'm getting really sick of his constantly yelling about himself and evil, and I bet everyone else is as well."

Nazz and Megan weren't the only ones making plans for the elimination ceremony. In the woods nearby a spy and a villain were having a meeting.

"So what do you want from me, anyway?" Elise demanded angrily. "Get talking!"

"Look, sweetheart, let's lose the attitude," Snidely said smarmily. "We both know that we're on the chopping block here."

"Oh, what, really? I'm not on the chopping block! I'm one of the most competent people on this show!" Elise stomped her foot on the ground to emphasize her point.

"I'm not saying you're incompetent," Snidely said calmly. "I'm saying that four people lied too much today, and we're two of them. That means that we already have a deficit of trust, and that's gonna lead the others to want to kick us out early."

"Kick you out, more like. I'm not the one with a creep-ass mustache," Elise retorted.

"Firstly, it's a moustache, and secondly, I wouldn't be so sure about that. You can't be certain that with ten votes in play you won't be going down," Snidely told her.

"Are you threatening me?" Elise asked threateningly.
"I'm making you an offer," Snidely responded. "Nobody gets through this game completely on their own, and we're both already handicapped by this loss. I suggest we team up."

"A team of two? I can't see that doing much, especially since I don't even like you," Elise replied.

"You don't have to like me, and what if I sweetened the deal? Sure, three on one team would be helpful—but what about two on one team and a third on the other? That would allow us to better run the game by giving us the ability to get rid of our biggest competition, if necessary. We just need the right pawn, and everything falls into place. Wouldn't you agree, Elise?" Snidely suggested.

"Yeah, like you could get somebody on the other side to join us," Elise snarked.

"I got you," Snidely smarmed.

"Wh–no you didn't! I am not joining up with you!" Elise yelped.

"Are you sure? Because the fact that you termed it 'us' suggests that you think this could work. Isn't that right, my dear?" Snidely smirked.

Elise looked at him for a full fifteen seconds, waiting for him to break her gaze. Snidely didn't flinch, and she dropped her eyes.

"Alright," she said. "I'm sold. If you can get a third to join us."

"Oh," Snidely replied, "I already have someone in mind."

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Confessional

"I don't trust that guy one iota," Elise admitted. "But he's right. I'll need help if I'm going to advance in the game. And if that means teaming up and using underhanded tactics, well, I'm used to underhanded tactics."

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Confessional

Rusty Shackleford sat down, lit a cigarette, and began puffing.

When Marlowe entered the girls' cabin, she found Nazz braiding Megan's hair on one of the beds. Nazz waved to her. "Hi Marlowe!" she said. "Want to join us?"

"Uh, no thanks. Braids aren't really my thing," Marlowe responded. "So what else have you two been doing?"

"Oh, we just talked about stuff, decided who we're gonna vote for, and now I'm braiding Megan's hair," Nazz said. "How about you, what've you been up to?"

"Oh, ya know, just wandering around," Marlowe replied. "Was planning to practice my bass down by the dock." She grabbed her bass case. "I'll see you around."

"Wait!" Megan said. Marlowe stopped and turned around. "Before you go, who were you planning to vote off?"

"I was thinking of Snidely," Marlowe said. "Why do you ask?"
"Oh, just wondered," Megan said nervously. "Me and Nazz were thinking of voting off Voltar because he's so annoying."

"Makes sense, but Snidely just gives me the creeps," Marlowe replied. "It's like he's plotting something. I dunno, there's just something off about him."

"Also, his clothes are a century out of date," Nazz threw in.

"Yeah, that too." Marlowe giggled. "See you at the campfire ceremony tonight!"

Boris was out in the woods. He hated nature, with its wild animals and trees and fresh air, but he had to be absolutely certain that he wouldn't run into that infernal moose and squirrel. Because of this, he was searching everywhere, making sure there weren't any flying squirrels or bumbling mooses (outside of his teammates) wandering around. That's why he was in the perfect position to spot Snidely Whiplash sneaking around behind the Bumbling Mooses cabin. Naturally, Boris's interest was piqued; as a villain, he knew what he'd be doing if he was outside his enemies cabin. Not that he was planning to do anything nefarious quite yet, but he had some ideas.

As he watched, Snidely crept around the side of the cabin and peered at the door. When it opened and somebody stepped out, Snidely let out a loud hiss. Getting the response he wanted, Snidely hissed again, and soon the person came around the side of the cabin, revealing himself as Andy French.

"Yeah, whaddaya want?" Andy asked.

"You," Snidely replied sinisterly.

Andy's eyes began darting back and forth. "Look, I don't know what you heard from my old roommate, but I don't swing that way. Uh, no offense."

Snidely looked confused. "Swing?" he questioned, before shaking his head to clear it. "Nevermind. Look, I have a proposition to make."

"Um, yeah, uh-" Andy replied.

"At least hear me out. This is the thing you've been dreaming of," Snidely said confidently.

"I...need an adult?"

"I want to form a union."

"I need an adult."

"I want us to come together as one."

"I'm just gonna back away slowly now."

"At least consider forming an alliance with me and Elise!" Snidely said desperately.

Andy stopped. "Why didn't you just say that instead of making me think this was gonna go all Gus and Wally?"

"Gus and Wally?" Snidely asked, confused.

"So what exactly do you have planned?" Andy asked.
"Simple. You have influence in your group, we have influence in ours. If we work together, we can eliminate those who pose a threat to us and easily get to the final six," Snidely explained.

"Don't you mean final three?" Andy asked.

"Enh, not sure I can guarantee that. But final six for sure. Are you in? It'd make the road ahead a lot easier," Snidely said.

"Why not?" Andy replied. "It could work."

"Good. I'm gonna go now, I've gotta tell Elise to vote off Voltar," Snidely said.

Boris Badenov watched Snidely leave and his teammate go back into the cabin. As soon as they were gone, he slumped against a tree.

"Hoo boy," Boris sighed.

Confessional

"That Snidely guy is creepy, but he's on to something. With three of us running the show and playing both sides, we could really get somewhere," Andy said. "Now, a little privacy?" He began to unbutton his pants.

Confessional

"And now the chessboard is set. Let us play." Snidely laughed evilly.

Once everybody was seated by the campfire, Chris walked up to the podium with a plate of marshmallows. "At camp," he began, "there's nothing like roasting marshmallows over a nice campfire. They're warm, crunchy on the outside, melty on the inside, and oh-so-deliciously satisfying. But at this camp...marshmallows are still delicious and carry no special meaning. Anybody want one?"

Confused, everybody but Snidely, Steve, and Voltar raised their hands. They were rewarded with marshmallows. Chris smiled.

"This year," he began, then muttered as an aside "because the author is immature," before resuming his normal mode of speech "if you're still in the game, you will receive another campfire food to either roast or eat raw or whatever. Not my concern. Anyway, there were five of you that saw nobody vote against them, and I've decided to start with Steve. Steve, you...did not come out of this unscathed."

"Yes!" Voltar cheered. "Take that, Steve!"

Steve looked at him confusedly. "I don't...get it?"

"You are my arch-enemy, Steve, and tonight you are going down!" Voltar exclaimed.

Steve looked even more confused.

"Someone who did come out unscathed was none other than Marlowe!" Marlowe gasped happily. "So Marlowe, get your butt up here and take your weiner!"
The smile dropped off of Marlowe's face. "Uh...what?"

In response, Chris threw a hot dog at her, and it bounced off of her stunned face.

"Now, who else wants a wiener in their mouth?" Chris grinned. "If your name is Nazz, Major Doctor Ghastly, Ingrid, or Angry Scientist—"

"AN-GU--oh wait that's correct, sorry, carrying onness," the Angry Scientist said sheepishly.

"Anyway, you all get sausages!" Chris exclaimed. The quartet came up and took four of the remaining eight sausages.

Chris grinned evilly. "Now, as for the rest of you, you all had people vote against you. Some of you received only one vote. Some of you received two. And one of you received way too many and is going home. Weiners go to...Megan." Megan exhaled. "Snidely." Snidely lept into a victory pose. "And Elise." Elise calmly walked up and took her weiner.

"There are two of you still here and only one weiner left. I wonder who it will go to...Voltar, or Steve?" Chris waited for a few seconds to let the suspense build. Voltar grinned at Steve and began chuckling evilly. Steve gulped nervously and began to shiver. Chris smiled and then in a swift motion grabbed the sausage.

"Steve."

Chris threw the hot dog at Steve. It bounced off of the lab assistant's head, but it didn't matter because he was safe. Voltar, meanwhile, was enraged.

"WHAT?!" he spat. "No way does Steve deserve to stay on this island! He's not evil! Or smart! Or cunning! Or genius! Or as good looking as I am. He's just, he's just, he's, he's--STEVE!"

"Dude," Chris said unamusedly, "you're the only one who voted against Steve."

"Ooh!" Voltar grumbled. "Steve, you're gonna pay for this."

Steve looked at him disinterestedly. "I don't care," he said.

This statement made Voltar shriek with anger.

"Anyway!" Chris cut in. "It seems you're the first one eliminated, and the first one to get shot out of the Cannon of Sorrow!"

"Cannon of Sorrow?" Marlowe questioned.

"Shame is overrated," Chris replied. "Voltar, get ready to cram yourself in there, because you're going for a cannon ride!"

Voltar stopped his tantrum and looked hopeful. "I get to...ride the cannon? The evil cannon?"

"Uh, yeah, sure," Chris said. Within seconds, Voltar was inside the cannon, ready to roll. Chris lit the fuse and stepped back as it started to burn. "Well, folks, that just about wraps it up," he said.

"Voltar's been eliminated, both teams saw two of their members leave them, and this season is already off to a rip-roaring start. Who will win? Who will lose? Who's gonna get his agent to negotiate a raise for all of the crappy weiner jokes I'll be forced to make? Find out next time, on Total! Drama! Cartoon Multiverse!"

As if to punctuate his words, the cannon fired at that moment, and Voltar soared out. As he went, he
let out a happy cry.

"VICTORY!"

Voting Breakdown:

Elise: Voltar
Snidely Whiplash: Voltar
Nazz Van Bartonschmeer: Voltar
Megan Allman: Voltar
Marlowe: Snidely Whiplash
Major Doctor Ghastly: Snidely Whiplash
Steve: Elise
The Angry Scientist: Elise
Ingrid Third: Megan Allman
Voltar: Steve

Final tally of votes received:

Voltar: 4 (eliminated)
Snidely Whiplash: 2
Elise: 2
Megan Allman: 1
Steve: 1
The Witching Episode

Chris was standing on the dock. The moon was in the sky, and behind him the campground was
dark.

"Hey there, and welcome back to Total Drama: Cartoon Multiverse," Chris whispered. "In the last
episode, we saw everybody getting to know each other. Some, like Nazz, Marlowe, Wendy, Ruby,
and Boris, made favorable impressions on their teams. Some...did not. Elise refused to tell anybody
her last name, Voltar kept prattling on about evil, Snidely was a creep, and the Angry Scientist either
complained about his team's name or mooned over Major Doctor Ghastly–who, protip, doesn't like
him. Ultimately, three of these people got knocked out by Chef, and with Megan's attempt to lie
about how popular she was back in Detroit going down in flames, the Scientists found themselves
sending someone home. Voltar, specifically. Not that things were all good for the Moose: Rusty was
a creepy paranoid dude, Andy proved himself a total loser who might just have some value for his
team, Chaz couldn't stop talking about himself, that Numbuh 2 kid was creepy, and Aunt Grandma
was creepier. Not only that, but it looks like Andy might be turning traitor, as he made a deal with
Snidely to ally and get their enemies kicked off in a negotiation that wasn't quite as private as they
hoped. Snidely, meanwhile, has Elise working with him on the Scientists, and our first alliance might
just find itself putting the drama in Total Drama. Who will be the next to go down? What will the
next challenge be? And why am I doing this at midnight? Find out next, on Total Drama. Cartoon
Multiverse."

The sound of Reveille blared through the camp loudspeakers, followed by Chef's announcement:
"ATTENTION MAGGOTS, ATTENTION MAGGOTS, IT'S THIMME...TO GET YOUR
BUTTS DOWN TO THE MESS HALL! NOW! GO GO GO! ANYBODY NOT THERE IN
TEN WILL BE GETTING A SPECIAL SURPRISE!"

I rolled out of bed, rubbing my eyes. I looked at the clock and saw it was just after midnight.
Obviously I had only gotten two hours of sleep, and while I may love the night it's not much fun
when you're forced to wake up and live through it when you'd rather sleep.

I threw on my dress, socks, and shoes, and headed out, along with the rest of our team. I'm not too
good with names, but I saw someone I recognized, Triana, just ahead of me and ran to catch up with
her. When I got to her, I matched her pace, and we headed towards the mess hall together.

we're up so early?" "God knows," she said. "Chris probably just wanted to torture us by having us
do a challenge at night." I nodded in agreement, and we reached the mess hall shortly thereafter. We
walked in and sat down at a table. The tables were the only part of the room that was lit; the front of
the room was in complete darkness. Suddenly, a red light flashed on above the front of the room,
revealing Chef wearing a long black cloak and a pointy black hat.

"Welcome, children," Chris said, voice coming from speakers placed at the front, "to the witching
hour!"

I admit, I was intrigued. I wondered what Chris had in mind for us that would involve witchery, and
I do love magic. Hopefully this challenge would be more fun; I mean, I usually like to get to know
people, but most of the people yesterday seemed angry or stressed or mean. This seemed like it might
be more fun, and we might make some friends.

"For this challenge, you will be split into teams of three. And to make it more interesting, these trios
will consist of two people from one team and a person from the other!" Chris announced.

I noticed the blue-haired guy blanch slightly. Apparently he wasn't used to working together.

"Team 1 will consist of Boris, Andy, and Ingrid. You'll need to stock up on mooseberries; you can find them in the swampy part on the west side of the island. Team 2 will consist of Major Doctor Ghastly, the Angry Scientist, and Aunt Grandma. You need to get a bunch of cattails, also in the swamp. Team 3, you're Rusty, Triana, and Steve, and you're getting maggots; scrape 'em off of the meat Chef threw out because it the network lawyers said we couldn't feed it to you. Team 4 is Snidely, Elise, and Numbuh 2, and you'll need to go up to the cliffs and bring back some chalk. Team 5: Chaz, Ruby, and Megan. Termites. Woods. Look for injured trees. And Team 6 will have four people: Nazz, Marlowe, Wendy, and Gandhi. Your job is to collect a big mess of water from underneath the dock and bring it back to the mess hall." We sat there silently, waiting for more instructions. "Well? Get moving! And be back here by two," Chris yelped. Soon, everyone was milling around. I stayed where I was, looking for the other members of my team. Soon, all but five people had filed out: me, a girl with long red hair, a bald-headed teenager, a girl with long blonde hair, and some guy who looked disturbingly perfect. The blonde approached me, pulling the good-looking guy behind her. "You're Ruby?" she asked. I nodded assent, and she introduced herself as Megan and the guy as Chaz.

"Alrighty peeps, here's the dealio," Chaz said. "You can go into the woods and find termites, I need my beauty sleep to keep this--" He gestured to himself. "--as perfect as ever. Okay, ciao!" He tried to leave, but Megan still had ahold of his wrist. "Uh, you have to let go now."

"No," she said. "We're going into the woods as a team, we're finding those termites, and we're completing that challenge."

"Uh, you can't do this to me," he replied, "I'm the Chaz. And the Chaz is not a fan of termites."

"I don't care what you're a fan of," she told him angrily, "you're not on my team, I'm not your friend, and that shirt doesn't look as good on you as you think it does."

"Oh like you'd know," he said back, "what, was the All In Black Store out of hair dye? Because that sweater is not doing you any favors. I know Detroit isn't exactly known for its fashions, but honey, you could be trying." Megan grit her teeth. "Now if you'll excuse me, sleepytime calls, and I'm not going to put it on hold for some stupid insects. Bye now." He removed his wrist from her grip, but I stepped in front of him. "What?" he asked.

"You're not leaving until we find those termites," I said playfully. He scowled and tried to push past me, but Megan grabbed his arm again. "Look," she said, trying reason, "the sooner we find some termites the sooner we go to bed." She grabbed a bucket labelled Termites from a table; it was sitting next to a bunch of buckets labelled Water, a pair of which the redhead and the bald guy had carried down to the docks. "Now let's go," she said, but Chaz refused to move. "Nuh-uh, I'm not gonna go into the woods at midnight and hunt termites," he said. "Yes you are," I said. "Oh, and why's that?" he asked. "Because everyone else is doing it and if you don't join in, you'll be the only one who doesn't, and our team will lose, and you'll go home," I told him. This seemed to shut him up, and we ventured into the woods. There, I used my flashlight to help us search as we wandered deeper and deeper into the wild until the flashlight happened upon some trees with a bunch of holes in them. As we watched, some termites crawled out.

"Okay, now what? The Chaz is not touching those creepy-crawlies, ew. You do it," he said, pushing Megan forward. Megan squealed in fright and leaped back from the tree. "Um, I can do it," I said.

Megan looked at me gratefully while Chaz looked disgusted. I pulled out a piece of cardboard and
waved it over the holes. Soon, some termites popped out. I led them into the bucket using the cardboard, and soon we had a decent-sized pile in the bucket. They were climbing out, however, and continued to do so until Megan put a layer of moisturizer around the edges of the bucket to keep them in. We got some more termites until we heard the announcement "fifteen more minutes, people!" from Chris, at which point we headed back to the mess hall and turned in our bucket five minutes early. We set it beside a bucket only a quarter full of mooseberries, a bucket completely full of cattails, a bucket almost overflowing with maggots, a bucket with only a little bit of chalk inside, and a bunch of buckets of water. As we watched, the redhead from earlier and the bald guy rushed in, dripping with sweat and water and followed by a blonde girl and Wendy who were completely soaked. They set down a pair of buckets and gasped for breath while the blonde hollered "Finished!"

"Congratulations!" Chris said as he walked in, smiling. "Now, in about fifteen minutes, we'll have something to pep you up!" Most of the mess hall yawned at this news, as we were all pretty tired. "Oh, and here's a hint: it's not coffee," he said, still grinning.

As we watched, Chef picked up the buckets of chalk, mooseberries, termites, maggots, and cattails, and dumped them all into a large blender. While they were being ground together, he picked up the buckets of dock water two at a time and dumped them into a large cauldron, then lit a fire under it. The fire leapt into life ravenously, and soon the water was boiling. When the water was ready, he took the ground-up mixture, dumped it into the water, and stirred thoroughly. He then grabbed some large bowls and began filling them with the disgusting stew.

"Now we reach the real part of the challenge," Chris smiled. "This witches' brew? You're about to drink it!"

"Um, what about the first part of the challenge?" the blonde girl asked. "Do we get anything for completing that?"

Chris shook his head. "Nope! That was just so we could tire you out even more. Now here's the rules: everybody has to drink this witchy concoction. Everybody who drinks it, gets a point for their team and immunity from elimination. Everybody who drinks and spews gets no points and can be eliminated by their team if their team loses. Everybody who refuses to drink also gets no points and puts themselves up for elimination, so if your stomach is weak maybe sit this one out and have your team look at you angrily for not even attempting the challenge. And before anybody asks, the producers asked me to cut down on the puke a bit this season. Because they don't understand what drives ratings. Now, Chef, if you would?"

Chef began to chant. "Cattails and termites, mooseberries and chalk, maggots and water from under the docks, to survive this you must have a stomach of rock, the brew is so strong you're unable to talk," he intoned. He then proceeded to slide bowls of the goop in front of us. "Now drink!" Chris said. We looked at the brew nervously until I shrugged and downed the bowl. It didn't taste bad; it was much like Misery's cooking, but with less mercury and residual electricity. "And that's one point for the Moose, if they can keep it!" Chris announced incredulously. I was sure that we could, but the same could not be said about the next one to try it, as the bald guy in the baseball cap took one sip, turned white, and puked into his bowl. "You can still earn a point if you drink the whole thing!" Chris gleefully told him, causing the poor man to collapse in a dead faint. I sighed and watched as on the other side, a redheaded woman took a sip, looked ill, but continued to drink bit by bit. The same thing happened around the room, as the rest of the people began to slowly drink, except for the Angry Scientist and the redhaired guy in the lab coat, who both quickly downed their soup. "The score is two to one in favor of the Mad Scientists!" Chris happily said, with the only response being a loudly yelled "AN-GU-RY!" from the Angry Scientist.

Suddenly, Megan stood up. "I'm not drinking this," she said. "Me neither," said the blonde girl sitting
next to her, standing up as well and pushing her bowl away. Aunt Grandma joined them. "Sorry, dearies, but this is not a beautiful enough morning," she told us.

At that moment, the redhead who had gotten water finished her bowl of brew. "That makes it three to one, Mad Scientists!" Chris cheered. "AN-GU-RY!" the Angry Scientist yelled. At that moment, Triana puked, and upon seeing this Andy lost it as well. Chaz was the next to go down; although he survived the initial pukefest, when he finally took a bite of his brew he ended up ralphing all over the table. By this time, one of the redheaded woman from the Scientists had finished her bowl.

"Well, it looks like the Bumbling Mooses have just about lost!" Chris exclaimed. "They're down by three with just four contestants remaining! They have pretty much no shot!"

"That's correct, Chris," a green-skinned man from the other table said, and he chugge his brew. Unfortunately for him, not five seconds later he turned less green and tossed his cookies. This set off the redheaded woman wearing leather and goggles beside him, who also threw up.

The short guy with the creepy mustache who was on our team looked around the table. "Welp, down the hatch," he said, and drank his entire bowl in one gulp. As soon as he finished, he turned green. "Just like Mama used to make," he said sickly, but managed to keep it down. The bald kid from our team looked at him. "Well, I've done stupider things," he said, and proceeded to drink as well. He smacked his lips. "Enh, better than Clone High's cafeteria food," he remarked. Eyes shifted to the skinny kid wearing the flight goggles. He stared down at his bowl.

"Aw, crimmyn," he said quietly. "Okay Numbuh Two, you can do this. It's not that hard. You've faced down Gramma Stuffums before, and her food was worse than this. Just don't think about it. Just don't think about it. Just don't think about it. It's food. It's food. Eat the food. Eat the food."

Numbuh Two slowly raised his spoon to his lips. Suddenly, he dropped the spoon into the bowl, then grabbed the bowl and drank it dry incredibly fast. When he finished, he looked incredibly ill and was shaking but didn't throw up.

"Well whaddya know, folks!" Chris crowed. "It's tied, four all, with only one contestant left for each side! Who's gonna win? It's all up in the air! It could be anyone! The pressure--"

"Ahem," a noirette girl who played for the other team interrupted. She tapped the inside of her bowl with her spoon. "I'm done," she said. Chef went over to check. "Yep, she's done," he said. Chris's shoulders sagged. "Alright, fine," he said. "Bumbling Moose, be at the campfire pit in fifteen minutes. I'll be right there for the anticlimatic elimination ceremony."

We left the mess hall. Most of us headed for the confessional to cast our votes, although some split off for the cabins or stopped to talk with friends. I thought about who I was going to vote for as I watched the Mad Scientists exit, victorious.
The Bumbling Mooses exited the mess hall. Andy was the last to leave, and he quickly headed over to the side of the building. Soon, Snidely and Elise joined him.

"Okay, so what's the plan?" Andy asked. "Who do you think we should get rid of?"

"I haven't noticed many competitors flush with physical prowess," Snidely replied. "The closest I can think of is on your side, Wendy. But honestly, we should try and get rid of the brainiest ones on our teams. I think that on the Scientists, that would have to be Ingrid as our number one priority, followed by either Ghastly or the angry guy. As for on your side, Boris is probably the brainiest, although that's not saying much, but Wendy is definitely a threat. Who do you think is the biggest worry on your team?"

"It's tough to say," Andy replied. "But Boris is immune and Wendy isn't, so I'll vote for her. It's too bad we don't have more time or I could try and get everyone else to agree with me, but I'll go vote now and hope for the best at the ceremony."

"Good luck," Snidely told the traitor as he walked away.

Elise crooked an eyebrow. "Are you sure he's up to the task?" she asked. "He didn't exactly fill me with confidence there."

Snidely shrugged. "He's disloyal to his team and loyal enough to us. There's only so much talent you can find amongst twenty random people."

"Fair enough," Elise said. "I guess I'm just used to creative but dimwitted guys who get super obsessed with one target and eliminate it easily."

"Well, don't worry," Snidely told her. "With luck, he'll eliminate his targets easily despite being a dimwit."

Soon, the votes were cast and Chris was ready to do the announcements. "You know, I'm disappointed," Chris said. "I thought the ending would be more dramatic. But no. You made it interesting, but you couldn't bring it on home. Or, for that matter, lose miserably. It's worse because you had the numbers advantage...but, after tonight, that advantage is gone. It's now just after four, so let's get this finished, since you're going to be waking up at six-thirty."

Complaints rose from the gathered campers. "Now now, settle down," Chris told them. "We chose this time for a very good reason."

"Oh yeah?" an angry Wendy asked. "What's that?"

"Two hours is just enough time to fall asleep but not enough time to get any rest. And believe you me, you'll need all the rest you can get for tomorrow's special event," Chris told them. The group groaned again. "Now then, let's get to the weiners. So, people who are immune: Boris, Ruby, Gandhi, Numbuh Two, here's your hot dogs." He flung them at the listed contestants. "Also, Triana, despite being eligible for elimination, you didn't get any votes against you—which cannot be said about the remaining contestants." He grinned wickedly. "Now here's a special treat: we're gonna show the audience who voted and how!"
"Okay, after spending all day with Andy and seeing him try to sabotage our mooseberry hunt, I'm certain of it," Boris said. "Andy is definitely not on our side at all!"

"Wendy's gonna go down. I hope," Andy said. He groaned. "Ugh, I need some sleep."

"You know, I can't really think of anybody who truly deserves to leave," Ruby told the camera. "I mean, everyone here seems pretty nice. Except for Chaz, I guess. Yeah, I'm voting for Chaz."

"Aunt Grandma," Triana said.

"Aunt Grandma's a total bore. And she cost us the game. Not cool," Gandhi told the world.

"I stomached that filth. Why couldn't Aunt Grandma?" Numbuh Two angrily asked.

"Hi, it's the Chaz again," Chaz said smarmily. "Can you believe that Ruby chick tried to make me collect termites? Ugh, right? But don't you worry, peeps, the Chaz is just fine." His face paled. "Well, except for that stew, it was horrible. You know, this would be funny if it wasn't happening to me. But it is, so it's horrible! Horrible! Oh, and I guess I'll vote for Aunt Grandma since I can't vote for Ruby. Excuse me."

Chaz began to puke into the toilet.

Rusty entered the confessional, lit a cigarette, and sat down on the toilet. He took a deep drag off of the cigarette and exhaled heavily. "Aunt Grandma," he told the camera.

"Ugh, this place smells like cigarettes!" Aunt Grandma complained as she entered the confession booth. "I bet it was that stupid Rusty guy. I hate him! What a sicko! God, I can't wait until he gets booted off! Hopefully it happens today. In fact, I know it will. Goodbye, Rusty."

The campers looked at Chris oddly. "Uh, where's the show?" Aunt Grandma asked.
"I said we'd show the audience, not the losers at camp," Chris said, smirking. "Now who wants a weiner in their mouth? Let's see...Andy, here you go."

"I'm not gay!" Andy complained as he caught the sausage.

"Never said you were, bro," Chris replied smoothly. "Not that there's anything wrong with that. Wendy! Come get your weiner."

Wendy walked up and took the weiner.

"And then there were three," Chris declared. "Chaz, you annoyed people by being a self-absorbed jerk who refused to help your teammates."

"Hey, the Chaz knew all along that his part of the challenge didn't matter," Chaz declared. "And because of my help, we ended up having to eat termites, so you're welcome people, I was right all along."

Chris gave the camera a questioning look before moving on with his spiel. "And Rusty, you're a creepy paranoid weirdo with no hair. Not cool, bro."

"Hey!" Rusty complained.

"And Aunt Grandma, really? You barely helped your team with the cattails or Major Doctor Ghastly with the Angry Scientist. And then you didn't even try to drink the witches' brew."

Chris paused for drama. "One of you is going to get a good night's rest," he said sweetly. "And the other two will be waking up in just a couple of hours. The one going home is...Aunt Grandma!"

Chris tossed the weiners to Rusty and Chaz. Aunt Grandma's jaw dropped open.

"What? No! How can this be?!" she asked. "I'm Aunt Grandma! I'm beloved! I'm everybody in the world's aunt and grandmother! AT THE SAME TIME!"

Chef shook his head as he carried Aunt Grandma to the cannon. "No, actually," he told the woman. "You're just a nut with a revenge fantasy directed at everybody's magical uncle and grandfather. You're a messed up woman who needs psychological help." He stuffed her into the cannon. "I hope you find it. Bye!"

Chef lit the fuse. Aunt Grandma continued to fume. "This can't be happening! No! I'm Aunt Grandma! I'm the one who gives kids what they need to succeed! I'm better than that dunderhead Uncle Grandpa! I don't deserve to go out like this! I'm smart! I'm beautiful! I'm AUNT GRANDMA!"

The cannon fired, sending Aunt Grandma flying through the sky, trailing behind her the final words she said on Total Drama: Cartoon Multiverse.

"I SHOULD'VE WON THAT SCIENCE FAIR!"

"Well, that was exciting," Chris said as most of the Bumbling Moose headed back to their cabin. "One down on the Moose, one down on the Scientists, and a bunch of drama still left in the season. Are we really gonna make these contestants do three challenges in two days? Will the geography of this island ever make sense? Have I been drinking nothing but espresso for the past ten hours? Find out next time, on Total. Drama. Cartoon Multiverse!"
The only person who stayed behind after everyone else had departed was Numbuh Two. He sat on a stump, trying to ready himself for the next challenge. He smiled to himself; for once, Numbuh One's workaholic nature had been beneficial, as Numbuh Two was used to pulling all-nighters filled with action. Suddenly, a twig snapped, and he started as a noirette with green eyes approached him. She sat down next to him.

"So, what's up?" she asked.

"Nothing much," Numbuh Two answered, trying to be suave. "Just working on a mystery. How about you?"

Ingrid looked him right in the eyes. "Mystery, eh? I know a lot about those. What's this so-called mystery?"

"I'm trying to figure out what's up with the game," Numbuh Two answered. "I know there's always somebody who manipulates the people around them and uses them as stepping stones, and there's always an alliance, and there's always patsies unwilling to believe that they're gonna be sold up the creek until it happens. Why do you ask?"

"I've been wondering the same thing myself," Ingrid responded. "I know that there's gotta be something going on, but I don't know who's doing what. I've been doing some investigating when I have time, but, y'know, we've been here less than 24 hours."

"Yeah, I know," Numbuh Two said. "But I can just feel that there's something going on that I'm not privy too. Especially when I'm around Boris and Andy, for some reason. It's like there's something going on there."

"I get the same feeling from Elise," Ingrid told him. In response to his blank stare, she elaborated "The redhead who kicked Chef in the throat."

"Oh, yeah, I remember," Numbuh Two replied.

"Yeah, but I don't know what she's hiding. Or why," Ingrid continued.

"You wanna try and solve this mystery?" Numbuh Two inquired. He swallowed a lump in his throat. "Together?"

Ingrid looked at him with the eyes of a stoic. "Is this an attempt to get into my pants?" she asked, deadpan.

"W-wh-what, no!" Numbuh Two stammered nervously. "No! I just, I think it would be useful if we were both working this case." He tried to regain his cool. Ingrid favored him with a small smile.

"I'll think about it," she said, and headed off to bed to try and get what little sleep she could. Numbuh Two settled himself again and tried to focus on staying awake to at least make it to the next challenge.

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Voting Breakdown:

Boris Badenov: Andy French
Andy French: Wendy Corduroy
Ruby Gloom: Chaz Monerainian
Triana Orpheus: Aunt Grandma
Gandhi: Aunt Grandma
Numbuh Two: Aunt Grandma
Chaz Monerainian: Aunt Grandma
Rusty Shackleford: Aunt Grandma
Wendy Corduroy: Aunt Grandma
Aunt Grandma: Rusty Shackleford

Total number of votes received:

Aunt Grandma: 6 (eliminated)
Andy French: 1
Chaz Monerainian: 1
Rusty Shackleford: 1
Wendy Corduroy: 1
The Minecart Episode

Chris was on the dock at sunrise. He smiled at the camera as he nursed a coffee.

"Last time, on Total Drama: Cartoon Multiverse," he began, "everybody made a witches' brew and drank it. Those who didn't spew, won invincibility. Those who did, well, there's a reason we saw the Mooses at the campfire ceremony, where they sent Aunt Grandma home. But that wasn't the most interesting thing that happened. Down by the docks, Nazz, Marlowe, and Wendy got along well, while in the swamp we saw tension between Boris and Andy. Gee, I wonder why? Probably nothing to do with Andy's alliance with a couple of players on the other team! Speaking of which, Snidely and Elise came up with a plan to get rid of whomever they deem dangerous the next chance they get. Guess whose number came up? That's right, they're gunning for scientists. And Ingrid for some reason. And how did they do it? Just by telling Numbuh 2 to keep watch for bears while they 'worked' on getting chalk off of the cliff. Apparently he's scared of bears. Hmm. I wonder if that'll be in a future episode. Meanwhile, Chaz was boring, Steve was boring, and it seems like the Angry Scientist ain't angry at Major Doctor Ghastly! And he's not the only one who might be falling in love: Numbuh 2 and Ingrid met up after the campfire ceremony to talk 'mystery solving.' I'm guessing they'll solve 'mysteries' in the 'dark.' With their 'tongues.' And other 'assorted body parts.' Will we get to air it in this fanfic? Probably not! But stay tuned anyway, for more Total! Drama! Cartoon Multiverse!"

When I wake up, I am in complete and total darkness. This wouldn't be so bad were it not for the fact that I'm somehow standing straight up, back against a wall, and when I try to step forward I bump into another wall. I cry out from pain, but it seems as though nobody hears me. Worried, I yell a hello, but nobody responds, so I try to feel out where I am. I feel along the sides and find that they are perfectly smooth, and when I jump I bash my knuckles against a roof. Growing more and more claustrophobic, I feel in front of me and find some small holes at about mouth level, just big enough to stick two fingers through. That solves the problem of suffocation, but it doesn't tell me where I am. Annoyed, I sink to the floor and hug my knees to my chest. This is not how my summer was supposed to go.

I remind myself to breathe deeply and try to calm down. Even if I'm stuck in a box in some place completely and utterly lacking light, I'm gonna be okay. This kind of stuff happens all the time on this show, and nobody has died. Yet. So this is probably part of the show. And even if it isn't, I'll probably be rescued anyway. Probably.

I should've stayed in Detroit. Even if Mom and Dad like Andy better and Dad's convinced he can talk to God it'd still be better than this. I'd even rather deal with Melissa with her stories of how her family goes on great vacations and her perfect hair and her endless collection of makeup and every boy in the world swooning over her oh god, why'd I agree to come on this show, I've got no chance of winning and I almost ate maggots and termites and I've got some acne forming on the bridge of my nose and now the whole world will see it--relax. Breathe. Breathe. Breathe.

Remember that it's not all bad. Some things don't suck. Like Nazz. She's nice, and pretty, and probably super popular back home even though she doesn't seem mean at all, and she likes you. Although she's kind of a lackey. She always seems to be following me and asking my opinion. Or maybe this is her way of showing friendship? I dunno, why would she want to be friends with me? But she does seem to want everyone to like her. I never thought I'd get along well with a musician, but Nazz has definitely bridged a gap between me and Marlowe and we seem to be becoming friends.
I can. Maybe I am a leader. I can do this! I can win this! I have a chance!

And I'm dying in a box in the dark. Yeah, good call Megan.

Okay breathe. Breathe. You're not dying, don't be so dramatic. God, I sound like my mother. What does she know about my life? It's more stressful than you'd think. Even if nobody else thinks so, but you try putting up with a father who thinks he talks to God and the Devil on a regular basis, a mom who just doesn't understand that designer clothes are necessary to be cool, and guys who don't get that you're not into them when you aren't and don't get that you're into them when you are. Who designed this stupid system, anyway? It's stacked against girls like me, girls who are just–kinda normal but not quite normal enough, it doesn't allow that sometimes your family STINKS or doesn't have money or whatever, who invented this stupid world anyway? If I ever get the chance to talk to God like dad says he does, I'm gonna have some choice words for him. "You hear me, God?" I gasped at the sound of my own voice. I sounded a bit froglike, and my throat was raspy. What else could go wrong today? Even if I get rescued I'll sound horrible and embarrass myself on TV yet again. This day just keeps getting better.

Not the point. Focus on what matters: getting out. I feel around the box and find the edges and what appears to be a lock on the right side of the box. Okay. There's a lock on this box, I'm wide awake, and I have no idea what I'm supposed to do here. But there's gotta be a weak point. How do they do this in movies? Don't they usually tap around until something feels different and then punch that point and then the cage falls apart? That's gotta be how I do this. Just gotta–oh, who am I kidding? I don't know what a weak spot would feel like, and I'm not strong enough to punch through whatever this is.

Wait, what's that sound? It's like a train rolling down a track. And it's getting closer. I strain my ears to hear and make out a bit of conversation underneath the rumble of the wheels. They pull closer and suddenly I hear a voice call "Stop!" The train pulls to a stop, and I make out a light. It bobs and weaves around the cave and then spotlights me in its glow. The light approaches me, and I hear keys jingle as the person holding the light walks up to me and tries to unlock the door to my prison. After a few tries, the door swings open, and I leap at the figure only to be flipped over its shoulders as it ducks to avoid my attack. I try to climb to my feet but find my captor has me in a chokehold.

"Relax," says a voice from the direction of the rails, "I'm not here to tie you to the railroad tracks. This time, at least. We're here to get you out of here. Now hop in the second minecart."

My captor releases me and shines the flashlight at the tracks. On it are three minecarts connected together like a train. The first one has a driver, I think his name is Steve, and both Snidely and Ghastly, with Snidely keeping an eye on the side I came from and Ghastly keeping an eye on the other side. I look back at my captor and realise it's Elise.

"So I take it this is a challenge?" I ask.

"Yep," Elise replies. "We gotta find all five of you sleepyheads and get you out of here before the Moose can. Now hop in."

Unsteady on my feet, I run to the second cart and hop in. Elise gets in the two-seater rear cart, facing backwards, and the train starts again. Elise turns off the flashlight--"to conserve battery power" she says--and we roll down the track. One of the things I noticed while the lights were on was that both Snidely and Ghastly were using night-vision goggles, which explains how they're able to see in the dark, but it's not explained how the driver can tell what buttons do what. And it turns out he can't, as
when Snidely calls for a halt again we accelerate and then suddenly pull to a halt that almost gives me whiplash. Elise turns on her flashlight and scans the wall on our left, and she finds the Angry Scientist fast asleep in a glass box by the wall of the tunnel we're in. A better look at the passageway tells me that this has got to be a mine we're trapped in. Elise turns the key in the door and rouses the Angry Scientist, who sits down next to me in the mine cart and immediately begins staring at Ghastly with lovesick eyes. Ghastly pretends not to notice, although her shoulders tense, and when the cart starts up again Elise keeps her light on. Suddenly, the tunnel widens and the mine track turns left and then we find ourselves next to another track. On that track is another train of minecarts only a little bit behind us. As I watch, Elise hursts water balloons at the people in the cart and throws a bucket of some sticky substance on their tracks. This slows our opponents' minecarts enough that we get a bit of a larger lead as the tracks cross each other, and we pass safely with room to spare onto the leftmost track. The tracks split from each other, and Elise turns out her light as we enter the next part of the mine. The next fifteen minutes or so pass uneventfully until Snidely declares "we've missed someone."

"Are you sure?" Ghastly asks. "I would've told you to stop if I'd seen someone."

"If you'd seen them we wouldn't have missed them!" Snidely replies, annoyed. "We have to go back."

"I don't think we can," Steve says. "There's no reverse switch on this thing."

"Oh, great," Snidely says angrily.

"Look on the bright side," I suggest. "It might not matter; Chris is sadistic enough that he might be glad that we left some teammates behind."

"He better be," says Elise. "Because if we passed them they won't be getting out on this train."

Shortly thereafter, the tracks turn right and Elise flips on her light again. Once again, we're riding side-by-side with some other tracks, although our opponents are nowhere in sight. We begin an uphill climb, and Elise tosses a barreelful of oil on the Moose tracks when we're about halfway up. Soon, we break through into the sunlit surface, and we see Nazz waiting at the end of the track. Steve eases up on the speed, and we slowly pull in to the end of the track. We get out, and Nazz runs up and hugs me.

"Are you okay?" she asks. "I was so worried."

I look at her and see that she really wants to know, that she was scared for me, that she thought something bad might happen.

"I'm–I'm fine," I tell her. "What are you doing up here?"

"Oh, I guess you didn't get the rundown?" she questions. When I shake my head, she says "Yeah, so this was another challenge. Everyone who opted to get some sleep last night–five on each side–got stuck in a glass box and placed underground, except for me and Chaz, because Chris put us here at the end. The four who stayed awake were made to hunt for you in the mines using minecarts. Hey, where's Marlowe and Ingrid?" She looks around worriedly. "They should've been down there with you."

"I think we missed them," I tell her. Nazz facepalms. "I-it's alright, I don't think the Moose got all of their players either, and we got here before them, and Elise greased the tracks so they might not make it up in the carts anyway—"
"It's not that!" Nazz says, upset. "It's that we're missing our friends! I don't care about the stupid game!"

I fall silent. I don't know what to say to that. Even if Chris probably wouldn't let them just stay down there, Ingrid and Marlowe have to be feeling horrible. I remember what it was like when I was in that box, and I was the first one rescued.

"I'm sorry," I say. "It's just–I don't think we can do anything to get them out now."

Nazz nods. "I know," she said. "I just wish they were here."

At that moment, a train of minecarts eases out of the tunnel. It's barely moving at all, but it seems Elise's grease trap didn't work, as it crests the hill and continues towards Chaz. As I count figures my heart sinks: they have eight. All they need is for Chaz to board. Boris waves him aboard, and although Chaz rolls his eyes, he does as requested and hops into the slowly-moving final cart. The minecarts reach the end of the line and stop. Chris walks up to them.

"Congratulations, Bumbling Moose," Chris says. "You got all your players out. Unfortunately, you didn't come in first, so that means you lose." We all cheer while the Moose slump. "Or it would, were it not for the fact that the Mad Scientists–"

"AN-GU-RY!"

"–failed to get all of their players out and are by rule disqualified, giving you the win by default!" Chris finishes. We stop cheering while the Moose begin to celebrate. "Scientists, go ahead and take a nap, and I'll see you at the elimination ceremony tonight."

We head back to our cabin, plop into bed, and sleep the dreamless sleep of losers.
When I wake up, I'm in my bed. Better than last time, at least. I roll over and realize that I went to
sleep in my clothes. I sigh and look out the window. It's now evening, and almost everybody else is
up. I look at the clock, 5:15. Another forty-five minutes until dinner, and I have nothing to do and
nothing but time. I look around the room. Naz is sleeping peacefully, and so is Ghastly, but Ingrid
and Elise are missing and Marlowe is reading in her bed. Ghastly is snoring like a woodchipper, and
I decide to file that under 'reasons to vote against her' along with her pretty much costing us the
game.

I sigh. Marlowe looks over and crooks an eyebrow. Bored, I decide to take a walk, and climb out of
bed. I put my shoes on and head out the door, waving goodbye as I go, and head for the beach. On
my way there, I spot Ingrid skulking around and decide to tail her. As I watch, she sneaks behind a
tree and stands there, watching something. Slowly, I approach her, but her head suddenly swivels
around. Upon seeing me, she puts a finger to her lips and beckons me forward, but when she turns
back to what she was looking at her shoulders slump. As I draw closer, I see Snidely and the blue-
haired guy from the other team walking away from each other.

"So," I say after a few moments, "What was that all about?"

Ingrid looks at me, eyes glimmering with excitement. "I just saw Snidely, Elise, and Andy meeting in
the woods to discuss things. I think they're up to something and might have formed an alliance."

"You sure?" I ask. It makes sense, but it doesn't explain what Ingrid was doing. "So what were you
doing here?"

"I saw Snidely skulking around trying to be sneaky so I followed him," she says. "You know,
regular detective-type stuff."

"This is big," I realize. "We have to tell the others."

I start to leave, but she grabs my shoulder. "Wait," she says. "How do we know they'll believe us,
and how do we know that we can trust them?"

I see the logic behind her words. "That makes sense," I reply. "Okay, let's only tell people we know
are on our side. Naz and Marlowe at dinner?"


At dinner, we tell Naz and Marlowe what we suspect.

"I knew it!" Marlowe exclaims. "I knew that Snidely guy was up to no good!"

"Yeah, but what do we do?" Naz asks.

"We vote him off, of course!" Marlowe exclaims. "Get rid of him forever!"

"Are you sure we can do that?" Ingrid asks. "There's only four of us. That's not a majority by any
means, and the other five could team up to send us home if they wanted."

"Look at it this way," I say. "Would you believe Snidely over us? I mean, we saw him with our own
eyes."
"Well yeah," Ingrid replies, "but people are loathe to believe there's a conspiracy going on until they see it with their own eyes. Just because we say it doesn't mean it's true; we could be trying to send Snidely away to save our own skins." To our quizzical looks she responds "look, I'm just playing devil's advocate is all."

"We don't have to convince five," Nazz says thoughtfully. "Even if four votes aren't enough today, they'll be enough when the team's down to eight to force at least a tie."

"Then let's do it," I decided. "We don't have to involve anybody else, and we can get rid of a big threat."

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**Confessional**

"Secret alliances are not to be trusted," I tell the audience.

That night, the nine people left on our team gather at the campfire pit. I smile when Snidely and Elise walk in late, knowing that their plot had failed, but frown when Ingrid is the last to arrive. She sits down next to me, and I lean over and ask "Hey, why are you late?"

Ingrid avoids my eyes. "Just got delayed, that's all."

I'm not sure she's telling the truth, but decide not to push it as Chris walks up to the podium. "Ladies. Gentlemen," he begins. "Today we did one of the classic challenges of Total Drama, and you just so happened to fail at it. I mean, leaving Ingrid and Marlowe behind? Cold. And on that note, Ingrid and Marlowe, here are your weiners." He throws them to my friends. "Other people who are safe: Steve, Nazz, Elise, Megan, Angry Scientist." He throws hot dogs to me and the others. We're down to two players: Snidely and Ghastly. One of them is going home."

"Now it looks like it's just you two," Chris says. "Snidely, it seems that there are some people on your team who don't really like you. Maybe they think you're up to no good. Maybe you are up to no good and they found out. And Ghastly. You didn't see a single person on your side of the tunnel. Or maybe you didn't want to see anybody. Either way, this was a close vote, and there could be only one winner."

"The one of you that stays is..." Chris pauses for a few seconds. "Snidely!"

Snidely calmly catches the hot dog thrown to him and stands up. He walks out of the campfire pit, and as he leaves, he looks directly at me. And smiles.

"Well, it looks like Ghastly's going back to Bunny Island!" Chris announces happily as he stuffs the woman into the cannon. "Unless, of course, she falls into the ocean on the way. But who would let a thing like that happen?" He grins at the camera and lights the fuse. "We'll see you next time, when we figure out who's gonna make waves in the next episode of Total! Drama! Cartoon Multiverse!"

Ghastly flies through the air and lands offshore. She surfaces, gasping for air.

"Wait, what's that? Hold on–green uniform, orange fish? Oh no. No. NO! COD COMMANDO!"

Voting Breakdown:

Snidely Whiplash: Major Doctor Ghastly
Elise: Major Doctor Ghastly
Nazz Van Bartonschmeer: Major Doctor Ghastly
Steve: Major Doctor Ghastly
Ingrid Third: Snidely Whiplash
Marlowe: Snidely Whiplash
Megan Allman: Snidely Whiplash
The Angry Scientist: Ingrid Third
Major Doctor Ghastly: The Angry Scientist

Final tally of votes received:

Major Doctor Ghastly: 4 (eliminated)
Snidely Whiplash: 3
The Angry Scientist: 1
Ingrid Third: 1
The Underwater Episode

Chris was standing on the dock, wearing a pair of sunglasses and a sun hat. "Last time, on Total Drama: Cartoon Multiverse, we had a lot of sleepyheads—ten of them, in fact. Luckily, there were five from both teams, and we hearkened back to a classic from Revenge of the Island: the minecarts! Well, close enough to that challenge so that some of the internet nerds would get the reference. Anyway, the Scientists ended up losing when Doctor Ghastly didn't spot anybody with her night-vision goggles. Huh, wonder why that is. It's not like Snidely intentionally broke them before handing them over—oh, no, he totally did in order to get her kicked out! Ha! Unfortunately for him, Ingrid spotted him talking with Elise and Andy and dug up their secret alliance. She told Megan, who told her female friends in the mess hall. Not exactly a private locale, you know. Elise and Snidely both overheard, and I'm sure they're plotting something. Long story short, Ghastly's out, Snidely's got a bunch of girls after him, and I'm still amazingly attractive. Welcome back, to Total! Drama! Cartoon Multiverse!"

I woke up at 6 A.M. and went for a walk on the beach. The temperature was about seventy degrees, and there was a sweet saltwater breeze. I looked out on the waterfront and saw the water cool and clear. The world was looking beautiful and I love the mornings here. As I watched a goose came down and landed on the sea. I smiled at the goose and I swear it smiled right back at me. I continued my walk and saw no one else around. I took off my shoes and let my feet touch the sandy ground.

I smiled at the sky. Today was going to be a good day. I finished my walk and headed over to the showers. Thankfully they were clean—probably the only part of camp that this could be said about. I took a short shower, got dressed, and headed back to our cabin. With any luck, I'd be able to play my bass some before Chris called us out for a challenge.

By the time I got back, it was almost 8. Elise was already gone, and Ingrid was reading in bed, but Megan and Nazz were still asleep. I smiled upon seeing my roommates and grabbed my bass. Before I could exit the cabin to practice, Chris's voice came crackling over the loudspeakers.

"Wake up campers!" he said cheerily. "It's time to get your swimsuits on and get down to the beach for some fun in the sun! And by fun, I mean your next challenge! Move it move it move it!"

Nazz and Megan groaned as they sat up in their beds and rubbed their eyes. Megan was the first to look up, and she smiled at me as she rose. "Hey Marlowe," she said. "Planning to play some bass?"

"I was," I told her, "but it seems we've gotta hit the beach."

"I heard," she said. "We'd better get out there."

She began to root through her suitcase, looking for her swimsuit. Nazz and Ingrid followed suit. I didn't do anything, because I didn't think to bring one. After a bit, Megan looked up at me. "Hey, aren't you going to get your swimsuit out?" she asked.

I told her I wasn't, and admitted I didn't bring one. She looked at me oddly and asked what I was going to do, so I told her I would just swim in my clothes. Nazz heard this, crooked an eyebrow, and offered me one of her bikinis. I refused, in part because our measurements were so different. Suddenly, Elise burst in, rifled through her suitcase, and pulled out a wetsuit. She quickly put it on and asked me to help zip her up. I did so, and she rushed out the door, carrying her flippers in one hand and a pair of swim goggles in the other.
Soon, everyone was on the beach by Chef. Chris walked up with an insufferable smile on his face. "Morning, campers! Nothing like a morning swim, is there?" he asked us. We stared back at him blankly. "There isn't, I checked," he told us. "And today, that's your first challenge: swim to the boats. Whichever team gets all their members to those boats over there—" he pointed to a couple of boats floating about two hundred feet offshore "—first, wins the first challenge, and a special prize! Now get moving!"

Quickly, everyone dove into the water. I swam as hard as I could for the boat and reached it after Elise and Nazz. I hauled myself aboard and looked over to the Bumbling Moose’s boat, where Wendy had made her way aboard. As I watched, I saw Triana work her way out of the water. Turning my attention back to our side, I spotted Snidely and Steve approaching. The Angry Scientist made quick time coming from behind, however, and he hopped aboard before they reached the boat and climbed on. I took a glance at the other boat and saw that Chaz and Ruby were onboard and Gandhi was making quick time towards the boat, followed by Boris. I heard feet hit the deck and saw Ingrid climb aboard, plainly winded and cold from the water. Megan was the only one left to climb aboard but she was nowhere in sight. I stared back at our opponents and saw Boris clamber aboard their boat. Coming on fast were Andy and Numbuh Two. They got to the boat, and it was only then that Megan came anywhere near the boat.

"C’mon, Megan, you can do it!" Nazz yelled. "You’re almost there!"

I decided to join in. "Yeah, Megan, you can win!"

"You’re doing greatness!" chimed the Angry Scientist. We looked at him oddly, and he shrugged. "What? Too much?"

Megan sped up, and she reached the boat just in time, barely beating out Rusty on the other side. She collapsed on the deck, winded. Chris and Chef drove up to us on a speedboat. Chris was holding a bullhorn.

"All right, campers!" he yelled. We all grabbed our ears. "That was just step one! Step two: there are twenty-two mines sitting on the bottom of the ocean, and you've gotta gather them up!"

We gasped. Chris laughed.

"Just kidding!" Chris said. "The accountants wouldn't approve it. And by accountants, I mean the author is a humorless dork."

Everyone gave Chris an odd look. "Uh, I think that time in the can drove Chris more than a little nuts," Steve whispered.

"I read that!" Chris said angrily. "And no, I'm not crazy. Would a crazy person make you pick up naval mines with your bare hands? I think not! Now then, they aren't naval mines. They're eighteen-pound cannonballs! All you gotta do is find ‘em, bring ‘em back to the surface, and deposit them on board. Whichever team nabs a majority of the cannonballs down there wins the next contest, and a special prize. Ready?"

"Wait!" Nazz exclaimed. "Where’s our special prize?"

"Oh, right," Chris said unenthusiastically. "It’s a map showing where the cannonballs were placed. Well, kind of. We weren’t paying that much attention and we didn’t give the interns a GPS, but it should be accurate enough." He tossed the map to us, and Elise grabbed it. "Contents may have shifted during shipping and handling, yadda yadda, go!"
Without pausing, the Moose dove into the water. Elise, meanwhile, opened up the map and took a gander.

"Well?" Steve asked. "Where's it say the cannonballs are?"

Elise shook her head. "All over the place, but the dimensions say approximately 100 feet in front of us and 50 feet on each side. Our best option is to dive under and look. From there we should be able to carry them up."

"Uh, I don't have swim goggles," Megan said.

"Doesn't matter," Snidely said, annoyed. "I've swum Canada's lakes. Trust me, the water won't hurt your eyes."

"Alright, everyone, dive!" Elise said, and dove underwater. We followed her in. I blinked my eyes and managed to make them focus. I spotted Elise, who scooped up a pair of cannonballs near the boat and quickly swam back to the surface. I spotted one a bit farther away. Before I could get to it Nazz swam over. She was unable to pick it up until Snidely came over and gave her some help. Together, they struggled with the heavy ball but managed to get it to the surface. Elise came back after that and quickly swam into the distance. Knowing we'd have to go deeper, I followed her. I spotted her as she grabbed a cannonball with one hand, surfaced for air, then dove again and picked up another before heading for the boat. I spotted a cannonball myself and headed for it. I was unable to budge it. Spotting Ingrid, I waved for help. She tried to force herself to sink but couldn't do it. She waved over someone else, and soon Nazz joined me. As we worked on getting the cannonball to the surface, I saw Elise swim by, looking for more balls. We broke the surface and Ingrid joined us, helping to carry the cannonball. We swam for the boat. After a lot of kicking, we got most of the way there only for Elise to pass us. She tossed a cannonball to the Angry Scientist, who was waiting onboard. He caught the balls and set them down. We got to the ladder leading up the side, and Ingrid took charge. She carried the cannonball onto the deck.

By this point we were all tired. Suddenly, Chris's voice came over the megaphone.

"Alright, people, that's a wrap! But don't let your balls drop just yet; anyone who leaves a ball behind is automatically eliminated from the rest of the challenge! We'll give you a few minutes to get those cannonballs back on board, but the Bumbling Moose just got their 12th cannonball and won this round! The score is now tied, and we'll be moving onto our next challenge shortly, just as soon as the last 4 cannonballs are taken care of."

Soon, Elise came back with a cannonball. She was accompanied by Snidely and Steve, who had worked together to get another cannonball. On the other boat, Wendy and Triana got a cannonball on board. Rounding out the group was Boris, Gandhi, and Ruby, who worked together.

"Is everyone rested?" Chris asked brightly. When he was met with groans, he shrugged nonchalantly. "Well, I am."

"You didn't do anything!" Wendy said angrily.

"Not true," Chris grinned cheekily. "I watched you work to dredge up those worthless cannonballs."

"Gah!" Elise yelled angrily. "I should send you to a weapons factory!"

"Not sure what that means," Chris replied smoothly, "but it's time to give the Bumbling Moose their reward. Chef, if you would?"
Chef drove the boat over to the Moose's boat and handed them a metal detector.

"That is a metal detector. And it is waterproof. Now, somewhere on the beach is buried a key, about a foot down. Your job is to find the key. The team that finds the key gets a special reward. Any questions?"

Several hands shot into the air.

"Good. Now get going! Shovels are on the beach. The sooner you get to the beach, the sooner you can get digging, and the sooner you can get to work. Oh, and yes, you do have to swim back to shore!"

With considerable grumbling, we all got ready and dove into the water. The Moose did the same on their side, and after a bit most of us had reached the shore. When Megan got to us, we gathered for a team meeting.

"Alright, what should we do?" Nazz asked.

"Start where they begin and go in the opposite direction," Ingrid suggested.

"I dunno," Elise said. "I think we should work in groups of two and comb the beach."

"Work in quadrants?" the Angry Scientist asked. "That is very smartnessness."

"Okay, how about we do both?" Megan suggested. "Start where they do and head in the opposite direction in four lines."

"Yeah, and we could look for disturbed sand!" Nazz exclaimed. "Megan, you're a genius!"

Steve nodded. "I'm in."

We split up. I paired up with Nazz. Megan paired up with Ingrid. The Angry Scientist paired up with Snidely. Steve paired up with Elise. Nazz and I started walking. After about forty feet, Nazz stopped.

"Does this look like a good spot?" she asked.

"I don't know," I said. "We're a bit far from everyone."

It was true. Megan and Ingrid were back near the starting line and the other two pairs were well ahead of us. Nazz nodded. "I've got a good feeling about this spot," she said.

We took out our shovels and began to dig. After about half a minute, Nazz started talking.

"So who do you think is the real threat?" she asked.

"What do you mean?" I replied.

"Well like, yesterday Megan told us that she saw Elise and Snidely meeting with Andy, right?" she asked. I nodded. "So one of them is the ringleader. But like, which one's the real threat?"

"Wouldn't they both be a threat?" I questioned. "I mean, if they're on the same side and in a secret alliance."

"Yeah, but we don't get to vote them both off at once. If we get a chance, we'll have to get rid of one of them first."
"True. So which one?"

"I think Elise is like, the bigger threat. I mean, she's in our room, and did you see what she's wearing? She packed a wetsuit!"

"Is a wetsuit that dangerous?"

"Who packs a wetsuit when going to summer camp? You didn't even pack a swimsuit."

I blushed. "I–yeah, but–maybe she thought we'd have to do some deep-sea diving? It is a reality show, after all."

"True," Nazz said. "But are you sure she's not really the ringleader? It just seems like she's the bigger threat."

"I don't know," I said thoughtfully. "You think we should get rid of her?"

"Yeah," Nazz replied. "It's like, why not get rid of her if we lose?"

"I'm with you," I responded. "If we lose, she's going down."

"Found it!" someone yelled. Our heads swiveled around only to spot Boris holding a key aloft in his hand.

"And the Bumbling Moose win!" Chris said happily.

Our team groaned and our opponents cheered. Chef beckoned us to the middle. We walked towards each other and stood in straight lines. Chris walked down the space beween us.

"Now, the Bumbling Moose will get a second reward," Chris said. He paused for a few seconds. "They get...Chef!"

Chef grinned widely and stepped over to the Bumbling Moose.

"Some rowing paddles have been put on your boats. All you have to do is row about five hundred yards due east and then dive. Underwater, we have hidden a treasure chest. Whichever team brings up the chest gets a point. The team that doesn't...well, it could be all over for the Mad Scientists—"

"AN-GU-RY!"

"–if they don't win this. A little extra incentive. Now swim back out there and get on the boats!"

Every single one of us groaned. We headed out for the boats yet again, sluggish and exhausted. By the time I finally reached the boat I was about to give up. I collapsed on the deck and saw that everyone else but Elise was doing the same. Maybe Nazz was right. Maybe Elise really was the bigger threat. After all, she'd been doing better than all of us.

But maybe that's why we should keep her on. She might give us the win. Or maybe that's what she wanted us to think. So she could weed out the other strong ones on our team.

The competition. She'd get rid of it. Take down others. Those who might see through her game.

Then win constantly in the endgame. She could do it too.

Beat us all.
We can't keep her.

We have to vote her off.

By the time Megan made it to the boat it was 15 minutes later. It would have been longer, but Elise hopped off the boat at some point and swam out to help others onboard. Because of this, we were able to take off a bit before the Moose could.

We still arrived well after them, because Chef gave them an advantage. Once there, most of us dragged our bodies overboard, but Ingrid and Megan stayed on deck because they were too tired. We slipped into the deep.

By sheer luck, the Moose hadn't found the treasure chest yet. We fanned out, ducking underwater for a peek every now and then. Soon, we heard a call from Steve.

"Over here!" he yelled. We made our way towards him, but the Moose had the same idea. Elise was the first to get there, and she stared down our encroaching opponents.

As I slowly swam towards Steve, I watched as Elise fought off the Moose. She was like an underwater viper, kicking and punching with abandon.

I saw it and I knew.

Elise was the biggest threat.

Nazz was right.

I reached Steve after Snidely. We dove down, but found ourselves unable to lift the chest.

We floated back to the surface, gasping for air.

Nazz joined us, and we dove again. We finally got it off the ground and headed back for the boat.

Elise swam with us. Playing guard.

It took forever, but we got there.

Ingrid and Megan grabbed the chest and pulled it aboard.

We climbed out.

Collapsed on the deck.

Needed rest.

Needed sleep.

And Chris rode up.

"Congratulations, Mad Scientists!" he declared.

"An-gu. Ry." the Angry Scientist said weakly.

"Whatever. Point is, you have won the fourth part of the challenge! The problem is, this is a five-part challenge."
Nobody on either side could muster the energy to even groan.

"Hey! A little enthusiasm would be nice!"

He waited.

Nobody responded.

"Fine. Be like that. But, the Scientists did win this challenge, so they get a special reward: Chef is no longer on the side of the Bumbling Moose. He's not on your side either, of course, but that's one obstacle removed for the Mad Scientists."

"An-gu...ry."

"Now, the final part of this challenge is a pirate battle! The Scientists need to steal a key, the Moose need to steal a chest. The team that gets both items at the same time and opens the chest is the winner! And, as a special reward, whomever opens the chest gets the treasure inside. Ready? Fight!"

Nobody moved.

And nobody moved.

And nobody moved.

And nobody moved.

Suddenly, a rope with a hook on the end flew over and latched itself onto our boat.

I pushed myself into sitting position. Balancing on the rope was Boris.

Elise leapt onto the rope and charged towards Boris.

Boris ducked.

A cannonball flew towards Elise.

Elise instinctively tried to catch the cannonball.

And fell off.

Boris, who was clinging to the rope, worked himself upright and walked over to our boat.

We tried to stop him, but he swerved around us.

Elise climbed onto the boat as he grabbed the treasure chest.

And jumped overboard with it.

Elise howled and dropped back into the ocean.

Just as everyone else on the Moose boat jumped in as well.

We hauled ourselves to our feet.

And jumped in.

A free-for-all ensued between two groups of very tired people.
Until the treasure chest resurfaced in Rusty's hands.

And Chaz stood beside him.

With the key.

He opened the chest.

"Congratulations, Bumbling Moose!" Chris cheerfully announced. "You have won the game, and the Mad Scientists will be sending someone home! They're gonna have to figure out who it is, while you get to rest and relax for the rest of the day!"

"Uh, what is this?" Chaz asked numbly.

"Promotional material from Greatminton!" Chris exclaimed. "It's not badminton, it's goodminton! Heck, it's greatminton!"

Chaz dropped the treasure chest into the sea.
Numbuh Two was napping on the front porch of the Moose's cabin when he felt someone tap him on the shoulder. "One more minute, Numbuh One," he complained, but the tapping continued. "Fine, fine, I'm up," he grumbled, annoyed, and opened his eyes. Ingrid was staring at him.

Numbuh Two rolled over and sat up. "What is it, Ingrid?" he asked, not fully into his detective persona. "Got a lead?"

Ingrid nodded. "Yeah. I forgot to tell you yesterday, but I saw Andy meeting with Snidely and Elise." Numbuh Two's eyes showed no recognition. "Two people on our team. They seem to be in a cross-team alliance."

"What, are you serious?" Numbuh Two asked.

"Yes," Ingrid said seriously before pausing. "Andy's the blue-haired guy, right?"

"Yeah, that's him," Numbuh Two told her. "You sure you saw them?"

"Positive," Ingrid replied. She paused. "You're wondering if you should trust me, aren't you."

"It's what any good gumshoe would do," Numbuh Two said. "Let's find some evidence."

"But how?" Ingrid said pensively. "We know that they won't be meeting with Andy since Elise and Snidely will vote as a bloc tonight. When are we gonna find the time to tail them?"

"Leave that to me," Numbuh Two said confidently. "I can probably keep an eye on Andy. If I see him sneaking off, I'll tail him."

"Right," Ingrid said. "But watch out for Elise. She's like a spy or something."

"Thanks for telling me," Numbuh Two said. "But I have a fair amount of experience with spies. And uh, thanks for uh, doing detective work. With me."

"Hey, no problem," Ingrid replied. "But if you dig up any alliances on your side, you'll tell me, right?"

Numbuh Two laughed. "Boris is a crook, Rusty is paranoid, Gandhi's hyperactive, Chaz is a narcissist, and if you're correct Andy's working for our opponents. As for the girls, I think they get along pretty well, but I don't really have a good way to say whether it's an alliance or whether they're just friends."

"Fair enough. I think we're all friends on the girls' side of the cabin too," Ingrid said. She smiled. "See you later, Numbuh Two."

"Uh, yeah," Numbuh Two said awkwardly. "See you later too."

Ingrid left. Numbuh Two collapsed back onto the front porch and tried to fall asleep again.

By the time the elimination ceremony rolled around, the Mad Scientists had recovered some stamina. They were still pretty much dead on their feet, however, as was apparent when they stumbled in and simply dropped onto the various stumps. Chris was still the last one there, and he strolled in with a big smile on his face.
"What's the matter, Scientists?" he asked faux-sympathetically. "Had a rough day after pulling an all-nighter two nights ago? Well, don't you worry, one of you gets to sleep in their own bed tonight. The rest of you have to sleep on our lumpy camp mattresses. But hey, with the workout today I bet you all need some protein for your muscles. And most of you are getting protein! The catch is that you have to come up and get it. The first one who doesn't is ELIMINATED!" He cackled evilly. "Yeah, I bet you didn't see that one coming. Now then. The Angry Scientist!"

The Angry Scientist got up and walked over to Chris. He took his hot dog and headed back towards the cabins.

"Aw, not gonna stay for the rest of the ceremony?" Chris asked mockingly. "That's too bad. Next weiner goes to...Nazz!"

Nazz, more energetic than most of her compatriots due to her years of cheerleading, got up and took her sausage. Unlike the Angry Scientist, she didn't head directly towards the cabins; instead, she stood near the plate of hot dogs, smiling sweetly.

"Riiight," Chris said, annoyed. "Anyway, the next person to get a weenie is Marlowe!"

Marlowe dragged herself to the podium, took the hot dog, and fell over on the spot. She began snoring lightly.

"Chef, if you would?" Chris asked. Chef grabbed Marlowe and dragged her away from the platter of sausages. Chris turned back to the remaining contestants. "Steve," he said. Steve stumbled forward, grabbed a sausage, and made his way back to his seat.

"Well, we're halfway done," Chris said. "It seems that some of you still have a little juice left. We'll have to fix that if we do this again. But, next sausage goes to...Ingrid!"

Ingrid stood up, took her weiner, and went back to her seat.

"Now it gets interesting," Chris said. "The final three. And you'll have a hard time guessing which one of these isn't getting a sausage! But here's a hint: Elise, you get one!"

Elise stood up, grabbed a weiner without looking, and headed for the cabins. "Night everybody!" she called behind her.

"Two campers left," Chris said, building tension. "Neither of you did anything to fail your teammates--well, more than anybody else--but neither of you did much to succeed. And both of you have made some enemies on this island. Which one will it be? Will it be Snidely, or Megan? Snidely, or Megan?"

Chris paused to let the tension rise even more. Snidely and Megan stared at Chris. Nazz and Ingrid stared at Snidely. Marlowe stared at the inside of her eyelids.

"Megan!" Chris yelled at last. Megan stood up and thrust her arms in the air. "You're going home!"

A dumbstruck look settled on Megan's face. Chris cackled. "Well you didn't think I'd miss another attempt to mess with your emotions, did you? Load your things and get ready for the cannon of sorrow!"

Tears prickled Megan's eyes as she despondently followed Chef to the cannon. He loaded her into it.

"But I don't understand," Megan quavered. "How did I get voted off?"
Elise and Steve were working together, shoveling out a random plot of sand on the beach. The people closest to them were Snidely and the Angry Scientist. They dug in silence.

"So..." Elise said, looking to break the silence. "Didn't pack a swimsuit?"

Steve scowled. "Didn't have a swimsuit."

"O-kay then," Elise said. "Why not?"

Steve huffed. "Look, I quit my job at the lab a while back, and as it turns out, when your only reference is a completely insane person who modifies corn to eat people—don't ask," he said to Elise's quizzical look. "Point is, it's hard to get work. And I was never that much of a swimmer anyway."

"Yeah, but still," Elise said. "Seriously, that's what you went with?"

Steve scowled but stayed silent this time.

"Okay, whatever," Elise said, annoyed. "Maybe Megan was right," she muttered. Steve looked up. "I'm sorry, what?" he said.

"Uh, nothing!" Elise replied, nervous. "Just uh, just forget I said anything!"

"No, you said something," Steve said. "About Megan."

"Oh, it's not important. What's important is that we find that key. Hey, let's move on, I don't think there's anything here," Elise said hastily.

"What did Megan say?" Steve asked.

"Um, well, you know, just girl talk, it wouldn't interest you, all lipstick and jewelry and periods," Elise told him.

"Maybe that would interest me," Steve said, irritated. "Or would that just prove Megan's point?"

Elise sighed. "Fine," she told him. "She said that you're kind of a creepy weirdo loser and she thinks we should all vote you off."

The tips of Steve's ears turned red. "Oh really," he said in a too-calm voice.

"Look, I'm sure she didn't mean anything by it," Elise said nervously. "I mean, I'm not gonna vote you off or anything! And nobody else is, I'm sure!"

"Tell me something," Steve said evenly. "What did you mean when you said she was right?"

"I—I didn't mean it like that!" Elise replied. "I just, uh—"

"Go ahead," Steve said. "You meant?"

"You're wearing tighty-whities!" Elise exclaimed. "To swim in! That doesn't strike you as a bit, a bit, well, a bit loserish?"

"I couldn't afford anything else!" Steve complained. "I'm broke! Jersey isn't cheap and I can't afford to move and I can't get a job! This reality show is my last chance!"
Elise sighed. "I'm sorry, Steve," she said sadly. "I didn't mean it. It's just--you were being a bit rude there."

"Yeah," Steve said pensively. "Maybe I was. I'm sorry."

Elise smiled. "It's okay. And hey. I don't think Megan was right about you."

Steve smiled. "Thanks, Elise."

"Found it!" Boris yelled. Steve and Elise looked over, spotted him, and started walking back.

"And the Bumbling Moose win!" Chris said happily.

As they headed back towards the gathered groups, Elise purposely fell behind Steve. Snidely caught up to her, and they walked together for a few seconds before Snidely pulled ahead.

"The message has been received," Elise told Snidely during those few seconds.

The cannon fired, and Megan shot into the night. Chris turned to the camera. "The Mad Scientists--"

"AN-GU-RY!" came a faint yell in the distance.

"...are bleeding players like anemic royalty. Wait, what? That reference is so old I got it. Wait...okay, I'm calling my agent! I need another raise for that insult! I'm outta here! But tune in next time for more Total! Drama! Cartoon Multiverse!"

After Chris finished his spiel, most of the camp retired for the night. The exception was Nazz, who grabbed Ingrid and Marlowe on their way back to the cabins.

"What is it, Nazz?" Marlowe yawned. "I'm exhausted."

"Think," Nazz said seriously. "There were four of us and eight contestants total."

"Yes?" Marlowe asked. Ingrid had already caught on to where Nazz was going.

"You're saying there's no way Megan could have been kicked off by majority vote?" she asked.

"Yeah. There's like, something seriously rotten here," Nazz replied.

"Maybe it was a tie and Chris decided to get rid of Megan," Marlowe suggested sleepily.

"I doubt it," Ingrid said. "He would've made a big deal about doing so."

"Yeah," Nazz said. "There's like, only one explanation." She made Ingrid and Marlowe face her.

"One of us...is a traitor."

Voting Breakdown:

Ingrid Third: Snidely Whiplash
Megan Allman: Snidely Whiplash
Marlowe: Elise
Nazz Van Bartonschmeer: Elise
Steve: Megan Allman
Snidely Whiplash: Megan Allman
Elise: Megan Allman
The Angry Scientist: Ingrid Third

Final tally of votes received:

Megan Allman: 3 (eliminated)
Elise: 2
Snidely Whiplash: 2
Ingrid Third: 1
"Welcome back, loyal fans, to another episode of Total! Drama! Cartoon Multiverse!" Chris announced. "In our last episode, we wore out our campers by making them do all kinds of activities in the water on a hunt for pirate treasure! Which Chaz threw away. Because he's an idiot. And a chump. Anyway, while they were doing this, Nazz convinced Marlowe that Elise was the biggest threat to their team. And she may not have been wrong, since Elise fed Steve a line about how Megan made fun of him. But Nazz forgot to tell everyone else to vote off Elise, and the alliance between Snidely and Elise managed to send Megan home with a little help from Steve. This led Nazz to conclude only one thing: one of the girls on the Scientists not named Elise is a traitor to the cause! Wow! See what happens next, on Total! Drama! Cartoon Multiverse!"

I woke up at 6:30 and slipped stealthily out of bed. Everyone else was still sleeping, tuckered out from the previous day's challenge. Luckily, my history as a skilled stealth agent had given me the stamina to not only do everything required of me but to be out of bed the next morning bright and early for a training session in the woods. Making my way there, I started with my daily exercises before moving on to parkouring on tree branches up the cliff. Once I had gotten halfway to the top, I stopped and did a handstand on the sturdy tree branch I was on. Still standing on my hands, I hand-walked to the edge of the branch and grabbed on to another branch on another tree. I did this until I had made some progress down the hill. At this point, I swung back to regular position and began using the branches as monkey bars, swinging like Tarzan through the trees. I got to the bottom, dropped to the ground, and sprinted through the woods towards camp. I arrived there and checked my watch. 7:26. Not bad.

I walked back to my cabin. Just before I could open the door, the loudspeakers crackled to life. "Attention campers, the mess hall is now open," Chris said. "I'd suggest you get some grub now, because your next challenge is in an hour and you may not get lunch. Ta-ta!"

I headed to the mess hall and got a platterful of Chef's latest batch of indigestible slop and sat down at the table where the rest of the Mad Scientists were gathered. As I sat there, I listened to the Angry Scientist and Steve argue about the benefits and drawbacks of weird inventions and listened to Nazz and Marlowe talk about their lives back home, nail polish, and god knows what else. I'd rather get involved in one of Dan's moronic revenge schemes than pay more attention to my cabinmates than I had to. I'd go so far as to bet that if they saw me, Snidely, and Andy meeting in the woods to discuss our alliance none of them would catch on to the fact that we were plotting their downfall.

Admittedly, the more time I spent at this place the more I was glad that I'd agreed to an alliance. As much as it hurt to admit, Snidely was one of the least insufferable people on my team–for that matter, in retrospect, Voltar was only average in terms of his annoyance factor. I honestly couldn't wait until we could get rid of Mister An-gu-ry forever. And could Ingrid possibly be any shier? I swear, it's like she's trying to avoid me. And she's one of the few people I can put up with, probably because she's constantly staying out of my way.

Yeah. There's a reason I usually work alone.

Although that's not an excuse for the rest of my team's incompetence. There is no way that one team should lose three out of four challenges when they started on a level playing field. And it's not like the Moose are hypercompetent. I mean, that windbag Chaz? A flight goggles-wearing weirdo who calls himself Numbuh Two? Dale Gribble? None of these people are any threat whatsoever, and yet we keep losing to them.
I swear, if we lose again, I'm gonna think about throwing some challenges to whittle our team down to the three people who don't completely suck.

When we got to the challenge area, Chris was standing there with two flags, one green and one blue. He handed the green flag to Ingrid and the blue flag to Numbuh Two.

"Now, today's challenge is a rousing game of capture the flag!" he said. "I assume all of you have played this before, and that everyone in the audience knows how it's played, but just to fill time and wordcount, I'm going to explain the rules anyway. Each team has a flag. They're supposed to guard this flag and try to take the other team's flag. Whomever brings the other team's flag back to their base first wins. Now, to make things interesting, each team gets thirty minutes to choose a base. When the thirty minutes are up, we start the game. Now let's go!"

The Moose went to the woods. We walked to our cabin and discussed our plans.

"Alright," Snidely said. "Any idea where we should put the flag?"

"I think we should go for high ground," Ingrid said. "We should put it on top of the cliff."

"The cliff's fairly wooded," I said. "We won't be able to see anyone coming, leaving us open to sneak attacks."

"Why not try the beach then?" Marlowe said. "We'll be able to see everyone coming."

"Why are we playing defense?" Steve said. "Wouldn't it be better to figure out how to capture their flag since we'll have to grab it to win?"

"But they have to do the same thing," I said. "We have to protect our base."

"This is all very interesting," Snidely said, "but it's not getting us anywhere."

"We'll need to find a way to disguise our deficiency in members," Nazz said. "Because they have two more players than we do, they have more flexibility in their arrangement of attackers and defenders. Depending on how they set up, we could see them send a force of eight that could overwhelm our seven, or we could see them attempt an impenetrable line against us. Furthermore, they could and probably will attempt to split their forces, which means we must commit to either a defensive stance or an offensive stance, which itself will be informed by the placement of both our flag and their flag. The most important thing we must focus on is the location of their flag, as if it's in a difficult spot our best option will be to defend, and if it's in an easy spot our best option will be to attack. However, they will likely anticipate us sitting back and waiting, and will therefore attack. Our best option may be some misdirection, such as splitting up and heading in different directions to confuse them as to who has the flag and extending the amount of time they have to spend searching for the true location of the flag. If we do this, we should then have the team that truly has the flag stand guard and have our other teams go on the offensive towards the other side in order to find their flag and surprise them with an unexpected offensive attempt, rather than the defensive attempt that while likely initially successful would only serve to prolong the game but still lead to our defeat."

We stared at her, shocked. Nazz shrugged.

"What?" she said. "Babysitters gotta know this stuff."

Steve and I headed for the cliffs. We had been selected as the second team, and we were to pretend to be on our way to plant the flag on the cliff while secretly scouting around. Nazz, Ingrid, and
Marlowe had headed for the beach, and Snidely and Mister An-gu-ry had taken the flag into the woods to hide it. Hopefully we’d be able to either find the hiding spot of the Bumbling Moose's flag or serve as a decoy for their attacking force. Either option would work, honestly, although I wanted to capture that flag and bring it back.

Suddenly, we heard an announcement from the direction of the campgrounds. "Both flags have been planted! The game has begun!" Chris said. I immediately began looking around for our targets. I saw nothing, but I heard faint conversation in the distance. I climbed up a tree and stealthily headed towards the voices. Steve watched me uncertainly, and I beckoned for him to follow. Steve shrugged and began walking underneath me, and I nodded. If nothing else, he could serve as a decoy while I waited for the correct moment to strike.

As we moved through the forest, I heard the voices more clearly. Soon, I came to the edge of a small clearing. Signalling for Steve to stop, I looked down. There were five people there; obviously they had sent four out to scout. I stared down at them and made note of who was there: Numbuh Two, Andy, Triana, Chaz, and Gandhi. Andy looked up, spotted me, and quickly looked away. That was one person I probably wouldn't have to worry about. Triana and Gandhi were deep in conversation, and Chaz was admiring himself in a mirror; only Numbuh Two was on alert.

Suddenly, I spotted a stick running up Gandhi's pant leg. He was obviously hiding it. But once I got it, I'd need to get away. I signaled for Steve to move forward, and he moved into the clearing.

"Hey! It's a Scientist! Get 'im!" Numbuh Two yelled. Steve got rushed by Numbuh Two and Andy. As Andy ran towards Steve, he looked up and jerked his head to the right. I didn't have time to decipher this, however, as I leapt down from the trees and kicked a now-agitated Triana in the face. She fell back, nose bleeding, and hit the ground hard. I landed on two feet and whirled around to throw a punch at Chaz, but stopped. Chaz was cowering before me, hands over his face.

"No! Not in the face! Not in my beautiful, beautiful face!" he whined pitifully. I rolled my eyes and swept my leg beneath his. He collapsed to the ground. "Thank you," he groaned.

I turned to Gandhi, who was frozen in place. I noticed the stick was still running up his pant leg, and knew he was the one hiding it. Suddenly, a sharp pain ricocheted through my skull, and I turned around, rubbing the sore spot. Standing behind me, with a massive shit-eating grin on his face, was the shortest member of the Moose.

"Allow me to introduce myself," he said. "Johnny Rock-Thrown, world famous punk, at your service."

I scowled. "He's dead," I said, and ran towards Boris. Suddenly, I tripped over a suddenly-extended leg and fell in a heap in front of Numbuh Two, who kicked me in the face. I rolled with the kick and moved into a three-point stance, where I surveyed my situation. To the left of me: an angry teenage girl with a nosebleed, a cowardly narcissist, Gandhi, and the flag. To the right of me: Boris casually tossing a rock in the air with his right hand, Steve pinned underneath Andy's foot, and Andy, trying to look like he might fight me. In front of me, Numbuh Two.

I charged at Numbuh Two, and he braced for impact. Suddenly, I launched myself to the right, and knocked Andy off of Steve as gently as I could. I used my hand to grab onto a tree trunk, used it to turn around, and ran directly at Boris. Boris's eyes widened as I grabbed him and threw him into Numbuh Two. I skidded to a halt and faced down Triana, who had her fists up and was ready to fight. I smiled.

"You know something, Triana? I have to deal with Dan on a revenge high on a regular basis. I have had to adjust for his insane brand of competence many times. I have had to occasionally help him
with his moronic plans,” I told her. "And you know something? You're no Dan," I said. She didn't say anything, just slowly approached.

And then I kicked her in the crotch.

Contrary to popular belief, men aren't the only ones who get hurt when they're kicked in the crotch. It's painful for everyone. Men may be more susceptible to a well-placed kick, but a kick anywhere hurts. And a kick in the nethers especially hurts. Even if you're a woman.

I knew this, and I knew it was my best option for quickly dropping Triana. And it worked. Triana fell over with a surprised gasp, and I ran towards Gandhi.

"Whoa whoa whoa whoa whoa!” Gandhi yelled. "No need to hit me, scary lady! Don't blast my berries!"

I picked him up and tossed him to the side, revealing a stick that had been planted into the ground and placed in Gandhi's pant leg. As I watched, the stick fell over.

I turned around. Steve and Andy were fighting with each other, Chaz was watching with a grin on his face, and neither Boris, Triana, nor Numbuh Two looked particularly pleased as they approached me.

"Where," I asked calmly, "is the flag?"

Chaz snorted. "It's called a decoy, genius, ever heard of it?"

I looked at him, fuming. "What do you mean, a decoy?"

"Yeah, the flag's not here," Gandhi said happily. "It's somewhere else."

I screamed, enraged, and took off away from them. I needed to find that flag. As I ran, I heard them pursue for a minute before they stopped. I assume they regrouped, but it was at that point that I heard footsteps approaching from another direction. I turned and ran towards them. We approached each other until we saw each other. At that point, he skidded to a halt and stared at me, panting heavily.

It was Dale. In his right hand he held our flag. I cracked my knuckles and cracked my neck and stared at him, angry.

"I believe you have something that belongs to me."

Dale stared at me, scared. He inched backwards, and I ran towards him.

"Squirrel tactic!" Dale screeched, and bounced between two trees, scaling them faster than if he had just tried to climb until he put the flagpole between his teeth and began to straight-up climb one of the trees. I was undaunted, however, and I followed him up. He had barely lifted himself onto a branch before I was halfway up the tree. He shakily lifted himself onto his feet on the branch and managed to get balanced just as I got up to him. I leapt onto the branch and ran at him. He cocked his arm back.

"Wendy, catch!" he yelled, and threw the flag. I was inches short of swatting the flag out of his grasp, and I tumbled towards the ground. I stared at the sky, watching as Dale lost his balance and fell towards me, as the flag sailed forward, about to pass a tree and land harmlessly on the ground. I watched and readied myself for impact.
And then suddenly an arm reached out from behind the tree, plucked the flag out of the air, and planted it into a hollow in the tree.

My back hit the ground first, and I bounced. I had almost reached the apex of my bounce when Dale's ass landed directly on my pelvis and drove me back into the soil. I choked, wind knocked out of me, and felt my vision fade into unconsciousness as Chris announced "The Bumbling Moose win!" over the loudspeakers.
The Flag Campfire Ceremony

Elise was lying in bed with an ice pack in her lap, all alone in the girls' side of the Mad Scientists' cabin, when she heard a knock on the door.

"Uh, can I come in?" Steve asked.

"Sure," Elise replied weakly. Steve opened the door and walked in nervously. He stood at the entrance awkwardly.

"Um," he said eloquently.

"So what do you want?" Elise asked with as much niceness as she could muster.

"I just wanted to say I'm sorry," he said. "I mean, I wasn't much help in the fight, and I was nowhere near you when you fell fifty feet from that tree--"

Elise waved him off. "It was more like thirty-five feet," she said. "Besides, you couldn't have done much anyway. D–Rusty is surprisingly agile."

"I know, but–I'm sorry," he said.

After about a minute, Elise sighed. "You know what hurts most–besides, well, everything?" she asked. "It's that I'm probably gonna be kicked out for my failure."

"I'm sure that's not the case," Steve comforted. "I mean, you're like the most competent person on our team! Who would kick you out?"

"Thanks for saying that," Elise said, "but I'm pretty sure that I'm going down."

"C'mon, that's not true," Steve reassured her. "I mean, whoever was guarding the flag screwed up way worse than you did."

"The Angry Scientist?" Elise snorted. "Yeah, like he was gonna stop anybody. Face it, I was supposed to win the game for us and I let everyone down. No way he gets voted out."

"I'll vote for him if you will," Steve told her. "Two votes isn't a guarantee, but it should help."


"Hey, no problem," Steve said. "I hope you feel better soon."

Steve smiled and left the cabin.

Ingrid met Numbuh Two on the beach.

"So what are you doing here?" Ingrid asked.

"Soaking up some rays," Numbuh Two replied. "How about you?"

Ingrid rolled her eyes. "Cut the acting, Jack."

"Jack?" he questioned.
"Numbuh Two's a bit of a mouthful. Somebody who does the film noir thing as much as you should know that."

"Maybe it is, maybe it ain't. Either way it's my name, doll."

"Yeah, maybe don't do that unless you want to be slapped."

"How do you know I don't?"

Ingrid stared at him askance. "Okay, maybe I don't," he amended. "But I was just getting into the snappy patter!"

"If you're want to do snappy patter, maybe don't say things that kill it," Ingrid told him.

"Fair enough," Numbuh Two conceded. "So what's the word, bird?"

"Bird?"

"You say Jack, I say bird."

"I'm sorry, but that's just weak. Especially since it rhymes."

"Hey, rhymes are fun!"

"Especially since it rhymes."

"Fine. So what's new?" he asked.

"You know how Megan left the island last night?"

"Yeah, everyone does."

"Well, we were all set to vote off Snidely, and there were four of us out of a total of eight votes."

"So maybe the vote split and Chris booted Megan off anyway."

"Maybe, but it seems unlikely. He'd probably have made a big deal out of it."

"So you're thinking what, exactly?"

"That one of the girls is a traitor."

Numbuh Two sat bolt upright. "Are you serious? One of...so who's that leave?"

"Well, I'm not a traitor, obviously," Ingrid concluded. "That leaves Nazz and Marlowe. One of them is working for Snidely."

"You think," Numbuh Two said.

"Well what other interpretation could there be?" Ingrid asked. "Suddenly, one of them decided that Snidely wasn't a threat after all? Somebody voted for a contestant besides Snidely for no reason? I'm telling you, there's something fishy going on."

"So there is," came a voice from behind them. "Now how about you explain yourselves, or else I'll spread the news to the rest of the team that you're in a secret, cross-team alliance."
Ingrid and Numbuh Two turned around. When they saw who it was, they relaxed slightly.

"Rusty, thank Zero!" Numbuh Two said. "For a moment there, I thought you were Andy."

"Oh really?" Rusty said, cocking an eyebrow. "And what makes me not a threat?"

"Well, uh..." Numbuh Two said awkwardly.

"Look, we'll fill you in," Ingrid told him. "But you have to promise that you won't run off and tell everybody we're working together on this."

"So you are in an alliance!" Rusty proclaimed. "I knew it!"

"Look, we're not in a 'win the game' type of alliance," Numbuh Two said. "We're in a 'solve mysteries' alliance."

Rusty stopped doing his victory dance. "Oh really?" he said in a cold, calculating tone. "And what mysteries are you solving?"

"You have to trust us," Ingrid said. "And we have to speak in private."

"No way," Rusty said. "We're not doing anything in private."

"There's a real alliance, it bridges the teams, and Andy is on it," Numbuh Two said. Ingrid cast him a disapproving look. "What? That's the short version."

Rusty thought about it.

"Alright," he said. "We can talk in the woods. But I'll be ready if you try to pull any funny business."

Fifteen minutes later, Boris spotted Ingrid heading for the woods. This wouldn't have interested him were it not for the fact that he had seen Rusty go into the woods not five minutes ago. His interest was piqued, and when he saw Numbuh Two heading for the woods as well he decided to tail him and see if there was some sort of meeting going on.

Boris sighed. "Hoo boy," he muttered to himself, "I'm used to being on the inside of conspiracies, not watching them from the outside! The world's all topsy-turvy ever since I come to this island!"

Boris snuck after Numbuh Two, ducking behind trees every now and then when he sensed that Numbuh Two was about to glance behind him. After a few minutes, Numbuh Two arrived at a small clearing in the woods where Rusty and Ingrid were already waiting.

"So, give me all the details," Rusty said. "And don't skimp on anything."

"You sure?" Numbuh Two asked nervously. "Because a lot of the stuff pre-island is irrelevant."

"Fine, just give me the island details," Rusty told him.

"Alright, so it all started before we got to the island," Ingrid began. "I watched the show's run right before I came here even though I wasn't a fan so I'd have a better idea of what we were up against, and I noticed that there was usually some sort of alliance. Or maybe not usually, but a non-negligible amount of the time there would be a secret alliance. So naturally, when I got here, I decided to try and figure out who was making one. You know, because I thought it'd be useful, to pass the time, basically I figured it would be something to do that would be interesting."
"Yeah, I was pretty much the same, only without a specific direction," Numbuh Two said. "I wanted to investigate and find out secrets, to peel back the glossy cover of the show and reveal the rot underneath, to yank at the gentle facade presented to the world--" He stopped. Ingrid and Rusty were giving him unimpressed looks. "Sorry. I like doing the Phillip Marlowe thing. Anyway, yeah, I wanted to investigate stuff too."

"We met up after the challenge with the soup," Ingrid continued, taking over. "And I suggested to him that there might be some sort of alliance somewhere going on. He was interested, and suggested we work together to crack the case."

"Wait, why'd you two meet?" Rusty questioned. "You're on opposite sides."

Ingrid rolled her eyes. "I wouldn't be much of a Safety Patrol officer if I didn't pick up on people's behaviors. Like how he was constantly acting like a film noir character. Or how you were always staring people down and experiencing the first pangs of nicotine withdrawal. Or how Megan's right hand twitched slightly every time she lied."

"Right, yeah," Numbuh Two said. "Wait, nicotine withdrawal?"

"Anyway," Ingrid continued, "the next day I saw Snidely and Elise go off together. This seemed suspicious to me, since at the meet-and-greet they seemed kind of like they were enemies. So I followed them and saw them meeting with Andy in the woods."

"And I take it you saw this too?" Rusty asked Numbuh Two.

"Actually, no," Numbuh Two said. "But I have noticed Andy acting suspicious, and he occasionally seems to just disappear. I tried tailing him once, but he spotted me and played it off as if he was going to the bathroom."

"Uh-huh," Rusty said. "And since then?"

"Since then, Megan has been kicked off and I wouldn't be surprised if I'm next to go," Ingrid said. "I've told the other girls about this, but Megan's disappearance from the game makes it look as if one of them has turned traitor. Probably Marlowe."

Rusty crooked an eyebrow, thinking, and then shook his head.

"You know, I don't quite believe you, but I'm not gonna tell anybody about this little alliance you've got going on," he said. "I'll be watching you. And Andy."

Rusty turned around and left Numbuh Two and Ingrid in the woods.

"So, is that all?" Numbuh Two asked.

"Yeah, pretty much," Ingrid replied.

"Good luck with the vote," Numbuh Two told her.

"Thanks," Ingrid said, smiling slightly. "I'll need it."

Confessional

Rusty entered the confessional booth, sat down, and lit a cigarette. He took a long drag and exhaled deeply.
"Ya know, I don't trust many people anyway," he told the camera. "But something tells me those kids were taking me for a ride."

Snidely knocked on the door to the girls' cabin. "Come in!" Elise called from inside. He didn't respond.

"I said come in!" Elise said again, loudly.

Snidely still didn't respond.

"I know it's you, Snidely. And yes, I'm alone in here."

Snidely opened the door and strode in. "So, Elise," he asked, "how are you feeling?"

"I'll survive," she told him. "But we're voting off the Angry Scientist."

Snidely's mouth fell open. "But--"

"Look," Elise said, "he's the only possible candidate. And I've already enlisted Steve's help. With a bit of luck, we'll get rid of him."

"Are you sure the other girls in your cabin aren't a threat?" he asked.

"Have you listened to them converse? Like at all?" Elise replied. "Trust me, if they were any more airheaded they'd be chewy candy. They're probably the least intelligent people I have ever met. And I once had to deal with a plot centered around making everyone in California stupid!"

"So the plot succeeded?" Snidely asked.

"What? No! It--whatever. Point is, these girls are going to be easy to manipulate." Elise paused. "Except for Ingrid," she remarked. "Ingrid seems pretty smart. But I don't think that we can get rid of her now. And besides, Steve's already agreed to vote for the Angry Scientist."

Snidely sighed. "I'll trust your judgement," he said. "The Angry Scientist it is." He smirked. "At least I won't have to deal with him exercising in our cabin every morning anymore."

Confessional

"Seriously, every morning," Snidely said. "He gets up at 7:30, does a bunch of jumping jacks, some push-ups, some sit-ups, and then sprints around the cabin. By the time he's finished, we're all awake and the place smells like back sweat. Also I don't think he's changed his underwear once the whole time we've been here."

Confessional

The Angry Scientist's eyes were bloodshot. "Maybe I should start wearing goggles," he decided. "My lucky underwear do not seem to be working so wellness."

A few minutes before voting was to begin, Nazz gathered her friends outside of the cabin and away from prying ears. "Okay girls, this is it," she told them. "We've gotta go in there and get rid of our biggest threat. It's us or them."
"But what about the traitor?" Ingrid asked.

"If one of us gets voted off, we'll know who the traitor is," Nazz replied.

"And if it's not one of us?" Marlowe asked.

"If it's not one of us, we win. Three votes will beat out the rest. Now let's go vote," Nazz declared.

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Seven campers sat on seven stumps in front of a roaring fire. Chris grinned as he walked up.

"So, it's your fourth campfire ceremony after only five challenges," Chris remarked. "How does it feel? To be that pathetic? To suck that much?" Elise growled. "I'll be honest, you've certainly been an interesting team. Not good, but interesting. And today, interest ratchets up another notch when you send one more competitor home! Who's it gonna be?"

The camera panned over the gathered campers. Ingrid's stoic exterior betrayed a buzz of interior nervousness, Nazz was biting her lip in anticipation, and Marlowe was breathing shakily. Next to them, Steve and the Angry Scientist were perfectly calm, certain that they would get hot dogs. And on the other side, Snidely had a wicked grin and Elise had a look of anger on her face—although whether this was due more to her various aches or to the likelihood that she'd get voted off was tough to tell.

"I'll be honest, none of you have a particularly good case," Chris continued. "Nazz, Marlowe, Ingrid—what exactly did you do? Sat on the beach like idiots. Not good for the old win probability. Also you didn't notice Ruby creeping up on you even though she's not exactly that good at, oh, what's the word, stealth. Yeah. Not impressive, girls. Snidely, you were tasked with guarding the flag and ran off as soon as you heard the clattering of a rock behind you—which, by the way, is pretty much the oldest trick in the book when it comes to attempting to distract a guard. You're just lucky it wasn't a bear. As for the Angry Scientist, you got taken down by Rusty Shackleford. In seconds! How do you even let that happen, dude? And that's saying nothing about Steve, who basically spent his time looking like an idiot."

"And finally, Elise," Chris said, grinning. "You turned in one of the most entertaining performances of the season thus far, perhaps even better than your underwater performance yesterday. But let's face it, at this point you're probably totally wiped out and useless. Also there's the minor fact that even your best efforts aren't enough to buoy this bastion of incompetence to victory. Also you're not the most likable person on the island, so you've got that going against you."

Chris's grin grew wider. "Well, now that I've totally dissected why every one of you suck and deserve to be thrown away, it's time to feed you parts that deserve to be thrown away! Weiner go to...Steve. Nazz. Marlowe." He tossed them their hot dogs. "Nobody voted against any of you. You're completely safe. Which I can also say about...

Chris paused for dramatic effect. Nazz stared at Snidely. Marlowe stared at Elise. Steve stared at the Angry Scientist. And the Angry Scientist stared at Ingrid.

"Elise!"

Chris threw a hot dog at Elise. It flew into her mouth, and she spit it out, disgusted. Marlowe slumped over in her seat.

"And also about Ingrid," Chris said casually, tossing a hot dog to Ingrid. "Down to two, it seems. Snidely, you've made yourself some enemies. And Angry, your verbal tics are, shall we say, immensely annoying."
"Who's it gonna be?"

Chris waited for several seconds to let the tension build before tossing a hot dog to Snidely. "Angry Scientist, you're eliminated. Get your butt to the cannon!"

The Angry Scientist's mouth dropped open. "But this is impossibleness!" he complained. "I have no enemies! People like me!"

"Yeah, no," Chris said sympathetically as he shoved the Angry Scientist into the cannon and lit the fuse. "It seems they don't. And the drama is heating up as we close the book on the most action-packed episode of Total Drama: Cartoon Multiverse yet! Join us next time, when we see whether anything can go right for the Mad Scientists!"

The cannon went off, and the Angry Scientist shot through the sky.

"AN-GU-RY!" he yelled.

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Voting Breakdown:

Marlowe: Elise
Nazz Van Bartonschmeer: Snidely Whiplash
Ingrid Third: Snidely Whiplash
The Angry Scientist: Ingrid Third
Steve: The Angry Scientist
Elise: The Angry Scientist
Snidely Whiplash: The Angry Scientist

Final tally of votes received:

The Angry Scientist: 3 (eliminated)
Snidely Whiplash: 2
Elise: 1
Ingrid Third: 1
"I'm sorry, but I just don't think Elise deserves to go," Steve said. "She's the one keeping the team afloat. And the Angry Scientist is constantly being a jerk, like all m—nevermind. Also, he exercises every morning before anybody else wants to get up and makes the whole room smell like a six-week old tuna sandwich." He considered his analogy. "Yeah, don't ask."

"Time to get rid of Snidely," Nazz said, smiling. "After this, it's going to be like, smooth sailing."

"Bye-bye, Angry Scientist," Elise said happily. "I'm really not going to miss you."

"Snidely," Ingrid said. "Although I can't help but feel in my gut that something's going to go wrong here."

"Oh, Ingrid, you are going into the downness!" the Angry Scientist chortled. "You got rid of my love, now I get rid of you! Seeing how you be liking it!"

Snidely Whiplash smirked at the camera. "Oh, dear sweet Angry Scientist," he intoned dramatically, "I may have wanted to rid us of Ingrid today. But you, well, your hunchbacked behind proved too tempting a target to resist! For Steve, at least. And so, it is with a happy heart that I say adieu to you and your annoying morning exercises, your arguments with Steve, your constant befoulment of our team name, and your occasional bouts of late-night self-gratification. First I did away with your beautiful love interest—in a most unusual manner, I will admit, but successfully nevertheless—and now I do away with you! Fie, fie on thee, Angry Scientist! Let your heart be heavy and your brains befuddled as you leave this island in my foul grasp!"

Snidely paused for breath. "Also," he continued, "I don't like how green his skin is. There's something wrong with that."

"Time to get rid of the biggest threat on the island," Marlowe said gleefully. "Goodbye, Elise."

"Welcome back, loyal fans, to another episode of Total! Drama! Cartoon Multiverse!" he proclaimed. "Last time, the girls banded together to stop their biggest threat.
Problem is, they didn't agree on which member of the alliance was truly the most dangerous, and they ended up getting neither of them tossed off. Who got tossed? Well, let's put it this way: when he hears about how he got ejected, he's gonna be really mad!" Chris laughed. "Man, I love my job. Anyway, while this was exciting enough, juicier stuff happened earlier, when Rusty discovered that Numbuh Two and Ingrid have been crossing team lines to talk to each other. And hey, while they say it's just to investigate mysteries, we know what's really going on." He made a kissy-face at the camera. "Rusty didn't, though, and thought they were forming an alliance. He half-bought their half-baked story about Andy really being the one in a secret alliance, but hey, we all know that's not true." Chris winked. "But it'll make for some good drama later on! And speaking of which, all this late-episode drama was nothing compared to the unbridled action unleashed when Elise took out six members of the Bumbling Moose pretty much all on her lonesome only to learn that these players were there as a decoy team as part of the Moose's ace misdirection plan. Which ended when Rusty Shackleford managed to actually be more athletic than Elise for just long enough to deliver the flag to W-e-n-d-y, sitting in a tree, w-i-n-n-i-n-g! Will this next episode compare to the previous one? Probably not, since it's a non-elimination show! But just in case, stay tuned to Total! Drama! Cartoon Multiverse!"

I rolled out of bed and looked at my watch. It read 11:36. I shook my head, knowing that couldn't be right, and looked around the cabin. Everyone but Numbuh Two and Andy were gone. Groggily, I stretched my muscles. Apparently Chris had let us sleep in. That was the least sinister interpretation to take, at least.

I stepped out of the cabin and frowned at how shady it was. Looking up, I saw a massive batch of zeppelins floating over the camp. Worried, I headed for the mess hall and threw the doors open. Almost everyone was there; the only exceptions were Marlowe, Andy, Numbuh Two, and Chris.

"Grab some food and park yourself," Chef said lazily. "We don't start until everyone gets up and has something to eat."

Unusual, yes, but I could deal. At least I wouldn't have to worry about letting something slip around Andy—although his two compatriots were a different matter entirely. I grabbed a plate and opened a serving platter on a big pile of hashbrowns. I took some of the potatoes before moving on to a pot that contained oatmeal. I grabbed a bowl, served myself, and headed for an empty space between Rusty and Gandhi.

"So, fellows!" I greeted them. "Do you know what's going on?"

"The NSA has sent in blimps to block out the sun and freeze us all to death," Rusty declared. "Soon, it'll be eternal winter, and then they'll clamp down on all of us so they can 'save' us. Mark my words, the CIA's been scouting us and is just about ready to move in."

"Or maybe we're going on a blimp ride!" Gandhi declared excitedly. "I've never been on one, you know, but it'll be super cool! Or super boring. They're like huge balloons, only they carry people, so maybe it'll be like riding a balloon. I hope we don't pop on the ceiling. Why do they put those little bumps up there, anyway? They're like butt zits, only it doesn't hurt when you sit on 'em."

I took a moment to process this, realized the moment was wasted, and moved on. "So when did you get up?"

"Ten o'clock," Rusty replied.

"I dunno," Gandhi said.
"So tell me more about the CIA's secret plot," I said to Rusty. If he hadn't been wearing mirrored sunglasses, I'm sure his eyes would have lit up. He began to talk about a massive conspiracy. I tuned him out and focused on my oatmeal and hashbrowns.

About a half-hour later everybody but Andy and Chris had joined us. My breakfast was long gone, and Rusty was still blathering on. By now, he had moved on to talking about how the state was secretly thinking of using box tops as reserve currency.

"...and then you turn 'em in for items. They're gonna use it so the Fed can ramp up inflation and pay off its debt, leaving us all broke, and then they announce the switch, and then after everyone's bought in to the box tops and given the government money for them they deflate the money supply again leaving the rest of us broke."

I shook my head. "They tried that back in '60. They stopped when they learned of a counterfeiting ring that was pretty successful and nearly brought the economy to its knees. They wouldn't try that again."

"Never underestimate the government's stupidity and greed," Rusty said dryly.

"Ah, right you are," I responded. "But tell me, how will they use sandwich shops to throw us off the trail again? I didn't quite understand that bit the first time around."

Rusty began speaking again. I tuned out and once again became absorbed in my own thoughts.

So Rusty and Numbuh Two knew. Not surprising, but they were working with Ingrid. Was this another alliance in the making, or were they really working to expose Andy? It would be worrisome if it was the former, but if it was the latter there wouldn't be any problems. Would there? Maybe they'd decide to form an alliance—out with the old, in with the new, as it so often is and as I had seen in my homeland. Could they be trusted to avoid the will to power? Of course not. But were they the bigger threat? As far as I could tell, Numbuh Two didn't seem to have sinister machinations, and I have a nose for that sort of thing. And Rusty wasn't exactly trusting them, not that he was the trusting type. But still, Andy was more obviously willing to sell our team out, and his predictability in this area was a benefit to me; after all, the good guys have a habit of occasionally doing something extremely stupid, like telling the truth in a delicate situation. Not a good sign for Rusty and Numbuh Two.

The door was flung open, and Andy stumbled in. Someone had shoved him, and that someone entered the room.

"Right," Chris said. He was dressed in a winter coat, ski goggles, and winter boots. "I got sick of waiting, so here's Andy. Any food left, Chef?"

"Beats me," Chef said, not looking up from his newspaper.

"Okay then," Chris said, and turned his attention to us. "Now then, you've been waiting a while, so let's just end your wait right now."

Chris pushed a button. A few seconds later, a huge thump was heard, and the ground outside turned white.

"Now, who wants some hot cocoa?" Chris asked, grinning.

"Uh, it's summer," Triana said.
"Right you are!" Chris replied. "And no, we're not celebrating Christmas in July. Instead, we're giving every one of you an opportunity to win a very coveted prize: immunity in the next challenge!"

Everybody looked up, interested.

"For one day only, your teams will be dissolved. Instead, it's every man for himself in today's massive snowball fight! The rules are simple: anyone who gets hit with a snowball is eliminated. The last one standing wins the game and wins immunity from elimination in tomorrow's challenge. There's a foot of snow covering the campgrounds right now. You get 15 minutes to build a snow fort, and then it's game on! Oh, and try to finish up in a couple of hours, I don't know how long the snow will last before it melts completely. Have fun!"

Chris strode out the door. Immediately after he left, there was a moment of silence, followed by a mad surge towards the mess hall doors. We scurried outside and headed in separate directions. I saw Snidely and Andy head for one end of the snowy yard, so I decided to sneak around and build a fort in a position where I could keep an eye on them. Once I saw them settle down and begin building, I got to work on my snow fort. I decided to go with simple construction; just good enough that it would appear I was trying, but not good enough to actually protect me from being taken out. When I finished, I hunkered down and got to work on some snowballs. Might as well fire back at any attackers.

I watched as Snidely and Andy put up two walls about five feet high. They then proceeded to build a short front wall and a taller back wall, and finished up by making an exit facing in my direction. I ducked down and watched as they did the same thing right next to the first fort and realized that they had built two forts right next to each other. Impressive construction, yes, but it probably wouldn't be enough to guarantee them both a win.

A whistle ripped through the campground.

"The war has begun!" Chris cheered. Instantly, snowballs began filling the air, including some directed at me from the direction of Andy's fort. I tried to find one that could plausibly hit me, but Andy's aim was so bad that just by standing still I was able to avoid the entire barrage. I looked around and was shocked to find that only a few dozen feet behind me was another snow fort, this one magnificent in its structure and grandeur. The only part of it that was incomplete was a parapet, and Numbuh Two was hard at work on this parapet. As I watched, a snowball flew through the air and pegged Numbuh Two. Turning around, I spotted Triana running towards the ice castle.

"Our first eliminations are in!" Chris announced. "No longer in play: Nazz, Marlowe, Rusty, Numbuh Two, and Steve."

At that moment a snowball flew out of the castle and pegged Triana in the face. I looked towards the castle and saw Ingrid wind up and hurl a soft floater towards Andy's fort. It flew through the air, reached the peak of its arc, and landed directly in the fort. I heard a howl of pain.

"AAAAH! RIGHT DOWN MY SHIRT RIGHT DOWN MY SHIRT! AGH! GOD! IT'S SLIDING OH GOD! JESUS! FUCK! MY BALLS! MY BALLS! GOD! CHRIST! FUCK! WHHHYYYYY?""

"Now eliminated: Triana and Andy, both by Ingrid," Chris announced. "Oh, and she's in the ice castle on the eastern edge of the snow. Just so you know."

Ingrid focused on me. I tossed a snowball towards her and then followed this up with another lazy toss. Ingrid hurled a rocket towards me, and I smiled and let it explode into my chest. Unfortunately, my second toss was more accurate than I ever could have intended, and it landed directly on the very
top of her skull.

"Boris and Ingrid, gone, in a dual elimination!"

A second snowball smacked into me. This one was thrown by a laughing Gandhi. He proceeded to run up to me.

"Hey, Boris, can I take your fort? I mean, you're not using it anymore, so—"

"Go ahead!" I said gladly. "What's mine is yours, what's yours is mine. Have fun!"

"Thanks!" he responded. I smiled sinistfully. That fort wasn't going to do much to protect him; it was designed for an early exit. He'd get just what he deserved for pegging me with a snowball.

While Gandhi took over the fort, I left for less-snowy pastures. This was unsuspicious, as I was just attempting to avoid the snowball barrage, but it allowed me to circle around in the woods and sneak up on Andy and Snidely.

I wasn't the first one there, however, as I spotted someone clad entirely in black sneak up on them and then suddenly stop. I looked closer, and realized that it was Ruby. As I watched, she stood straight upright and raised a hand to cover her mouth. She then put a hand to her ear to listen closer and angled her ear towards the forts. She was so deep in concentration that she didn't notice snowballs landing around her until one smacked her in the face.

"And Chaz takes out Ruby!" Chris declared. "We're down to our final five: Elise, Chaz, Wendy, Gandhi, and Snidely. Oh, and most of them are on the east side of camp. Have fun with that info...Elise."

Ruby stood up and slunk off of the playing field. She didn't notice me, and I turned my attention to the game, knowing that from now on that would be the complete focus of Snidely.

I didn't have to wait long until Elise came running across the snow. She was met by a barrage of snowballs from two places: my snow fort and the towers of the snow castle, on which stood Chaz and Wendy. Although she dodged well, she was hit with a snowball just as she flung an accurate shot through the air, smacking right into Chaz's face.

"Ow, not my face! Gah!" he complained. "Come on, people!"

"We're down to three!" Chris told us. A snowball thrown by Gandhi hit Wendy. "Well, two now."

Over the next hour or so, nothing happened apart from Gandhi slipping out to take over the ice castle. Eventually, Chris got on the mic to complain.

"Okay, if nobody moves, I'm declaring the match forfeit and nobody gets immunity!"

Nobody moved.

"Also you both get eliminated."

"You can't do that!" Snidely complained loudly.

"I make the rules, I change the rules. Now MOVE IT!" he declared. Both Gandhi and Snidely exited their forts and faced each other down.

"Nice cloak. Where'd you get it, the Marilyn Manson store?" Gandhi asked menacingly, before tilting his head. "Actually, Marilyn Manson came to our school once. He told us about the food
pyramid and not getting suckered into only eating pancake batter and blue house paint. And–"

Snidely pegged Gandhi in the chest with a snowball.

"Aw, man!" Gandhi said, disappointed.

"And Snidely is the winner of immunity for the next episode!" Chris declared cheerfully. "The rest of you rest up. We've got a big challenge ahead of you tomorrow—and yes, someone will be eliminated then. Who will it be? What death..."

I tuned Chris out and focused on Ruby, who looked nervous. It was time to see what she was going to do with her newfound knowledge.
The Snow Campfire Ceremony

I followed Ruby back to our cabin. When she entered the girls' side, I parked myself on the porch and waited. Everyone else was hanging out elsewhere, except for Chaz, who came back to our cabin and told me to keep everyone out since he'd be busy examining his face. I shrugged and agreed to do so. It was a good enough excuse for staying out of the cabin. Eventually, Wendy and Triana came back together and slipped into the girls' side of the cabin. It was at that moment that I heard Ruby declare, "Guys, you'll never believe this."

I quickly shifted to my feet and put my ear up against the door in order to hear better. "Believe what?" Wendy replied. "Because I still can't believe that Gandhi took me out. I was expecting it to be Elise."

"Hey, you took me out," Ruby told her.

"All's fair in love and snowballs, princess," Wendy chided her.

I heard Ruby pause for a moment before continuing. "Whatever. Point is, I think that we have a traitor on our team."

I swore I could hear Wendy roll her eyes. "Uh, yeah, it was a free-for-all snowball fight. Are you still hung up on this? It's not like I pretended I wrote you a song when it was really someone else's song intended to brainwash you."

A long silence ensued.

"Look, forget that," Wendy said. "If this is really about the snowball fight, I'm sorry."

"It's not about that!" Ruby quickly corrected. "Although thanks. But no, I'm not really upset about you hitting me with a snowball. I mean, on the team, there's a traitor."

"Are you sure about this?" Triana said doubtfully. "Maybe you misheard something."

"No, really," Ruby said. "I was sneaking up on Snidely's fort when--"

"I pegged you with a snowball!" Wendy cheered. "Yeah, I remember that. You kind of froze for a moment there."

"That's what I'm trying to tell you!" Ruby continued. "I froze because I heard Snidely and Andy talking about an 'alliance,' and who was going to be voted off next!"

"Maybe they weren't talking about their alliance," Triana suggested. "Maybe they were talking about some other alliance."

"Well, they did say Elise was part of it..." Ruby said doubtfully.

Wendy snorted. "Elise? Hanging out with those losers? I mean, honestly, no way. She's probably going it alone."

"I dunno," Triana said doubtfully. "Beatdown she laid on me notwithstanding, she doesn't strike me as the type to go all Batman."

The room was silent for a few more seconds, and then Wendy burst out laughing.
"Not like that!" Triana said frantically. "Not like that! Not like that at all!"

"Oh, like how?" Wendy asked, still laughing. "Like with your help?"

"No!" Triana said, mortified. "Come on, really?"

"I'm surprised we haven't lost more often, what with your love of weiners!"

"Is this really where the conversation is going?" Triana asked.

"Yes! Yes! Yes!" Wendy said, still riotous. "And that's a direct quote from you, bee-tee-dubs."

After about a minute, Wendy's laughter and Ruby's giggling subsided.

"Are we done now?" Triana asked.

"Something you've never said to a guy," snarked Ruby. This set Wendy off again.

"You guys suck," Triana moaned. After a few more chuckles, Wendy settled down.

"Sorry, Triana," Wendy said, not sorry at all. "I guess I got a little carried away."

"Whatever," Triana said. "Anyway, Ruby, what were you saying?"

"Andy is probably in an alliance with Snidely and Elise," Ruby said. "And that can't be a good thing."

"Oh, right," Wendy said. "Are you sure about this?"

"Well, not completely," Ruby admitted. "But I think that that's what's going on."

Triana sighed. "I'd like to believe you, but I dunno. I just have some reservations."

"Yeah," Wendy said. "It's a bit far-fetched to think that Andy would sell us out. Boris, sure, but Andy?"

"I'm telling you, it's true!" Ruby insisted. The room fell silent.

"I–tentatively believe you," Triana finally admitted. "But I could be swayed."

"Well I don't," Wendy said. "I can't believe you'd distrust a teammate. Especially when he hasn't done anything to harm us."

"Well–" Ruby began.

"No," Wendy said. "If he was really against us, we'd have lost more. The Scientists can't afford to lose as many people as they have. No way is there a traitor on our side. Now if you'll excuse me, I'm going for a walk."

I quickly slipped away from the door and laid down on the porch. Wendy opened the door and looked at me, eyebrow raised.

"What are you doing there?" she asked suspiciously.

"Chaz said I am to keep everybody out," I told her curtly.

"And you're lying down because?"
"When you get to be my age, you'll find that lying on hard surfaces is good for your backaches," I replied.

Wendy rolled her eyes. "Whatever," she said, and walked away. As soon as she was gone, I put my ear to the door again.

"Okay, I said that I kinda believe you. I don't think you're lying, and if we lose I'd be willing to vote for Andy, but geez! You haven't provided much evidence!" Triana exclaimed.

"You want evidence?" Ruby asked. I heard the sound of clothing being thrown about haphazardly. "I'll get you your evidence."

Footsteps approached the door, and I pulled back. Ruby exited the room wearing a green trenchcoat over her clothes and a green fedora. She cast her eyes at me.

"So what are you doing there?" she asked me.

"What is this, the detective game?" I responded.

"Maybe it is, maybe it ain't. Either way you better play poker right."

I stared at her blankly.

"Don't try and bluff me," she translated.

"What cards am I holding?" I asked.

"I'm not sure, but I'd like to find out," she said.

"You'd better call my bet, then," I responded.

"Oh, I'll raise."

"Call. What's the flop?"

"Wait, are we playing Hold 'Em? I thought this was Seven-Card Stud."

I opened my mouth to respond and then shut it again. "What's this analogy supposed to mean, anyway?" I asked.

She sighed. "Tell me why you're here."

"Make it worth my while, perhaps," I told her.

"I don't have any cash on me, but maybe you'd prefer primo dirt?" she suggested.

I gave her a dubious glance. "What kind of dirt?"

"The kind that could change the entire trajectory of the game."

I sighed. "Look, kid, you're a nice girl, but as a friend of mine would say, 'you're out of luck, darlink.'"

"Darlink? What was she, Russian?"

"Pottsylvanian, actually. As am I. Point is, run off and play your little detective game elsewhere. I have nothing for you."
Ruby's shoulders slumped, but she soon drew her coat tighter around her and left. As soon as she was gone, I walked into the cabin.

"Hey, I told you to stay out!" Chaz complained. He was busy with his hairspray.

"Don't worry, comrade!" I told him cheerfully. "I just need to write something down."

"Well make it snappy," he said, annoyed. I went over to my suitcase, pulled out a notepad and a pen, and wrote 'Talk to Numbuh Two about Andy.' I then pulled out some string, ripped out the page, folded up the paper, put my suitcase back, and left the cabin. I spotted Andy walking towards me, so I stuffed the paper and string in my pocket and hurried on my way.

"Hi Boris," Andy said blandly. I ignored him and focused on the ground. Now where could my quarry have run off to? I thought about it, and decided to head towards the Moose's cabin. As I headed there, I couldn't help but get the feeling that somebody was following me. I knew what I had to do to shake them, so I headed past the cabin and turned around the side. As soon as I had turned, I stopped and inched around the edge of the cabin until, moving swiftly, I turned the corner. Nobody was looking at me, so I sat down, back to the cabin, and waited for the person following me to make a wrong step and reveal themself.

Shortly thereafter, I saw Ruby round the corner of the cabin. Upon seeing me, she started. "Um–uh–" she said, uncertain.

"You know, cabin walls aren't very thick," I told her. "Why, if I were to put my ear against this wall, I might just be able to hear everything." Her eyes widened. "Relations within the group, plans for the next matchup, secrets being discussed... I could hear it all."

"I–uh–" Ruby said, scared.

"Why, I might even find out something somebody might not want me to know!" I continued cheerfully.

"Um–are–uh–"

"Listen, kid," I said harshly. "I've been in the spying business longer than you, I've had to do more spying than you, and I know how this game works better than you. Now shut your yap and listen. Were you followed?"

"I–um–I don't think so!" Ruby finally blurted.

"Good. Then we're gonna take a look around. Make sure to check the woods," I told her. She checked the woods, I looked around, and then I swiftly glanced up to check the roof.

"I guess we're alone now?" I asked her. She nodded. "Good. You're not the only one who saw something she shouldn't have." I walked over to her. "Here." I pressed the paper into her hand. "Hide that in your coat, take it to a private place, and only then do you read it. Got it?" She nodded meekly. "Good. I'll be in my bunk, avoiding trouble."

I walked away from her without looking back. I had given her information that could help her or hurt her. What she did with it was her choice. I had a nap to take and a bunk to do it in.
The Centipede Episode

Chris was standing at the end of the dock. "Last time, on Total Drama: Cartoon Multiverse," Chris began, "we gave the campers a day off. Well, not really. We made them throw snowballs at each other. Ingrid was colder than a sniper, Elise was a ball-throwing whirlwind of fury, and Andy got his nuts packed in ice. Yeah, those nuts. Numbuh Two built an outpost for his friends, and despite being knocked off early while trying to complete his ice masterpiece I gotta say that it was pretty important, as it helped the people inside shell everyone else more effectively than anything else anyone attempted. But in the end, it all came down to Gandhi versus Snidely, and when Gandhi got distracted Snidely pegged him with a slushball. Ouch! And this wasn't even the most interesting thing that happened; no, the most interesting part had to be when Ruby snuck up on Snidely's hideout and heard him having a private conversation with Andy concerning their small, irrelevant, totally secret alliance. She told her friends, who didn't exactly believe her, but Boris did! And what did our favorite foreign felon do? Not much, just gave her a lead to Numbuh Two, who also knows about Andy's alliance. And what about the girls on the Mad Scientists, who have to deal with the ringleader himself? Well, they just decided that since Snidely has immunity because he won the snowball fight, they're gonna go after Elise in the event of a loss. How is this gonna shake out? We'll just have to see what happens, on Total! Drama! Cartoon Multiverse!"

I need a drink.

I need some Bugles.

I need to not be in this fucking hellhole of a camp.

I roll over and look at my watch. It's 9:25 A.M. And Chris wants everybody gathered at the center of camp in five minutes.

Well, I was a pro at this in college. Just grab my shirt and pants and throw them on. No time for undies, so I'm going commando. Run a comb through my hair and get my shoes on, then rush out the door, stepping on my shoelaces all the way, and what do you know, I'm there before Ruby or Numbuh Two. Losers aren't gonna be here on time.

Ruby and Numbuh Two run up just before Chris gets there, and they're panting as Chris begins making his daily challenge announcement. "Alright, campers," he says, "we're going old school today! And by old school, I mean 1980s-arcade style old school. Not, like, school in summer. Because that would be lame. Now, who here has played Centipede?"

Numbuh Two's hand shoots up.

"Well, for everyone else who isn't a huge nerd, the rules are simple. There's a centipede running around the screen, and you have to shoot it with the sprite you control. When a segment of the centipede is shot, it breaks up into smaller pieces. If you destroy all the pieces you win the level and get another centipede to shoot." Chris pauses. "Yeah, storytelling was not a concern in the 80s. But enough about Beverly Hills Cop, let's tell you how we're putting our twist on it!" Chris pauses again. "Today you're going to choose one player from your team to be the shooter. And then, you're going to play Centipede against the opposite team. They're going to be travelling hand-in-hand, trying to escape your one player's righteous barrage of water balloons, which Chef will help provide. And here's a free suggestion: try not to hit the ones in the middle. That's an easy recipe for splitting the group from one large, hard to maneuver centipede into two large, slightly easier to maneuver centipedes. Now, both teams get an hour to choose their fighter. Let's do it!"
Chris walks away, and we meet to decide who should be the one to throw water balloons at the Mad Scientists.

"I nominate Wendy," Triana says immediately.

"Seconded," Numbuh Two confirms. "The girl can throw."

Wendy shrugs. "I'm in if you want me."

"I nominate the Chaz!" Chaz says. "The Chaz deserves more screen time, I mean look at this people."

"Again. "This is not in the picture quite enough, we gotta get me more screen time, put more of what the people love out there."

"Uh, yeah, I'm with Wendy," I say.

"Me too," Boris agrees.

"Go ahead, girl," Rusty says.

"Yeah, that's pretty much unanimous," Numbuh Two says. "So what do we do for the next hour?"

"I'm going back to bed," I tell them.

Have you ever laid in bed for a long time, staring at the bunk above you and thinking about home? Because that's pretty much what I did. I missed the couch, I missed my friends, hell I even missed Kevin. Kevin, that little douchebag, always looking up to me as the big brother. God, what a prick. He needs to grow up and realize that there's more to life than getting into Yale. Education isn't everything, it's scarcely anything at all in the long run. But he looked at me hopefully when I told him I got on this show and said he'd be rooting for me. I dunno, I guess that was nice of him. But he really thinks I can win even though I've never really won anything in my life. And I'm probably not going to win here. It's just, I'd like to not fail at something for once, you know? I got Cs at a party school, I got fired from my crappy job selling mattresses—fired, the owner got arrested for tax evasion, whatever—and I've only kept my job in graphic design because Jim's like a superstar there and he demands to have me kept on. It just seems like I haven't really been successful at anything since scoring with Elizabeth Rogers in 10th grade. And here I am, mid-20s, can't sell my cartoons to anyone, can't really figure out where I'm going, I don't get it. It's like I've been walking on a treadmill for forever. Is this all there is? Stuck sharing an apartment with some friends while my little brother goes on to do great things and I work a dead-end job? It sucks. Being a failure sucks. No wonder I nominated Wendy; getting me out of the way is the best option for our team.

"Attention campers!" Chris declares over the intercom. "Now that you've had time to figure out your strategy, it's time for us to get started! Get to the center of camp and get ready!"

I groan. Of course. That's what we were supposed to be doing with our free time. Not lie in bed full of self pity.

I make my way to the center of camp along with everybody else. Chris is waiting there patiently. "Now then," he says, "it's time to choose who goes first. So, Chef will choose a captain from each team to name their champion and call a coin in the air. Chef?"

Chef takes center stage. "Pretty girl, ugly boy, you're up!" he declares. Nobody moves, and he rolls his eyes. "Nazz, Andy, get up here!" he yells. I wince. I know I'm not male model material or anything, but ugly?

"Pretty girl, ugly boy, you're up!" he declares. Nobody moves, and he rolls his eyes. "Nazz, Andy, get up here!" he yells. I wince. I know I'm not male model material or anything, but ugly?
"Call it, ugly boy!" Chef yells, and the coin is whirling in the air.

"Uh, heads!" I say.

The coin comes up tails.

"Mad Scientists, how you wanna do this?" Chef asks.

"We'd like to attack?" Nazz says, uncertain. "If that's how you say it?"

"You wanna throw balloons?" Chef asks nicely.

"Uh, yeah. That one," Nazz responds.

"Alright!" Chef declares loudly. "The Mad Scientists are on the attack! Who's your champion?"

"Ingrid," Nazz says confidently.

"Bumbling Moose, you have one minute to get in a line and get running!" Chef announces.

We get ourselves into a line and join hands. As soon as we try to start, the line moves in three different directions; on one end Boris yanks the line left, on the other end Gandhi yanks the line right, and in the middle Chaz nearly jerks my arm out of its' socket trying to run forward. "Go with Gandhi!" Ruby yells, just as Numbuh Two yells "Go with Boris!" and the line pulls in three directions again when Chaz ignores everyone. "No, Gandhi!" Numbuh Two corrects himself, but Ruby does the same with Boris, and we lunge in even more convoluted directions. "We go to the left!" Wendy finally screams, and we take off just as an airhorn goes off and Ingrid hurls a water balloon. In the back somebody goes down with a splash, and we run for the woods as another water balloon splatters on our tail end. We run as fast as we can, but the arrangement is unwieldy, and it's not long before Ingrid has taken out another two players. Suddenly, Chaz jerks my arm to the right as the rest of the line heads left, and this motion halts the charge in its tracks. A water balloon soaks Numbuh Two, who is standing a foot ahead of where I was just a second before. Numbuh Two releases me and Wendy, and the line splits into two. Boris and Wendy run in one direction, Chaz and I run in another, and Ingrid delays for a moment before deciding to chase Boris and Wendy.

"Where are we going?!" I scream at Chaz.

"Not here, c'mon!" he yells back. We take off through the woods, ducking under branches and hopping over fallen debris and as much as I hate to admit it, he's a good runner. Fast, quick reflexes, and very good at maneuvering. Me, not so much, and I feel like I'm constantly slowing him down. Eventually, panting, he stops and we crouch behind a bush.

"What now?" I whisper. Chaz just grins. Then, suddenly, he asks me a question I wasn't expecting.

"So, Andy, got any plans this afternoon?"

I'm taken aback. The last time this happened, it was Snidely, and he probably wasn't trying to get into my pants. Probably. But now Chaz? Chaz, the self-absorbed jerk? Seriously, who's next? Numbuh Two? Boris? Mohandas frigging Gandhi?

"Um, I, uh--"

Chaz smirks. "Knew you didn't have plans. And if you did, you're gonna want to drop 'em for--" He looks directly at a tree. "Chaz's Corner! Special Reality Show Edition." He turns back to me. "Yeah, I'll see you in the middle of camp after this challenge is over. And trust me, you are not gonna want
to miss this!"

Chaz's words worry me. "Wait, what are you--"

"Talking about?" Chaz suggests. "You'll find out. Toodles!" He tries to get up, but I don't let go. He frowns. "Oh, right. Should've remembered that this was a challenge. Oh well, I can wait here without giving away my big surprise."

I think about this. "No you can't," I eventually tell him. "You're chronically unable to stop talking. You're gonna tell me."

"Au contraire, ugly man," Chaz replies smugly. "I can avoid telling you what I'm planning very easily. And as for talking all the time, c'mon. Who doesn't love my voice? With its low low lows and its high high highs! People have told me I have a voice for radio, but I couldn't possibly deprive the world of this face. You know you love it, I know you love it, heck let's be real, nobody could ever dislike what I've got going on! And that's without even getting into yeeEEEKK!"

Chaz suddenly spins around, nearly ripping my arm off. A water balloon explodes against the back of my skull, and Chaz releases my hand, running deeper into the woods.

"Sorry Andy!" he calls back to me. "You're not fast enough!"

I hit the ground hard. Ingrid chases after Chaz. She doesn't say anything to me.

It feels right.

By the time the two hours are up, everyone but Chaz—even Wendy and Boris—has been tagged. We only know it's over because Chris uses his airhorn again and then gets on the loudspeakers and tells us to gather at the center of camp.

"Well, that was Round 1," Chris says. "Ingrid, you nailed everyone except for Chaz. That's an unexpected result, but now you're going to have to run even more. It's the Bumbling Moose's turn to attack! Now, who's your champion?" he asks me.

"Wendy," I tell him.

"One minute, Scientists," Chris says. "Better get moving!"

The Scientists get into a line very quickly and head for the beach. As soon as the airhorn goes off, Wendy hurls a water balloon after them. It falls well short, but the message is clear: she's ready to play. She runs after them, fresh after over an hour of rest, and soon nails Ingrid, trailing at the end of the line. Her next shot hits the person in the middle, and their line splits cleanly, as if they planned it that way. Wendy runs after one of the two pairs, and the other one peels off and slams into her from the right, knocking her over. The people in the duo—Elise and Nazz—don't break stride at all and head for the woods. Wendy takes a few seconds to get up, and by that point both groups have hefty leads. She thinks for a moment, and then runs down the beach after the group she was chasing first.

"Hey, wasn't that a foul?" Boris asks.

"No rule against it," Chef replies.

"Besides, it was awesome," Chris says. Boris shrugs, but accepts this answer. We stand around awkwardly for a bit.
"Well, what now?" Numbuh Two asks.

"I dunno," Rusty says.

"Well, I've gotta get ready," Chaz says. "So none of you are using the cabin, okay? Good. Seeya!"

"No way!" I complain. "No freaking way are you keeping us all out of the cabin again."

Chaz thinks about it. "Hmm. You're right. I need the stars of the show with me. Listen up people!" he announces. "Today, after the game, there's gonna be a very special Chaz's Corner!" He sings the last two words. "Starring me, of course, and also these two." He points to me and Numbuh Two. "Be here, or miss out on the event of a lifetime! Oh, and you two are coming with me."

He grabs my wrist and lunges for Numbuh Two. Numbuh Two sidesteps.

"Uh-uh," Numbuh Two says. "No way am I going to be stuck in the cabin with you all day."

Chaz shrugs. "Suit yourself. But things will only go badly for you if you aren't on--" He sings again. "Chaz's Corner!"

Chaz walks away, dragging me behind him. His grip is surprisingly strong. He pulls me into the cabin, shuts the door, and begins messing around with his hair and makeup.

By the time the airhorn sounds again and Chris announces that it's time for us all to come out and listen to him announce the results, I have learned that spending an afternoon with Chaz is a form of torture. It's not his constant focus on prettying himself up. He doesn't attempt to annoy me, that's not the problem. It's how he constantly talks to himself. He's always complimenting his looks as he works on his hair and makeup, and it drives me insane. It doesn't help that the bad feeling I've had ever since he first mentioned his special surprise has gotten worse. Anything that Chaz is this enthusiastic about that doesn't cast him as the only star cannot possibly be good for me.

When the horn goes off, Chaz smiles widely and stands up from his makeup desk. "Showtime," he breathes enthusiastically, and we head out to the campground, where Chris is waiting for us, along with pretty much everyone else. As we wait, Elise and Nazz walk in. A while later, a tired Wendy finally makes it back.

"So, I bet you can guess who won," Chris says, "but I'll tell you anyway. Both Elise and Nazz managed to evade Wendy's water balloons, and they win the challenge for the Mad Scientists! Hats off to Snidely and Marlowe, by the way, you two really made things tough for her. So, Bumbling Moose, figure out who you're gonna vote off. I'm gonna go get a coffee."

Everybody starts to leave until Chaz loudly announces "Hey! Wait, people! This Chaz's Corner is the event of a lifetime, you'll wanna tell your grandkids about it! C'mon, check it out!"

The rest of my team stops. The Mad Scientists mostly leave, but the bad feeling in my gut grows stronger.

"Now then," Chaz says, "if I could get Numbuh Two and Ruby up here? Thanks," he adds as Ruby and Numbuh Two are jostled to the front of the crowd. "Now, Andy, stand right here," he tells me, and walks to a point in between me and the two kids.

It occurs to me that I could run. I can just turn tail and get away from the incoming invasion of my privacy. I don't have to play along with Chaz's game. He needs me, actually. He needs me to stand here. To act like he's in control. To not realize that I can win this game simply by refusing to play.
Sure, I'd look weak, but he'd look stupid. His ambush would blow up in his face, and he'd be left trying to do damage control. I should really just leave.

I don't leave.

"Welcome, ladies and gentlemen," Chaz begins, "to the Trial of the Century!"

He pauses for applause. Everyone mostly looks confused. But I can guess what this is about.

"Now, this morning I was at breakfast—totally not tasty, by the way, the bacon was so burnt its grandchildren will have scorch marks—when I overheard a little conversation between two of our teammates: Noirtastic Numbuh Two and sweet lil' Ruby Gloom. And what were they discussing? Why, nothing but an alliance, of course!" The audience gasps. Chaz isn't finished, though. "Not between them, no. No, they think that another alliance is going on involving two members of the other team—and our very own Andy!" The audience gasps again. "Now, I'm not one to spread gossip blindly; no, I prefer to do it with eyes wide open in front of everybody! So, allow me to present, The Trial of Andy French!"

I survey the rest of the team. They're listening. Apparently Chaz does have a gift for showmanship somewhere in his thick head.

"In this corner, for the prosecution, Ruby Gloom and Numbuh Two!" Chaz announces. "And in this corner, serving as his own defense, we have the one and only Andy French!"

The gathered Moose applaud.

And I realize something.

This whole thing is a show. Chaz isn't putting on a trial. He's putting on a production. It doesn't matter to him what's true and what's false. It doesn't matter to him whether or not I'm planning to sell out the team. It doesn't matter to him that I might secretly be plotting to run the game right beneath everybody's noses. All that matters is whether I can be entertaining.

Okay, douchebags. Let the show begin.

"So, Ruby," Chaz says smarmily. "Could you lay out your case for the court? We're all just dying to hear why you think Andy is going to sell us out."

Ruby looks uncomfortable. "Well, I wouldn't say that..." she says awkwardly. "It's just that—"

"Oh, so you were lying?" Chaz suggests. "Why were you lying to Numbuh Two?"

"No, I wasn't!" Ruby says quickly. "I mean, I don't know that he won't uh, won't—"

"And, how do you respond to this?" Chaz asks me.

"This is a huge waste of my time," I say. "I'm being dragged out here and forced to listen to people who don't like me say that I'm actively trying to hurt the team? C'mon, we've won most of our challenges so far. Either I'm incompetent at hurting the team, or they're lying."

"He's not trying to hurt the team!" Ruby blurts out. "He's just—"

"He's just what, Ruby?" Chaz asks. "He's just really, really ugly, and you don't like that?"

"Wh–no!" Ruby replies.
"Now that's just hurtful," I say. "I mean, I know I'm not the most attractive guy, but ugly? Really?"

"Whoa, hold up." Numbuh Two says. "I've been in courtrooms before, and I know that this is not how trials work."

"Ooh, a felon?" Chaz suggests. "And why should we listen to a criminal?"

"I'm not a criminal!" Numbuh Two says angrily. "I've just—"

"Spent time in courtrooms despite not having a reason to be there unless you were on trial? For being a criminal?" Chaz suggests.

"Yeah, I gotta say, this isn't really doing much for me," I say. "This is, uh, this is kinda boring. Seriously, did you two just set this up with Chaz to waste our time? Because I am not impressed."

Chaz turns his head towards me, and for a split second I see his eyes. Although the smile stays on his face, his eyes have become sharklike and angry.

Fuck.

"You're right, Andy," Chaz says, faking sympathy. "It must be hard, being dragged into a trial for something you never did. After all, you never attempted to undermine our team, did you?" he says, layering sweetness over a mouthful of knives. "Now, Ruby," he says, moving back to her and keeping the sweetness in his voice, "why did you tell us that Andy was trying to betray us if it's not true?"

"I never said he was!" Ruby says indignantly. For once, Chaz doesn't twist her words or add a false accusation onto the end of them. He lets her take a deep breath and say "All I was trying to say is that Andy is in an alliance with members of the other team!"

"Oh really?" Chaz asks. "And why would they choose Andy to be in their alliance?" he questions.

"They didn't!" I interject. I have to save this situation somehow.

"Oh, did you ask them?" Chaz suggests. He's gone back to playing with his captive victim. "It'd make sense that you'd ask for an alliance."

"I'm not in an alliance!" I protest.

"You know, that's just what you'd say if you were in a secret alliance," Chaz says. "Is it a secret alliance?"

Numbuh Two rolls his eyes. "Um, it's with two people on the other team and they don't want anybody to know about it. I'd say it's a secret alliance."

"Ooh, juicy!" Chaz exclaims. "And how did you find out about it?"

Numbuh Two looks nervous. "I was just uh, doing detective work. It's my thing."

"And I heard Andy talking to Snidely in their fort during the snowball fight!" Ruby says. I scoff.

"Oh, is that what this is about?" I ask. "Look, Snidely just suggested that we built a fort together, pool our labor. And for the record, it didn't work out too well. My dick almost froze." I glare daggers at Numbuh Two. He looks embarrassed.

"Really?" Chaz asks her. "Were they only talking about an alliance for the snowball fight?"
"No!" Numbuh Two objects. "This was after he was eliminated!"

I shake my head. "No, I'm pretty sure there wouldn't have been talk of teaming up after, you know, we teamed up. And it wouldn't have happened after I'd been eliminated from the challenge."

"It wasn't just for the snowball fight!" Numbuh Two pleads. "They've been doing this all game! They're working together, I swear!"

Ruby looks doubtful. "I dunno..." she says. "I suppose they could've just been discussing their snow fort thing."

"You don't even have your stories straight?" Chaz asks, disgusted. "I'm beginning to side with Andy here, this might just be a huge case of you wasting all of our time."

"Well I wasn't there!" Numbuh Two declared.

"You weren't there?" Chaz asks, faking shock. "You mean you don't even know what was being talked about but you think it was a secret alliance?"

"No! But I mean--well--I know he's in an alliance!" Numbuh Two says, off-balance from Chaz's attack.

"Really. How?" Chaz asks.

"I uh, I've uh, I heard things! And when Ruby came to me--" Numbuh Two attempts to say before he's cut off.

"Oh, so you've only heard things," Chaz says, unimpressed. "Uh-huh."

"Well I've seen him talking to Snidely!" Numbuh Two exclaims.

"And I've seen Chris talking to Chef," Chaz says. "What's your point?"

"Yeah," I say. "So Ruby just decided to come up to you and accuse me of being a traitor."

Numbuh Two pauses and looks thoughtful.

"Hey, yeah!" he says. "Ruby, why'd you come to me? I never told anybody about what I'd seen."

"Well, I--" Ruby says, uncomfortable. "I--I can't tell you why."

"Really?" Chaz needles. "There was no reason?"

"I just thought he'd believe me!" Ruby blurts out, eyes darting from side to side.

"And did you?" Chaz asks Numbuh Two. "Mister Gullible Detective?"

Numbuh Two doesn't take the bait. He looks thoughtful again. "So Ruby saw something suspicious," he mutters. "And somebody knew she had dirt on Andy. And somebody knew I was following Andy's trail." He looks up, eyes wide. "Someone here can corroborate our story!" he exclaims.

"Corpses bore what now?" Chaz asks, confused.

"Somebody else has witnessed Andy's alliance!" Numbuh Two announces. Ruby looks nervous.
"Oh really?" Chaz asks smugly. "Well why haven't they stepped forward?"

"Allow me to introduce myself!" a voice behind me booms.

I don't even have to look.

It's Boris.

"Hello, my friends! I've been watching Andy, and I can confirm that he has indeed been meeting with Snidely and Elise as part of a secret alliance seeking to run the game! Numbuh Two and Ruby are completely correct when they tell you this! Also I was the one who got them to meet. So they'd figure out a way to stop him."

"Ah, Boris," Chaz says smarmily. "So you say that they're telling the truth?"

"Would I lie to you? Don't answer that," he says quickly. "But yes, I am completely certain that this is what's going on. I've seen it with my own eyes."

"It's a lie," I finally manage to stammer out. "It's a lie."

"Is it?" Chaz asks. Once again, he's on the attack, and I can't look him in the eyes. "Or are you the liar, who has been stringing us along the whole season? Are you really in an alliance with the other side? Well?!"

I won't cry.

I won't cry.

I won't cry.

Not on TV.

Not in front of everybody.

No tears.

Even if I have to keep my mouth shut.

Even if I have to deal with his words.

No tears.

"Ladies and gentlemen, his silence is confession enough!" Chaz declares rowdily. "I think it's obvious to everyone here what the truth is: Andy is a liar in a secret alliance with members of the other team!"

The rest of the team murmurs, and I get the sense that they're not saying good things about me.

"This concludes The Trial of Andy French!" Chaz announces. "And this also concludes this special reality show edition of Chaz's Corner! Thank you!"


It feels right.

That night I keep my head down as I walk to a stump by the campfire. I choose the one closest to the
podium. If I'm going to leave, I might as well make everyone look at me before I go. Make Chris look right past me as he throws hot dogs to the other contestants.

I'm the first one there. I want to be the first one to leave. Actually, I want to stay on the show, and I want to win, but if I can't have that I just want to get this day over with, get shot out of the cannon, go home. Drink some malt liquor, eat some Bugles, pass out on the couch. And don't think about the world for a while. Don't think about how I failed. Put up with Kevin's attempts to comfort me.

I put my head down. Close my eyes. And wait. And when I look up, everyone is here except for Wendy. And as I watch she walks up too.

Chris finally gets there. And he begins to toss out hot dogs. I don't listen, although I stare right at him. I'm numb as the hot dogs go flying off the plate until there's just one left. I spare a glance behind me and spot the goth girl, waiting patiently. And right on schedule, there it goes. To her.

No tears.

"Well, Andy," Chris says, "I guess it's time for you to ride the cannonball express to loserville."

I nod.

No tears.

"C'mon, get in the cannon," he says.

I do it without protesting.

No tears.

And I sit in the cannon as the fuse is lit. It's over. I'm going home. Chris goes into his spiel, and I do my best not to think about tomorrow.

Maybe one more.

One more tear.

It feels right.

Voting Breakdown:

Ruby Gloom: Andy French
Rusty Shackleford: Andy French
Numbuh Two: Andy French
Wendy Corduroy: Andy French
Gandhi: Andy French
Triana Orpheus: Andy French
Boris Badenov: Andy French
Chaz Monerainian: Triana Orpheus
Andy French: Chaz Monerainian

Final tally of votes received:

Andy French: 7 (eliminated)
Chaz Monerainian: 1
Triana Orpheus: 1
Geoff and Bridgette were making out on a couch on a stage. After a few minutes, Bridgette pushed Geoff off of her.

"So, why are we doing this?" Bridgette asked.

"Well, babe," Geoff said, "I'd assume it's because the author never really watched the show after Action. Well, except for Pakhitew Island."

"So what, this is basically our relationship circa Action?" Bridgette asked.

"Yep," Geoff responded.

"Okay, I get that," Bridgette said. "There's just one thing I don't get."

"Why we're breaking the fourth wall so much?" Geoff suggested.

"No, why we're asking questions we already know the answer to. It seems like a really cheap way to do exposition," Bridgette said.

"It is," Geoff agreed. "But the author kinda sucks."

"True," Bridgette admitted before turning her attention to the audience. "So we've got a very special Aftermath for you today, where we'll answer questions about the show that haven't been put in the text."

"AKA the author wants to share with you some half-baked explanations for the plot holes," Geoff butted in.

"And details that were left out due to all the first-person narrating," Bridgette added. "C'mon, Kenny and Æon Flux died during introductions. We don't want to get killed too."

"Oh, and how would that happen?" Geoff asked mockingly. In response, a spotlight fell from one of the rafters above and crash-landed at his feet. He chuckled nervously. "Uh, I was just joking. So! Let's get to the show!"

In the audience, Gwen stood up. "So, I notice the title of this chapter is 'The Centipede Campfire Ceremony'. Is there a reason why it's not called 'Aftermath 1' or something?"

"Good question, Gwen," Bridgette replied. "The title is indeed intentional, like how with the Snow episode there was a chapter titled 'The Snow Campfire Ceremony' even though, as a non-elimination episode, there wasn't a campfire ceremony. The purpose of this is so that somebody scrolling down the chapter menu doesn't know exactly what's going to happen in a given episode. It's basically done to avoid spoiling whether an episode includes an elimination or not, or in the case of this chapter, to obscure the fact that the elimination for this episode was included in the same chapter as the challenge itself. Does that answer your question?"

"It's more wordy than I would've liked, but yeah," Gwen said, sitting down.

"Well get used to it," Geoff said. "We have a lot more words coming."

"And my jaw's already tired!" Bridgette exclaimed. She took a drink from a bottle of water as Tyler stood up and asked the next question.
"So why was Ingrid the thrower in the last episode instead of Elise?"

"This may be hard to believe," Geoff responded, "but she was actually the best thrower on the team. See, Steve had brought some tennis balls with him so he could practice his juggling, and the Scientists had an accuracy contest with them. Ingrid was more accurate than Elise thanks to years of playing baseball, so she got the nod."

Tyler nodded and sat down. Leshawna stood up.

"So here's something I don't get," she began. "In the challenge in the mines, each team had like five people who fell asleep. How did they get five people on each side to go beddy-bye and four to stay awake?"

"Well," Geoff said, "in-universe, Chris didn't care. I mean, if eight people on one team had fallen asleep and all nine on the other team were wide awake, he would've had them run the challenge that way. The fact that an equal number on each side fell asleep is pure luck. And by pure luck, I mean the author wrote it that way for plot reasons."

Leshawna nodded and sat down. Cody stood up.

"Speaking of the mine challenge," he began, "it's said that Snidely broke Ghastly's night-vision goggles before he handed them over. Is there a reason he threw the challenge? Because this seems kind of strange since he's apparently been trying during the other challenges."

Bridgette smiled. "That was Snidely being too cynical about Chris. He thought it was going to be a straight-up race where the first team to the finish line won, and wanted to ensure that they didn't waste too much time rescuing people and also make sure that other members of his team hated Ghastly for leaving them in their boxes. He was half-right; the Mad Scientists lost because they didn't rescue everyone, but Ghastly became Public Enemy Number One for the Scientists."

Cody nodded. "Okay, yeah, that makes sense," he said. "And that does totally seem like a twist Chris would throw in to mess with people."

Cody sat down. The next person to stand up was Sam. "So, I noticed several inaccuracies in the game of Centipede—" he began.

"The author really doesn't care," Geoff said. "Also, inaccuracies are to be expected since the challenges use people instead of pixels in this instance and in other instances are formatted for human play on the island rather than their usual format elsewhere."

"Why did that sound like legalese?" Sam asked.

"It didn't, the author just wanted to sound smart," Bridgette said.

"I don't think it worked," Geoff said.

"Well, not when we point out it didn't work," Bridgette replied. "Anyway, next question?"

Cameron stood up. "So this just bugged me," he said, "but the Angry Scientist pretty much constantly tries to vote off Ingrid. Is there a reason for this?"

Bridgette shrugged. "He didn't like her initially, probably because she attempted to explain the difference between the 'Mad Scientists' and the 'Angry Scientist' to him during the politics episode. Then, when Ghastly got voted off, he blamed her for getting rid of his crush...yeah I don't know why either. Anyway, from then on he vowed revenge and voted against her every chance he had."
"Did she ever actually do anything to him?" Cameron asked, confused.

"Nope," Geoff said. "Next question?"

Cameron sat down again, still confused by the Angry Scientist's behavior. Beth stood up.

"So what happened after the snowball fight and after the cart race?" she asked. "Because we got both of those in first person."

Geoff shifted in his seat to get more comfortable. "Well, after the snowball fight, the girls on the Mad Scientists got together and concluded that if they lost the next match, they'd vote off Elise, since Snidely had immunity. They ended up winning, of course, but they didn't know they would at the time. Also, Ingrid and Numbuh Two did not meet to talk about the Snidely and Elise and Andy secret alliance they had discovered, but Numbuh Two and Ruby did. Ruby put the pieces together and they talked more over breakfast, which is where Chaz overheard them and set up the trial. Meanwhile, Rusty smoked some cigarettes in the confessional."

Bridgette nodded. "And after the minecart challenge, pretty much everybody took a nap. Andy met with Snidely and Elise at a predetermined meeting spot, and Ingrid tailed Snidely there. Boris thought up fiendish plots. Wendy, Triana, and Ruby hung out in their side of the cabin talking and got to like each other better. And yes, Rusty smoked in the confessional then too."

Beth sat down. Lindsay stood up next.

"So, like, in the introductions thing, and in the first challenge, Gandhi kinda makes a big deal about being named Gary Coleman," she said. "But like, after that, everybody like totally refers to him as Gandhi! What's up with that?"

"Well," Geoff said, "he was used to being called Gandhi because he'd been called Gandhi all his life. After a bit, being Gary Coleman completely slipped his mind."

"Also," Bridgette added, "it'd be pretty confusing for everybody if he was constantly referred to as Gary instead of Gandhi."

"Oh, and Total Drama: Cartoon Multiverse?" Geoff continued. "Is totally not gonna air in India. Yeah, that's canon now."

Lindsay pursed her lips. "Okay," she said, "I just hate it when people can't get a name right."

Beside her, Tyler's jaw dropped to the floor. Lindsay looked over at him as she sat down. "What?" she asked.

Tyler tried to speak but only let out indecipherable sounds.

"Moving on!" Geoff said. "Next question, please!"

Jo stood up. "So what were the contestants lying about in the first episode?" she asked.

"Good question!" Bridgette said cheerfully. "Geoff?"

"Well, Dale AKA Rusty said his name was Rusty like four times, but Chef, or more honestly the author, miscounted and called it five. Can't lie about your name, dude. Megan said she was popular back in Detroit–she wasn't, and told too many lies trying to pump up her reputation. Wendy talked about having a normal life, but lemme tell ya nothing is normal in Gravity Falls, Oregon. In fact, it's just west of weird. Elise, meanwhile, made stuff up to avoid revealing that she's actually a superspy,
Voltar lied about being a super-effective and super-feared villain—which, admittedly, he may have thought was true—and Snidely was a compulsive liar who couldn't resist. Chaz, meanwhile, just bragged about himself and how everyone loved him; he probably thought he was telling the truth, but he was wrong wrong wrong!” Geoff said gleefully.

"That's about all of it," Bridgette said. "At least for the ones who got knocked out; we weren't given a list for the ones who didn't lie too much."

"The author is lazy," Geoff told the camera in a stage whisper.

"So, next question?" Bridgette asked. Jo sat back down.

"I have a question," Harold said.

"Go ahead," Geoff invited. Harold stood up.

"So we saw Rusty use his mad skills to avoid Elise and win the game for the Moose in the capture-the-flag contest," he said. "But how did Rusty get the flag in the first place?"

"Aw, dude!" Geoff exclaimed. "That was like, one of the awesome parts of the story you didn't see! Can we like, get a clip of that, or--"

A TV descended from above the stage and hung over the couch.

"Oh yeah. You're gonna wanna watch this," Geoff proclaimed. The TV fizzled static and then resolved into a picture.

Snidely and the Angry Scientist were silently guarding a flag that had been stuck in the ground. Their eyes were fixed on the woods around them, constantly on watch for an intruder. Suddenly, a thump came from behind them.

"What was that?" the Angry Scientist shouted.

"I'll go check it out," Snidely said. "You stay here and guard."

Snidely left to check out the sound. The Angry Scientist now surveyed the entire area by himself. Suddenly, he turned to his right, having heard something.

"Who is being thereness?" he asked. No response came until a figure burst out of the undergrowth.

"Pocket sand!" Rusty yelled, and threw some sand from his pocket into the Angry Scientist's face.

"YAAAAAAAA!" the Angry Scientist screamed as he grabbed for his stinging eyes. Rusty ran over to the flag, uprooted it, and ran off. About half a minute later, Snidely came running back, only to find the flag gone, the Angry Scientist rubbing his eyes frantically, and no one else around.

"Wow," Duncan said, not sarcastic at all. "That was–actually pretty impressive."

"I know, right?" Owen proclaimed.

"Yeah. I'm just glad that we got to show it here," Bridgette said. "Now, we have time for one last question...who wants it?"

Several audience members stood up and clamored for attention. Geoff scanned the audience.
"How about...Ezekiel?" he suggested.

The audience settled down, and soon Ezekiel was the only one standing up.

"So what have all the campers been doing since being eliminated?" he asked. "Also, why aren't I some kind of mutant freak?"

"Uh, yeah, what part of 'not since Action' didn't you get?" Geoff asked. "And, to answer your question, Bridgette?"

"Alright," Bridgette said. "Well, Voltar has been busy with various acts of immense evil, like staying in a parking spot fifteen seconds after the parking meter has expired and trying to convince the neighborhood kids that he's not as lame as they think he is. Aunt Grandma has been helping kids and attempting to discredit Uncle Grandpa. Major Doctor Ghastly has returned to Evil Con Carne, where she continues to harbor an immense crush on her boss and do mad science. Megan Allman has gone back to Detroit, where her father totally claims he can talk to God and her mom just won't get off her back, god, why does she have to be so smothering? The Angry Scientist is back at the Secret Military Organization's Secret Military Base, where they're still trying to capture the one sheep that will fit the sheep-powered ray gun. And Andy French is currently passed out on the couch in his apartment after eating a few bags of Bugles and drinking a bottle of malt liquor."

"And that's all the time we have today!" Geoff concluded. "If you're uncertain about aspects of the plot, feel free to ask us in the comments section, and if you're lucky we might answer your question! We'll see you next time the author needs to fill a chapter, here on Total! Drama! Cartoon Multiverse! Aftermath!"

Bridgette gave her boyfriend a look. "That send-off was very Chris-like," she told him.

Geoff nodded. "Yeah, I can't believe I had to say that. It gave me the chills," he said, shivering.

Bridgette gave him a sultry look. "Well how's about we warm you up?" she suggested smokily.

Bridgette and Geoff began making out again.
The Games Episode

Chris had a huge smile on his face at sunrise. "Last time, on Total Drama: Cartoon Multiverse," he began, "we played a game of Centipede. The Mad Scientists won for only the second time this season, and the Bumbling Moose had to decide who to get rid of. Chaz, for once, proved to be interesting, as he set up a trial involving Andy, who may or may not have been in an alliance with Snidely and Elise. Spoiler alert: he totally was. Was being the operative word, as after an intense debate with Numbuh Two and Ruby, Boris stepped in and told everyone that Andy really _was_ in a secret alliance. Andy just gave up at this point, and the Moose sent him packing. Now the show has lost eight contestants, the Bumbling Moose have lost two contestants, and Snidely's alliance has lost one member. What's gonna happen next? I don't know, but we're gonna have a field day with it, here on Total! Drama! Cartoon Multiverse!"

My alarm clock goes off at eight. And when it does, I always get up and do my daily exercises. It's good to have a routine as you get older, you know. It helps keep you limber and ready for the day. Admittedly, Chris's habit of not having a regular schedule for challenges isn't very good for my routine, but I do try to keep up with it anyway.

Such a strategy isn't very effective when you're awoken prior to 6:30 by an announcement over the camp loudspeakers.

"Well, campers," Chris announced, "it's time to get your butts out of bed for today's breakfast! And if you don't get breakfast, you can't be in the challenge. That's just how it is today."

I stared at the ceiling for a few seconds and then pulled myself out of bed. I blinked the sleep from my eyes as I landed on the floor. I put on my clothes, did some stretches, and headed for the mess hall. Admittedly, Chef's cooking wasn't as bad as many of my compatriots frequently said it was, but that might just be a matter of taste; when your cooking is usually done by a guy who learned by fermenting oranges into alcohol by the heat of a prison radiator, you're less prone to complain about certain things like maggots in the stew or too little salt on the food (or, for that matter, too much salt).

The chill of the morning nipped at my nose. It felt like there was a rainstorm on the horizon that would hit in a couple of days. Thankfully, the mess hall was not too far away, and I was one of the first ones to enter. I grabbed a tray, took the bowl of gruel (simultaneously thick and thin; quite a culinary feat when you think about it) I was given, and sat down at a table. There, I watched as the rest of my fellow campers streamed in. When I realized they had all arrived, I frowned. It seemed that Andy was no longer in the game. This was...less than optimal.

Soon the other members of my team sat at my table. Elise sat across from me, with Steve hanging close by her side. The other three girls on our team sat away from us; it seems that they had formed their own clique, one that wasn't very fond of us. Regardless, they soon fell into conversation, and so did we. We passed our time at breakfast discussing our expectations for the coming day. Steve was quieter than usual, although he expressed a preference for a non-painful exercise and possibly one that tested our ability to work together in teams. Elise, meanwhile, was favoring a challenge that involved subterfuge, or barring that, one that was based on whomever put forth the greatest effort. This I couldn't fault her for; Elise had proven herself to be the strongest competitor on our team and quite possibly the toughest player in the game. If there was a challenge based on individual effort, Elise would have to be the most likely one of us all to win--especially if the challenge demanded physical prowess.

I, however, was particularly fond of some sort of challenge that would require us to expend mental
effort; perhaps a tournament of chess or of seven-card stud. Not many people know this, but I am particularly gifted at chess. Unfortunately, my profession rarely gives me an opportunity to try my skills against strong (or even mediocre) opponents. Admittedly, this hasn't helped me evade the authorities, but that does not change the fact that I long for a chance to try my hand at chess.

But, barring that, I have become quite skilled in the art of poker. Quite a few of my men are fond of the game, as is most of the Canadian wilderness, so I have seen fit to acquaint myself with the game and acquire a sort of mastery over it. Poker, as much as it is a game of luck, is in many more ways a game of skill, and I do believe that I have the skills necessary to win on a regular basis, if called upon to do so. And when facing the rest of this camp, I wouldn't be surprised to find myself the eventual winner—barring, of course, an extraordinary run of bad luck for me, an extraordinary run of good luck for someone else, or there being another fantastic poker player at this camp.

Still, the thing that I would most like is a test of brains. None of our challenges thus far have been particularly challenging mentally; the closest one was the first challenge we had, and that was more about putting on a pleasant face. I will admit, politicking is not my forte, and I am not surprised that I failed there; however, I don't see how being able to finish a bowl of soup made from various horrible ingredients is in any way meant to test anything beyond your constitution. Furthermore, all of our challenges since have essentially been physical; the closest we have come to a mental challenge was the snowball fight, wherein the construction of forts was central to success.

My train of thought was interrupted when the loudspeakers in the mess hall crackled to life and Chris's voice was emitted from them. "I hope you've all finished your breakfast," he said, "because it's time to get to the middle of camp to start the first part of today's challenge!"

Well, at least that's a clue. Today's challenge will have several parts. This does not bode well for my hopes of an intelligence-based challenge.

Minutes later, we had all gathered at the center of camp. Chris was wearing a sun hat and sunglasses, and had a whistle around his neck. More importantly, several potato sacks were sitting behind him.

"Well, glad to see you're all here," Chris said. "I was afraid some of you would skip breakfast. But now that your bellies are full, let's move on to today's challenge!" He smiled. "Today, we're gonna go do some wholesome camp activities, the kind that camp is supposed to have. That's right, folks, it's field day! You're gonna play games typically reserved for the elementary school set. The main difference is that generally elementary school kids don't screw up as much. Also the traps. There are going to be traps. So, let's get started. Everyone grab a sack and get ready, because the potato sack race is gonna start very soon!"

We all grabbed sacks, and Chris led us down to the starting line on the beach. The finish line was a fair bit away. My calves were already starting to ache slightly.

"Now then, here's the rules," Chris said. "Rule number one of the sack race: don't fall down. If you fall down, you get eliminated. Rule number two of the sack race: the first person to cross the finish line wins a point for their team. Rule number three of the sack race: all competitors must cross the finish line or be eliminated from the competition. Rule number four of the sack race: no, you are not allowed to cheat." He turned to the camera and whispered, "Not my idea, that's totally on the author." He then turned back to us. "Any questions?"

Steve put his hand up.

"Yes, Steve?" Chris acknowledged him.
"Uh, what's the twist?" he asked.

"Good question!" Chris said. "You get a fifteen-second head start! Go!"

Steve began to hop forward. On his fourth hop, the sand gave way beneath him and he fell into a hole.

"I did say there were traps," Chris said happily. "Now then, the rest of you, get ready, get set, go!"

We all took off from the starting line. Boris, whose sack was so large on him that it was up around his nose, soon tripped and fell over. Rusty and Elise, meanwhile, burst into the lead quickly and passed all of us as they headed for the finish line. The rest of us just hopped forward slowly, scanning the ground. It quickly became apparent where the traps were, as the sand there was a darker color and appeared to be glued onto a canvas. Most of us managed to make it to the finish line without any problems; the only exception was Chaz, as he simply ignored everybody else and disappeared into a hole halfway through the course.

When the last of us crossed the finish line, we saw Chris waiting there next to Rusty and Elise. He grabbed Rusty's arm and thrust it into the air. "Rusty wins the sack race and gets a point for his team!" he declared. "That puts the Bumbling Moose ahead of the Mad Scientists one-nothing. Now, while the interns get the losers out of their holes, we'll move into the woods for the next contest: an egg-and-spoon race!"

So saying, Chris took us into the woods. There, the course was much shorter, but it was also filled with many more obstacles. In addition to the trees, there were dead logs, a trench filled with water, and what appeared to be puddles of Chef's cooking scattered about the course.

"This is where you'll be doing the egg-and-spoon race!" Chris announced. "Now, for the rules. Firstly, you must cross the finish line with your egg cradled in your spoon. Anybody who doesn't do so loses the challenge. Secondly, the first person across the finish line with their egg in their spoon wins the challenge and wins a point for their team. Thirdly, no using glue or other adhesive materials to permanently affix your egg to the spoon. Using your hands to keep the egg on the spoon is prohibited as well. Fourthly, if your egg gets anything on it, you are automatically eliminated. Fifthly, sabotaging your opponents is not only allowed but encouraged. Sixthly, once you cross the finish line you must eat your egg in order to seal completion of this challenge. If you refuse to eat the egg, you will be eliminated from the next challenge. And yes, you have to eat the eggshell too. Seventhly, remember to have fun." Chris giggled.

Chef handed us all an egg and a teaspoon. I looked over the rest of my competitors. Nobody seemed to be taking any initiative to cheat, although I was sure that this would change quite quickly. As soon as all the eggs and spoons were handed it, Chef arranged us in a straight line at the start.

"Get ready..." Chris said. "Get set..." We waited. "And...go!"

I took one step and felt a dye pack explode all over me. I cursed Harold Robeson as I coughed and wiped my eyes. Once I could see again, though, I got an idea. Elise was heading for the finish line, but was being outrun by Gandhi and Numbuh Two. I picked up a rock lying on the ground and hurled it. It flew through the air gracefully and hit Gandhi in the middle of his back. Gandhi jolted, lost control of his egg, and fell over. Still in front of Elise was Numbuh Two, but he soon stepped in Chef's food and found himself off-balance due to the sudden change in the ground's texture and consistency. I threw more rocks at him, and although I constantly missed, Elise was able to slip into first place and complete the challenge. Numbuh Two broke free from the puddle, but stepped on a dye pack of his own, and although he did a good job covering up his egg it wasn't good enough, as a droplet got on it and he was eliminated. Meanwhile, Rusty crossed the finish line, cracked his egg
into his mouth, and then chewed his eggshell up into a fine paste before swallowing it. Elise followed his lead and did the same. Ruby and Triana were the next to cross the finish line, and as they worked on getting their eggs down Ingrid tripped, dropping her egg on the ground and breaking it. Marlowe was the next one across the finish line, but as soon as the egg hit her tongue she retched and threw up.

There were only two players left: Nazz and Wendy. Unlike their other competitors, they were taking it slow as they made their way across the battlefield. This also made them easy targets, and I gathered up as many rocks as I could and pelted Wendy with them. Although the rocks hit Wendy hard, she merely curled herself around her egg and continued to inch forward. As soon as she crossed the finish line, she cracked her egg and ate it, ignoring my barrage of stones, and then began chewing up the eggshell. As she worked on the eggshell, she turned to me with an angry look in her eye, and upon swallowing, ran towards me with intent to injure. Fortunately, I was able to defeat her in hand-to-hand combat; admittedly, I only succeeded in doing this by hiding behind Chef and having Chef hold her off, but I consider that a victory nonetheless. When all was said and done, Nazz had crossed the finish line and managed to eat her egg, leaving six competitors (four on their side, two on ours) still in play.

"Although Elise crossed the finish line first," Chris declared, "Rusty was the first one to finish eating his egg."

My compatriots and I groaned at this news.

"But that doesn't matter," Chris said. Of course. Chris was using this as an opportunity to toy with our emotions. "So that means a point for the Mad Scientists! The score is one-all, and we're moving on to the third challenge. This one is gonna take place on the water–and no, you don't have time to get your swimsuits."

Chris led the six remaining contestants away. Intrigued, most of the rest of the camp followed, wanting to see what the next challenge would be. Chris led us to the beach and there, about twenty feet offshore, were two floating platforms. There was a wooden wall sitting on a part that jutted out from both of them, and on the wall a rope was resting.

"As you may have guessed," Chris said, "this next challenge is tug-of-war. If you fall into the water, you're out. Whichever team gets control of the rope gets a point. Now, if you would?" He gestured to some rowboats. "Two to a boat."

Elise and Nazz grabbed one boat, Rusty and Wendy grabbed another, and Triana and Ruby grabbed a third. They rowed out to the platforms; the Moose took the platform on the left and lined up. Elise and Nazz took the platform on the right, with Nazz in front and Elise in back. Onshore, Chris pulled out a megaphone. "Now, if each of you could take an end of the rope?" Chris asked. The competitors did as they were told. "Good. Now, everybody get ready...get set...and...pull!"

The two teams yanked on the rope. Although our team got the jump on the other team, none of the Moose fell into the water, and they soon regained their footing. Soon, the teams were engaged in a stalemate. As I watched, I noticed Nazz's feet starting to slip forward towards the edge. It looked like she was going to topple over when she released the rope.

The sudden loss of kinetic force shocked Elise, and she stumbled forward into Nazz and let go of the rope. The two of them flailed madly as they lost their balance and toppled into the water. They came up spitting.
"And that's a point for the Bumbling Moose, giving them a 2-1 lead! More importantly, that leaves every member of the Mad Scientists eliminated, giving the Bumbling Moose the win by default. Sorry, Mad Scientists, but you're going to send someone home tonight!" Chris announced.
I kicked at the sand on the beach and walked away, not looking behind me as the Bumbling Moose welcomed back their victorious champions and the Mad Scientists accepted that they had been dealt yet another loss. I wasn't happy with this outcome, not one bit. In fact, at this point I was thoroughly regretting that I had broken Ghastly's night-vision goggles; while I wasn't unhappy to see her go, the fact that the team was down to half-strength this early on in the competition and that I was at least partially responsible for these dire straits chilled me to my very core, especially since it was now starting to look like our team might only barely make it to the merger; for that matter, it seemed entirely possible that there wouldn't be a merger and that Chris would just let our team be hunted down like caged foxes.

The loss of Andy also weighed heavily on my mind. Admittedly, he might have been voted off by the Bumbling Moose for justifiable reasons. It was entirely possible that he had managed to insult his teammates or that he had simply been seen as the weakest player on the team. After all, this was likely more probable than that they had discovered his alliance with us and voted him out in retaliation. Still, the fact that my alliance was now not only down a member but also without its connection to the other side was a fairly large blow to our chances of success.

I was headed for the woods. Strange as it may seem, I usually get my ideas while out in the Canadian wilderness. It's like a tonic to my brain, calming my stressed emotions and allowing my mind to function more clearly. If there was ever a time my emotions were running hot, it was now. Fear was chasing me, although it was tempered by the realization that I could not afford to panic. Alongside of it was self-doubt; although I hadn't been responsible for our losses in the underwater contest, the capture-the-flag game, or here, I couldn't help but feel that if I hadn't worked to eliminate Ghastly the entire game might have gone differently. Also brewing in my stomach was a sense of general unease; this feeling I could not place the origin of, but could only accept as a gut feeling that there was a bad omen in the air.

But underneath this there was a sense of anger. I couldn't quite figure out why, but something about the previous challenge did not sit right with me. It's almost as though the challenge was rigged in some way, as if the Bumbling Moose were fated to win. Of course, this would be ridiculous; a strong team constantly defeating a weak team is almost never entertaining. For that matter, neither is a team being completely incompetent, which is the direction that we appear to be headed in. Still, I couldn't shake the feeling that something about the last challenge was wrong.

That wasn't why I came here, however. I looked around the woods, saw that I was alone, and leaned against a tree to think. I twirled my moustache out of habit and contemplated the setup of the chessboard, as the analogy goes. I knew that Ingrid, Marlowe, and Nazz were frequently allied against us, and that Steve usually votes with us. It seems that Elise's lie about the girls in her cabin making fun of him struck deeper than would be expected. Regardless, it would be easy to presume that the women of the Mad Scientists not named Elise will cast their votes against us, and as such our best hope is to all be on the same page and cast out the girl that poses the biggest threat and is eliminatable. The only question was which person that is? Ingrid, who had the worst placement of any of the trio? Marlowe, who couldn't swallow an egg and left us further bereft in the tug-of-war? The only certainty was that it couldn't be Nazz, since Nazz made it all the way to the tug-of-war–

And let go of the rope.

As I thought about it, I came to the realization that Nazz intentionally dropped the rope. She intentionally set us up for failure. And now, she was going to attempt to break our alliance for good.
I knew what I had to do. Purposefully, I pushed my body away from the tree and headed back towards the camp. I had to set up Nazz's elimination as soon as possible, and I had to do it fast; convince everyone on my team that Nazz had intentionally thrown the game. If everyone else learned that Nazz had intentionally lost the game for us, she'd be out of here quickly. My first target had to be Steve; enforcing a tie at the very least would be a boon. Only after that would I be able to get Elise to agree to tell the rest of the girls about Nazz's traitorous stance. Would this be a somewhat difficult series of tasks to accomplish? Perhaps. But it would be necessary; injecting doubt into the teenage girls' relationship would only serve to benefit us, especially if we were able to get rid of one of them by doing so.

My pace hastened and my breath came faster. My ears scanned the camp for sounds, and I heard snippets of conversation, various people engaged in various activities, and the all-around shiftless sounds of a bunch of people with nothing to do and time to waste. As I entered the camp, I noticed that people shied away from me; obviously they recognized that I was in a hurry and that I had a specific goal. I walked through the camp, searching for Steve, and eventually saw him exiting the showers, having just washed himself. While I never enjoy being accosted after I have just concluded bathing, I knew that this was probably going to be my best opportunity to talk to Steve and convince him to vote for the right person.

I approached him and threw a friendly arm around his shoulders. "Hello, Steve," I said. "How have you been?"

"Enh," Steve replied. "About the same as usual. Disappointed that we lost. Why do you ask?"

I sighed. "Steve," I said, "I'm gonna level with you. I think I know why we lost the previous match, and I need your help to vote off the person who did it."

"Oh, what?" Steve asked. "You think Elise intentionally fell overboard?"

"No," I told him. "I think Nazz let go of the rope."

"Yeah," Steve said. "I trust you."

Steve's voice contained no hint of trust whatsoever. I looked in his eyes, and he stared straight back at me. His gaze had no sympathy in it, no emotion other than a bit of distaste.

"Good," I said, trying not to let my voice betray my inner worry. "So you'll work with Elise and I to vote her off?"

"Of course I will," Steve said flatly. "After all, neither of you have ever lied to me."

He was playing with me. He knew. But I still had a chance at salvaging the situation if I could just make him doubt himself.

I sighed. "Let me guess," I said. "Ingrid came over and spun you some sort of sob story? Something about how Elise and I are evil just because we're not teenagers like her and her friends?"

"No," Steve said. "I haven't spoken to Ingrid all day. Now if you'll excuse me, I have to go dry my hair."

I stared after him as he walked away, flabbergasted. "The correct excuse is 'I have to go wash my hair', you know!" I called after him.

"I just washed my hair," Steve replied evenly. "Now, I'm going to dry it. Goodbye."
Well, that was that. My alliance was officially sunk. Elise and I were dead meat at this point. All that was left to do was tell her what had happened.

I headed through camp, head down, my brain swirling with questions. I thought that getting rid of Megan would make it obvious to anybody who knew that we were strong enough to take down our enemies. Was it a bluff? Perhaps. But the fact remained that I was hopeful that this would keep everyone else in line.

Of course, I hadn't expected us to lose five games out of seven. Or thought that the girls would provide such a threat. Or expect that even Steve, who was completely sold on Elise's lies and seemed to fancy her, would be the one to betray us. But somehow, that was the position we found ourselves in: needing to get the girls on our side in order to survive.

It was at that moment that I spotted Elise. She had gotten a towel and was lying on the beach in a shameful swimsuit. I shook my head. Modern styles are so promiscuous. I cannot decide whether this is a bad thing or a good thing. Regardless of the morality of such swimwear, though, I had to confront Elise and figure out a strategy; if we could not quickly find a solution together, we would surely fall in short order.

I strode towards Elise. Upon hearing my footfalls, her body tensed and her head snapped towards me. Behind her sunglasses, her eyes took stock of me, and she relaxed slightly.

"Oh, hey, Snidely," she said. "What's new in your world?"

I decided to plunge right in.

"Nazz let go of the rope intentionally," I told her.

In response to this, Elise shrugged.

"So? Why does that matter?" she asked.

"Because she's trying to get rid of us," I told her. "I just had a talk with Steve, and I think he's on their side."

She jolted and sat upright. "Are you serious?" she asked. "Steve has turned on us?"

"I tried to tell him about Nazz," I said, "and he brushed it off. Like he didn't believe me. Like he was already thinking of the best way to get revenge for some nonexistent slight."

"So you think it's over?" she said, worried. "You think one of us is gone?"

"I'm pretty sure," I replied. "I don't think he's on our side any more."

She nodded in contemplation. "Okay," she said slowly. "So we go after...Ingrid?"

I shook my head. "Nazz. I just know she's responsible for this."

She looked at me oddly. "I don't think so," Elise said. "I don't really think that Nazz would intentionally throw a match just to get one of us kicked off."

"I saw her with my own eyes," I told her. "I'm certain that she knew what she was doing."

"Or maybe she was trying to reset her feet," Elise said. "Look, I knew she's done some good work on tactics in a couple of games, but I don't really think she's that bright. I mean, I share a cabin with her, and I gotta say that there's not much going on up there."
"Then how do you explain how she set up the battle plans in capture-the-flag and the video game?" I argue.

Elise shrugged. "I dunno, but as somebody who spends upwards of twelve hours a day with her, I don't think she's the brains of the operation. That's pretty clearly Ingrid. And the thing about Ingrid is that she's quiet. Shy. Not the most likable person here. If I talk to the girls, we might be able to get rid of her."

I pretend to think about it. "Alright," I reply. "We'll vote off Ingrid."

I walk away from Elise. Inside, I know we're done for. We are sunk. Today, either I leave this island or Elise leaves. Whichever one of us it is, the fact remains that the alliance has been discovered and is about to be broken.

Goodbye, Elise. You were a good partner to have in this game.
The Musical Episode

Confessional

"I can't believe it!" Steve said. "Snidely and Elise, running the game, all along? And I didn't see it? They played me, I just know it! Was Elise lying to me about Megan making fun of me? Was that a lie? Was it all a lie? Did she just make up stories to turn me into a puppet? What a jerk! I can't believe it! They toyed with me! They made me look like a fool! And I fell for it!"

Calming down, Steve sat on the toilet and looked directly at the camera.

"Megan, Angry Scientist, I'm sorry," he said. "I should never have fallen for their tricks. Please accept my vote against Snidely as my apology."

Confessional

"Really? Trying to frame me, Elise?" Ingrid asked the camera. "That's just desperate. But I'm voting off Snidely."

Confessional

"Snidely," Marlowe said. "Your time will come after the merge, Elise."

Confessional

Nazz frowned. "I can't believe that Snidely and Elise were playing us," she said. "Not cool, guys. I vote for Snidely."

Confessional

"Okay, this is a long shot, but Ingrid getting voted off is our best hope," Elise said. "So I vote for Ingrid."

Confessional

Snidely sighed. "I hope somebody's watching Nazz," he said. "Because believe me, she's more dangerous than anybody thinks. And I'm voting for Nazz because of that."

Voting Breakdown:

Nazz Van Bartonschmeer: Snidely Whiplash
Marlowe: Snidely Whiplash
Ingrid Third: Snidely Whiplash
Steve: Snidely Whiplash
Snidely Whiplash: Nazz Van Bartonschmeer
Elise: Ingrid Third

Final tally of votes received:
Chris smiled. "Last time, on Total Drama: Cartoon Multiverse," he said, "we put the campers through a field day. With some twists, of course. We dug pits for the sack race, put dye packs on the egg-and-spoon course, and soaked challengers during the tug-of-war. In the end, the Bumbling Moose won, and the Mad Scientists decided to send Snidely home when the girls united against him and Steve turned on him after overhearing Andy's trial two days ago. Now Snidely's alliance is completely broken, the Mad Scientists are at half-strength, and we're only about a third of the way through the season. Who will win the next challenge? Who will be eliminated? And who's gonna finally get me the cappuccino I asked for five minutes ago?" Somebody tossed a coffee to Chris from offscreen. He grabbed it and took a sip. "Ah. Much better. We'll find out the answers to those questions and more, here on Total! Drama! Cartoon Multiverse!"

The following is a non-profit fan-made story. Total Drama, Total Drama Aftermath, Total Drama Daycare, and all related shows, spin-offs, and merchandise are all owned by Fresh TV Inc., Teletoon, Cake Entertainment, Jennifer Pertsch, and Tom McGillis. Please support the official release.

Well that statement was odder than the ones I usually make. I may have ADD and ADHD, its hyperactive cousin, but usually it doesn't manifest itself with odd statements such as the copyright information for the show I'm on. For that matter, I didn't even know I knew that much about the copyright of this show. Weird how that works. But that's not a reason to let it get me down. We got to sleep in today. I had a dream about Marie Curie. She was having lunch with George Washington Carver. They were both eating his anthropomorphic peanut. It was screaming as they bit away at its shell. I can't blame it. It can't be fun to have somebody eat your nuts. And they ate its nuts. Not sure what exactly that meant. Maybe it just meant that I should avoid oral sex.

Avoid oral sex? That's crazy talk! Anybody offers to put their mouth down there I'm gonna take it. Unless it's like that hunkeycorn or something. That was weird. She's listed in Santa Monica but I don't have a Santa Monica phone book. And I did promise to be celibate. And I guess Marie Curie wouldn't like it if I stuck my penis into a strangers mouth. Or a not-strangers mouth. Poor Abe Lincoln, he got his mouth cut up constantly on Snowflake Day. I wish Snowflake Jake was here. He could give us all presents and rescue us from denominational holidays.

Wendy's pretty hot. So is Triana, but she reminds me of Joan, only she's not crazy about my best friend. Although maybe Triana could be one of my best friends. You know, if she was a clone. Is she a clone? I dunno, I don't think she's a clone. And she probably doesn't believe clones exist. But I do. Which is pretty cool. Except for when people think you're gonna be just like your clonefather. I'm pretty sure Clonefather Abe Lincoln didn't put his hand on his butt and pretend it was a woman's breast while jacking it to Cleopatra. But maybe he would've if Cleopatra went to his high school. Did Clonefather Abe attend high school? I really don't know.

Also it's weird how nobody calls me Gary even though I'm supposed to be Gary Coleman. But I don't really do that either because I still feel like Gandhi. Is that weird? I thought I was always Gandhi. Although the part with Tom Green was weird. Why was he chasing that bag from that movie with the pedophile we're supposed to root for? I thought pedophiles were like supposed to be all evil villains and stuff but then there's a movie where we're supposed to be on the pedophile's side and it gets all kinds of compliments from like everyone. That's weird. I prefer the one where the guy has sex with a pie although I fell asleep in the theater when it came out and I never got to see him
have sex with the pie until Abe suggested I rent it and then I watched it with Joan and we saw him have sex with that pie. But my Jewish foster mother walked in right as he was having sex with the pie and was totally unhappy about it. But the sex with a pie thing was pretty cool.

Anyway it's about two o'clock in the afternoon and I skipped lunch and Chris has had us all gather by the stage. And there have been like these blackout curtains put up and a roof so it's really dark in here. I kinda wonder why he did this. Does he want us to think it's nighttime? Because it's not. I checked. It's like the middle of the day. Although I like the nighttime. It's partytime. Maybe there will be a party. But Chris isn't good at parties. At least the ones where everyone else has fun. It's like he wants to make us all feel like Van Gogh. He's a dick. Why'd he have to paint my penis as being tiny in that mural? I mean I know it is, but I still don't think I deserved that. Just because he called a depressed teens hotline doesn't mean he should expect help. I mean, it's somebody for depressed teens to talk to. The best he's going to get is somebody who uses his pain for amusing other people. He could've gotten somebody who was just as depressed and told him how good he has it. Or somebody who thought that they could show him they knew how he felt but really couldn't because they'd never felt like him. Also he's constantly wearing that towel on his head. I don't get it.

Wait a second, there's a spotlight on the stage and music has started to play. Chris is in the spotlight. He's got a bunch of eye makeup on and his hair is all messy. Also it looks like he's wearing a bloodstained straitjacket and clutching a microphone. Is he going to sing?

"Hello!" Chris sings. "Hooray! Let the show begin. I've been ready."

I wonder what this is about.

"Hello! Hooray! Let the lights grow dim. I've been ready."

He looks like Marilyn Manson only a bit creepier.

"Ready as this audience that's coming here to dream!"

Maybe this'll be a musical performance.

"Loving every second, every moment, every scream!"

That'd be cool. I was a rap star once.

"I've! Been waiting so long, to sing my song!"

G-spot is ready to rock the g-spot again.

"I've! Been waiting so long, for this thing to come!"

I mean, I'm an expert at rhymes. It's gonna be time for rhymes.

"Yes I've! Been thinking so long, I was the only one!"

I'm gonna kill it in this game.

"Roll out! Roll out! Your American dream and its recruits, I've been ready."

Soon they're all gonna know that Gandhi is the rhyme master.

"Roll out! Roll out! Your circus freaks and hula hoops I've been ready."

And they're all gonna bow down when I become the master.
"Ready for this challenge, it's a classic episode!"

Wait, did this show already do a musical episode?

"All the fans of World Tour are ready to explode!"

Sometimes it really sucks being stuck in a freezer for years.

"I've! Been waiting so long to sing my song!"

Didn't he say this already?

"I've! Been waiting so long for this thing to come!"

Maybe this is the chorus.

"Yeah I've! Been ready for you, to sing along!"

Okay that explains it.

"Now I can stand and announce the rules
We'll put on a show to display you fools!"

Huh. A guitar solo. Not what I was expecting. I thought Chris was gonna sing over everything. Usually he has to be the center of attention. All the time. Kinda like me. Only boring.

"God! I! Feel! So! Strong! I feel so strong! I'm so strong! I feel so strong! I feel so strong, so strong, God I feel so strong!
I am so strong! So strong! I feel so strong! I feel so strong! I feel so strong! I feel so strong!
I feel! So! Strong!
God! I am so strong!"

The song ended, and Chris took a bow. He looked kind of stupid. Good song though.

"Now, as you may have guessed," Chris said, "today is gonna be a musical episode, like World Tour only not. Everybody has to come onstage and sing; if somebody doesn't sing and what they say cannot be worked into a song, they'll be eliminated. So, long story short: no conversations unless they're in the form of a song. Onstage. Once you're out of the contest, please take a seat in the theater and enjoy the rest of the show. Now let's begin."

Everybody headed for the stage at once. It was like Clone High after a cross-country victory only no pools got flipped. That was a letdown. Soon, the spotlights chose their victims: Elise, Nazz, Marlowe, and Ingrid. All of them were girls on the other team. Elise was pretty hot for a thirty-something but I heard that she was kinda nuts and being in an alliance with Snidely and Andy? Totally uncool. Nazz was like super-duper hot. I mean, Cleopatra would be envious of her, you know? Also she was apparently pretty nice which was cool, but Nazz was really hot. Marlowe was kinda good-looking I guess, but she was outshone by Nazz. Did I mention Nazz was hot? Also Ingrid looked kinda like she just wanted to fade away with the all-black wardrobe. She was kinda like Triana. And not as hot as Nazz. Who opened her mouth and proved she couldn't really sing.

"Welcome to Chris's show, it's
Summer vacation
I can see you quivering with
Anticipation
Tell me boys, is it so wrong?"
You're spending summer with the Amazons

Elise was the next one who sang. Her voice wasn't much better.

"We've been bleeding players, we got
Rid of all our men
Except for Steve, he's still here, but
Then again
We lose so much, it feels so wrong
We're down to five
Four Amazons"

A guitar solo occurred. It was okay, but I was more focused on where the music was coming from. It seemed like it came out of nowhere and perfectly fit the song. I wasn't given a lyrics sheet or anything though, so maybe that wasn't it. But then again when everybody got high on raisins music happened then and nobody questioned where it came from. So maybe this was the same sort of thing. Especially since the music was appropriate. Or so I'm told. I was eating Vegemite at the time. Then the solo ended and Marlowe sang and her voice was pretty bad too.

"There's a reason I usually play bass
I see it written on everyone else's face
My melodies are not beautiful
My voice is out of key
And I really kinda hate how you look at me
When I sing
I really hate the way you look at me"

Ingrid took center stage.

"We don't really have much of a chance
None of us really sing
And we'd really love to win but
We fail at everything
Now Jeff Hanneman's dead and gone
I'll cry for him
And the Amazons"

The four of them joined together for an off-key harmonization of the outro.

"Ooh, cry for the Amazons!
Ooh, cry for the Amazons!
Ooh, cry for the Amazons!
Who, will cry for the Amazons!"

The spotlights shut off. I have to say that that was one of the most painful performances I'd ever heard. And I recorded 'You're a G Old Flag.'

"Okay, so that sucked," Chris said. "Elise, Nazz, Marlowe: all three of you are eliminated because you suck at singing. Take a seat in the audience. Ingrid, you get to stay in. But the Mad Scientists are down to two members. Try to make this interesting, won't you? I mean, the drama is just going down the tubes here! Ratings are gonna tank if y'all don't stop sucking! Next song!"

Spotlight shown on me. Also on Triana, and Wendy, and Boris, and Rusty, and Chaz, and Numbuh
Two, and Ruby. It was our turn to sing.

"So far, it's been an easy ride," Ruby started.

"Like a good time on a waterslide
We've been taking care of business so far
And we're putting about two below par"

A piano started to play. It was accompanied by drums.

"So here we are today
There's not much we can say
The sun is shining bright outside
And so far, it's been an easy ride"

"It seems we always win," Boris cut in.

"It seems we always win
No matter what state we start off in
It seems we always win"

"Hi I'm Rusty," Rusty said. "Shackleford.
I've never been in a place like this before
It's easier here than I ever expected
Although I didn't come unprotected"

"It seems we always win
It seems we always win
No matter what state we start off in
It seems we always win"

My turn. "Hey there folks I'm the G-spot
Spent all my life rocking the g-spot
There's cameras all over this place
But they never seem to get a good look at my face"

"It feels like we're...

"Stuck in a shadow
Stuck in a shadow
Stuck in their shadow, we're always,
Stuck in a shadow"

Triana piped up. "It's like we're ancillary characters in our own lives
Like the narrative's not on our side
It barely even notices when we're around
That sorta thing just hurts our pride"

We sang together. "Stuck in a shadow
Stuck in a shadow
Stuck in their shadow, we're always
Stuck in a shadow"

"This feeling you mention, I've felt it too
And not just because I'm Numbuh Two
I thought I'd be famous when I arrived
But there's only one solution that I've derived, I'm

He joined us. "Stuck in a shadow
Stuck in a shadow
Stuck in their shadow, we're always
Stuck in a shadow"

"And I--"

Everyone winced and the music stopped. Wendy noticed immediately and looked around at us.
"What?" she asked. I could think of plenty of answers to that. Her singing was awful. It was worse
than the three failed Amazons combined. I'd rather listen to Billy Corgan pass a kidney stone than
suffer through another line of her singing. The problem is that nobody would possibly be rude
enough to tell her that, not even me.

"Hi, the Chaz here, news flash, hi
I caught uncertainty in your eye
You've prob'ly not heard this before
But it's news you can't ignore"

Chaz paused for a breath. A piano started playing again. This one was doing a jaunty tune.

"We're sorry but you suck
We're sorry but you suck
You're completely out of luck
We're sorry but you suck"

Boris stepped forward.

"I don't want to be a prude
But what you said was very rude
I don't think it was incorrect
But it could use a bit more tact
You'd hate it if we said to you
You're not the one who breaks the news
The cameras think you're second-rate
You're the one they love to hate"

I joined in with Boris.

"We're sorry but you suck
We're sorry but you suck
You're completely out of luck
We're sorry but you suck"

Triana started to sing.

"Your mustache is a total bore
Been done a million times before
I don't want to cause a fuss
You don't look sinister to us--"

"But gothic style no longer scares" Numbuh Two butted in
"It's cliche like your purple hair
I saw it in a comic strip
Its gone the way of frosted tips"

Everybody sang along.

"We're sorry but you suck
We're sorry but you suck
You're completely out of luck
We're sorry but you suck"

I took a verse.

"They say you're Numbuh Two
You always smell like poo
You wear those goggles all the time
Why wear them all the time?
You're a creepy loner guy
Who acts like a creepy guy
And when you talk you're making puns
Nobody likes puns"

Everybody sang.

"We're sorry but you suck
We're sorry but you suck
You're completely out of luck
We're sorry but you suck"

"You say you're Gandhi, yes?" Rusty asked.
"Well something I'll confess
You're hyperactive and insane
And have a tiny brain"

"Can't we all get along?" Ruby asked
"Why must we sing a song
That insults everyone we know
Competing on this show?"

Everybody else sang.

"We're sorry but you suck
We're sorry but you suck
You're completely out of luck
We're sorry but you suck
We're sorry
But
You suck!"

The music came to a close. We all looked at each other and began babbling angrily. Rusty was upset over how he only got one verse. Wendy was mad about being told she couldn't sing. Chaz was pissed because he thought the camera loved him. Triana thought her hairstyle was edgy. Numbuh Two wanted to know what was wrong with his goggles. Boris believed that his mustache was the classic villain look. And I was mad because ADHD actually stands for 'Awesome Dude with a Huge
Dick.' It does, by the way. Although sometimes I lose my train of thought really easily. It's just because I think super fast. Why didn't we have a super rad guitar solo in our song? Or rap. There should've been rap. I'm a great rapper, I was chosen by rhyming to be the greatest rhymer the world ever saw. Like in the last song, I was rhyming all over the place. On cue, I was dropping rhymes. Like that time I rhymed two with poo or puns with puns. Great rhymes like that. Although Numbuh Two doesn't smell like poo. His name just makes it sound like he does. Also he doesn't use deodorant. And sweats a lot. Maybe I should offer him some of that spray stuff. I love that spray stuff. Or maybe he should wear warmups. My warmups wick sweat away really fast. And really well. Although sometimes they end up making you have a self-affirmation session in a prison shower. And then you have to recycle and the janitor gets fired and you learn that littering is good in moderation. Like watching a guy have sex with a pie. That's good in moderation. I wonder if I should have sex with a pie? The movie made it look like fun. But I'm allergic to apples. What about blueberry pie? I like blueberries. They feel good in my mouth. And they're tasty. Although then my penis might turn blue. Like hypothermia. That's supposed to make your fingers fall off. And without fingers, how will I give high-fives?

"Okay," Chris interrupted my thoughts. "Well, as entertaining as your arguing is, every one of you has spoken without working it into a song. So you're all eliminated. Except for Ruby. She didn't speak up, just looked kinda sad. And Gandhi, seriously, blueberry pie?"

We headed for the seats and sat down. That sunk a lot of our chances at winning. Hopefully Ruby could pull it off. Although I would've killed it if there had been rapping. But there wasn't. But maybe there would be. I didn't know what they had in store. And then the spotlight settled on the nerdy lab coat guy from the other team. A guitar riff started playing.

"Broken broke on the Jersey Shore
Like so many bums before
Who never found a way
To escape
My refusal to go back
Science fiction turned to fact
The asylum cries I
Can't escape

And he never was a friend
Two weeks notice
At his hands my life would end
Two weeks notice

Bless me softly in the rain
Can it take away my pain
In this strange place it's a
Baffler
Look beyond reality
My eyes will close and I will see
It all started with a
Baffler

And he never was a friend
Two weeks notice
At his hands my life would end
Two weeks notice
I was always just a failed experiment
Did you see me
I was always just a failed experiment
On your TV
I was always failed, was always failed
Did you notice
Failed experiment, experiment
A malpractice

So he'd use me as a tool
An assistant and a fool
He'd have me eaten by his
Little pets
I might have been his only friend
I was just a specimen
I close my eyes and wish I
Could forget

And he never was a friend
Two weeks notice
At his hands my life would end
Two weeks notice

I was always just a failed experiment
Did you see me
I was always just a failed experiment
On your TV
I was always failed, was always failed
Did you notice
Failed experiment, experiment
A malpractice"

Ingrid cut in. "We won't tell you lies
We won't tell you lies like him
We won't tell you lies, we won't"

Steve acknowledged her and then took center stage again.

"Yesterday's a memory
And it haunts me when I sleep
And tomorrow lies there's
No escape
Though it should be long ago
Deep inside my terror grows
The asylum cries I
Can't escape

And he never was a friend
Two weeks notice
At his hands my life would end
Two weeks notice

I was always just a failed experiment
Did you see me
I was always just a failed experiment
On your TV
I was always failed, was always failed
Did you notice
Failed experiment, experiment
A malpractice

I was always just a failed experiment"

Steve finished his song. The Mad Scientists clapped and yelled encouragement. They were very happy. Weird, since the song was kind of a downer. I like downer songs sometimes. But I prefer happy songs. With an edge. A sexy edge. Like a knife. Or a knork. Not sure why that never took off. Was it the rising price of coal in an economy that's moving away from coal as a main fuel source? That seemed possible, but it didn't quite hit the nail on the head. Maybe it was how Abe's mouth got cut up. But his mouth got cut up all the time. Like when he ate that silverware. Or when he ate that miniature hot dog with the razor blade inside. Why would somebody put a razor in a hot dog? Were they planning to shave it? Because poodles are freaky looking creatures. With their puffy parts and their non-puffy parts. They're like buffaloes. Only instead of having a big puffy part on the front and no puffy part on the back they're just randomly puffed all over. Why do buffaloes have that puffy coat? Don't their legs get cold? And what about chicks who wear short shorts in winter? Their legs must be cold. Which is kinda hot. And why do legs get stuck to vinyl seats? Do DJs get their hands stuck to their turntables? Maybe that's how they make the wikiwiki sound. Their hands are stuck and they're trying to get them unstuck. Maybe they should wear gloves. But gloves always look kinda stupid. Unless they're fingerless gloves. Which look cool. Although they don't do much. Maybe they're just there to look cool. Is that why I'm on this show? To up the cool factor? Because I am upping it like a fridge door that's been left wide open. Which doesn't do as much as you might think. It mostly just makes the milk chunky. My Jewish foster dad threw it out when that happened. I don't like chunky milk. Milk is supposed to be smooth. Like me. So maybe I'm here to up the milk factor and subsidize the cattle industry.

"I see you here staring at me"

Steve was singing again.

"The tales you tell, I want to believe"

This time it was a piano ballad.

"This encouragement you shout"

I preferred his first song, honestly.

"But I've got too much doubt"

Although maybe this one would be interesting.

"And I've heard too many lies"

When's Ruby going to sing, though?

"It's a lie, it's a lie
I won't get sucker ed this time
It's a lie, it's a lie
My smile doesn't quite reach my eyes"

Ingrid stepped up. "I won't pretend to know what you've been through
But I want you to know I'll put my trust in you
There's a man on this stage singing words that he truly believes
And he's strange and he's changed and I'm sure that I'm speaking of Steve"

Steve's turn. "It's a lie, it's a lie
I won't get suckered this time
It's a lie, it's a lie
My smile doesn't quite reach my eyes"

Ingrid again. "There's so many things I could say while I'm singing this song
Leave your hangups in Jersey, nobody cares what went wrong
Honestly Steve, you're the best hope that we have left
Don't throw it away, don't leave us lost and bereft"

Steve. "It's a lie, it's a lie
I won't get suckered this time
It's a lie, it's a lie
My smile doesn't quite reach my eyes

No don't say you like me
Don't say you're my friends
We both know when push comes to shove
I'm gonna get the short end
Don't say you need me
Then push me away
We both know the rules of this contest
There's no room for friends in this game"

Ingrid. "That's a lie, that's a lie
We both know that I'm on your side
It's a lie, it's a lie
Let yourself smile just one time"

The song ended.

"Seriously, Steve, I believe in you," Ingrid said.

"ENNNH!" Chris announced loudly. "Ingrid, you're eliminated! And then there were two. Steve vs. Ruby. Who's gonna win? Stay tuned to find out!"

Seconds later, a spotlight shone on Ruby. It was apparently her turn to sing.

"Stuck in a shadow
I'm stuck in their shadow
Out of the spotlight and always
Stuck in a shadow

I'm out here on a lonely island and wondering why I came
Everyone in this place is so different and I'm still the same
I thought I was gonna have fun but the fun has started to fade
I'm living in the sunshine but I really prefer the shade
Stuck in a shadow
I'm stuck in their shadow
Out of the spotlight and always
Stuck in a shadow

I'll admit it, I miss my friends, and I miss Gloomsville too
And the people who left this island, yes I miss them too
I'm not sure if people here like me, they never seem to care
I wonder if anyone would notice if I wasn't there

Stuck in a shadow
I'm stuck in their shadow
Out of the spotlight and always
Stuck in a shadow"

A piano solo played. It was surprisingly good. Ruby hung her head sadly until the solo was finished.

"Stuck in a shadow
Stuck in their shadow
And I miss you...

The song finished. I applauded along with everyone else on our side. Applauding is weird. It's like hi-fiving yourself, but you're actually giving the hi-five feeling to another person. And that person doesn't even get the awesomeness that is transferred when you hi-five them. Like in prison, those guys were getting hi-fives under the table as a pick-me-up. Until I asked JFK about it and he told me they weren't hi-fives at all. Which makes sense, because they were happening under the table, ergo, they were lo-fives. I still don't get why Joan didn't want to give me a lo-five. I mean, lo-fives may not be as demonstrative as hi-fives but they're still super fun. Maybe I should try and make that a thing. Giving lo-fives. Which kinda sounds like lo-fi. I have never understood people's affinity for that stuff. Like the time Ponce gave me a CD about aeroplanes and said I should check it out. I mean, it was cool and all I guess, but it just wasn't my jam. Although Oscar Wilde thought I was a fool who just didn't get it. But we were also forced to read one of his books about a guy and a painting and getting laid in English, so his head was all swelled up then. But Dorothy Parker said she agreed with me. Which was nice. Wait, did she have a thing for me? Aw, man, she was totally into me! She wanted to roll with the G-spot! And I missed it completely! Stupid! Stupid! Stupid! But at least Marie Curie likes me. I think. Does she? I'm not sure. All I remember is that we got together at the dance and then ran into a freezer where Joan and JFK had just had sex and then a huge conga line walked in and then Scudworth yelled "Everybody FREEZE!" and then I was on this boat with these shadowy figures who told me I was Gary Coleman even though I'm Gandhi and then I was here watching this weird musical.

And geez, everyone in this musical is angsty! Its like ten times worse than high school! Okay, maybe only two times worse. Or maybe just as bad. Anyway, it's like they've got these huge hangups with their past and junk. Man, am I glad I don't have any of those.

The spotlights came on again. This time, they were focused on Ruby and Steve.

"I know that we could say," Steve sang, "it's been a long time in the making
But I'm afraid this one will bring you down"

"I know that we could say," Ruby sang, "we've spent a long time, lonely and waiting
But you won't believe what I've found"

"It might come as a suprise," Steve sang, "but I've finally had enough of being kicked around
Tomorrow's gonna be much better"

"You can see it in my eyes," Ruby sang, "I've woken up, and I'm speaking up right now
Tomorrow's gonna be much better

Dancing on that burning building gonna twist and shout
See me on the fire escape, yes I'm getting out"

They sang together. "Time to do my best
Finally gonna pass that test
I've had enough, yes I've finally come around
So look up at the sky
You can see it in my eyes
I've had enough and I've finally come around"

Ruby took the lead. "See the bags beneath my eyes, I think they came from stress, the stress of searching for success
I know that's part of the game"

Steve's turn. "Everybody told me lies, I think I've found the truth, getting away from wasting youth
I guess that's the price of fame

See me on the burning building, gonna burn it down
Gonna turn it into ashes, leave the ashes on the ground"

They sang together again. "Time to do my best
Finally gonna pass that test
I've had enough, yes I've finally come around
So look up at the sky
You can see it in my eyes
I've had enough and I've finally come around"

"And don't you ever tell me!" Steve sang. "That I wasn't made for this place"

"You don't need an answer!" Ruby sang. "It's written on my face."

"I've always been kicked around been bossed around been knocked around, well no more!" Steve sang. "Steve's gonna win this race!"

He took the lead on the next verse. "Finally got my confidence, rocking around my brain, the adrenaline might drive me insane
But that's alright!"

Ruby sang. "It might not be too intense, but I hate these games, the ones they're playing for fiscal gain
I'll be alright!

See me on the burning building, think I'm burning down
Before I become ashes I'm leaving for solid ground"

They sang together for the third time. "Time to do my best
Finally gonna pass that test
I've had enough, yes I've f--"

"THEY WERE GETTING HANDJOBS!"
The music stopped and everyone stared at me. To rub it in, a spotlight hit me in the face with its light.

"I uh, I just got that," I explained sheepishly. "At the prison. The hi-fives, well lo-fives, they were, uh, they were handjobs."

The spotlight left me and slowly approached the stage again.

"Okay," Chris said, annoyed. "Well then. If we could finish the song, please?"

The piano started playing again, along with the guitar, drums, and bass.

"I've had enough!" they sang.

"Time to get tough!" Steve sang.

"Get off my duff!" Ruby sang.

"I've had enough!" they sang.

"THANK YOU INGRID!" Steve sang in time with music.

"I've finally, finally, finally, had enough!" they sang together. The song came to a close with a huge ending. Everybody in the building applauded.

"You know, you're a really good singer, Steve," Ruby said.

"NOPE!" Chris yelled. "That eliminates Ruby, and knocks her off the stage! The winner is Steve, and the Mad Scientists!"

The Mad Scientists cheered while the rest of us booed. As soon as the commotion was over, Steve turned to Ruby.

"Thanks," he said. "That means a lot. Really. And you're a good singer too."

"Maybe we can sing together sometime," Ruby suggested.

"Maybe," Steve said hesitantly. "Although where did that music come from? And how did we know the melodies? And--"

"It's best not to think about it," Ruby said. "Trust me. I've done this before, and it's best not to question it."

Steve shrugged. The black covers on the theater came down, revealing that maybe an hour had passed, and we all exited the theater.

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Hello Hooray: music by Rolf Kempf, lyrics by Rolf Kempf and SteveAtwater
Amazon Squad: music and lyrics by SteveAtwater
It Seems We Always Win: music and lyrics by SteveAtwater
Stuck In Their Shadow: music and lyrics by SteveAtwater
We're Sorry But You Suck: music and lyrics by SteveAtwater
Just a Failed Experiment: music and lyrics by SteveAtwater
It's a Lie: music and lyrics by SteveAtwater
Stuck In Their Shadow (reprise): music and lyrics by SteveAtwater
I've Had Enough: music and lyrics by SteveAtwater
After the musical ended, campers dispersed throughout Wawanakwa, and Boris found himself walking side-by-side with Rusty. They walked in silence for a short while until Boris decided to pop the question.

"So," Boris said casually, "who were you thinking of voting off?"

Rusty shrugged. "I was thinking of that Chaz kid. Why do you ask?"

"Enh, don't really have a specific player in mind," Boris said. "Why Chaz, though?"

Rusty scratched the back of his head. "Something's just not right with that boy," he replied. "And no, I don't mean the overabundance of hairspray he uses. I mean more along the lines of how he did that whole trial thing. Something about it stunk to high heaven."

Boris chuckled nervously. "Rusty, my friend, I assure you, Andy was working with the other side. I swear, I saw them with my own eyes. I would've said something were it not for the fact that you all know I'm a sneak."

Rusty clicked his tongue. "I saw Numbuh Two and Ingrid meeting, and they told me the same. And I don't see why you'd stand up for them if it wasn't true. So I'm willing to believe that Andy wasn't on the level. But the trial itself, I dunno."

Boris gave Rusty a quizzical look.

"I guess," Rusty started before pausing. "He wasn't asking real questions. He wasn't looking for the truth. He wanted to rile them up, make 'em frustrated. He didn't care whether Andy was on the up-and-up or not. He just wanted a reaction. And that type of person is dangerous. Trust me."

"If you say so," Boris responded. "I'll have to think on that."

"So will I," Rusty said, opening the door to the confessional. "So will I."

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Rusty and Boris weren't the only ones having a conversation. On the girls' side of the Mad Scientists' cabin, Elise was in a discussion with Nazz, Marlowe, and Ingrid.

"So why not me?" Elise asked. "It's been bugging me since last night. Why not take me out instead?"

Ingrid exhaled as she gathered her thoughts. After a few seconds, she spoke.

"You haven't thrown any games, have you?" she asked.

"Of course not!" Elise exclaimed. "What do I look like?"

"Well, you did work your butt off in the water challenge," Marlowe said.

"And you apparently came close to winning capture-the-flag if we believe Steve," Ingrid said.
"And you pretty much held your own against a team twice our size in tug-of-war," Nazz added. "So you've pretty much been keeping us afloat as a team. Even if we never won any of those challenges."

"Gee, thanks," Elise said sarcastically.

"Point is, you've helped us win," Ingrid said. "And we'll need your help if we're gonna keep winning."

"Oh, and what?" Elise asked angrily. "As soon as I'm no longer useful, you'll sell me down the river?"

"Look," Nazz said comfortingly, "there's no need to act that way. After all, you did get into a secret alliance to try and run the game."

"I was playing the game!" Elise shouted. "There's nothing wrong with alliances!"

"You kept your alliance secret and involved a member of the other team," Ingrid said flatly. "That seems a bit morally iffy to me."

"It's a perfectly legitimate way of playing!" Elise complained.

"You mean like how we got rid of your alliance member since he was dead weight and kept you on?" Marlowe suggested. Elise glared at her. "Hey, don't ask the question if you don't like the answer."

Elise stood up straight. "I'm going for a walk," she said through clenched teeth. Elise walked out of the cabin and slammed the door behind her. As she left she muttered profanities under her breath. Silence fell upon the cabin.

"Well," Nazz eventually said, "that went better than we expected."

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Confessional

"At least she's on our side," Nazz said. "I think. She wouldn't throw a game just to spite us, would she?"

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Confessional

"That was harsh," Marlowe said. "Maybe we should have voted her off instead."

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Confessional

Elise smiled at the camera calmly. "Hey, Dan, remember how you once got trapped on a reality show and completely wrecked it? Well, I want you to figure out everything you can about this show and come up with a plan, or else I'm gonna sign you up for the next season and you'll come up with one anyway. Miss you Chris!"

Numbuh Two caught up with Triana outside of the cabin.

"Hey, wait," Numbuh Two called to her.
Triana stopped but didn't turn around. "What do you want?" she asked.

"I just wanted to apologize," Numbuh Two said. "For, you know, the uh--"

Triana smirked. "Believe me, that's nowhere near the worst insult I've had. And I don't dress like a goth to scare people."

"Oh," Numbuh Two said. "Uh, no offense, but why are you a goth then?"

Triana shrugged. "When your dad's a necromancer who occasionally gets mistaken for a Dracula--yeah don't ask--you automatically become the creepy chick in school. And that makes you an outcast. Goths are cool with outcasts."

"Okay, that kinda makes sense," Numbuh Two said. "But--necromancer?"

"He says it sounds cooler than 'magician.'" Triana paused for a moment. "He's not wrong."

"Yeah, I guess," Numbuh Two said doubtfully. "I was also wondering who you were planning to vote for tonight."

"Boris," Triana said.

"What?" Numbuh Two asked, shocked. "Why?"

"He's a villain," Triana replied. "You can't trust those guys. Unless you're trusting them to stab you in the back. And he told us that much during the first challenge."

Confessional

"I don't like saying this, but Triana has a point," Numbuh Two said. "Boris may have stuck up for me and Ruby, but he's definitely going to double-cross us."

"WOO-HOO!"

Steve ran up and down the length of the cabin.

"FINALLY! ALL TO MYSELF! WOO! WOO! WOO!"

Confessional

"With Snidely gone, I now have the entire dudes' side of the cabin all to myself!" Steve exclaimed. "It's awesome!"

Confessional

Rusty lit up a cigarette and began smoking.

After dinner, everyone gathered to cast their votes. Triana and Ruby stood together in line.

"Are you okay?" Triana asked. "You look nervous."

Ruby shook her head and offered up a weak smile. "I'm fine."
"Don't worry," Triana said. "Everyone likes you and you almost won it for us."

Ruby smiled. "Thanks." She entered the confessional, but turned back before she shut the door. "For everything. And uh, bye."

Triana raised an eyebrow, confused by Ruby's statement.

Shortly thereafter, everyone was gathered by the campfire. Chris walked up with a platter containing seven sausages.

"Seven weiners. Eight of you. One cannon. Who gets what?" Chris asked rhetorically. "Well, we'll just find out. Today's vote was very interesting, to say the least. It doesn't look like we have a really clear-cut winner for the position of least-popular camper. But we did have a few people who didn't get a single vote against them..."

"Chaz! Rusty! Boris! Ruby! Wendy! You're all on the chopping block!" Chris announced. The initial excitement displayed by the five announced changed to disappointment–except for Ruby, who looked completely calm. Triana, Gandhi, and Numbuh Two all rose and took their weiners.

"Five of you, only eight votes to go around...some of you only got one vote. And those are...Rusty!" Rusty stood and caught the hot dog thrown his way. "Swallow that beef!"

Rusty looked at him, shocked. "It's uncooked!" he complained.

Wendy snorted. "Wuss," she said softly.

"You get a weiner in your mouth too, Wendy," Chris said. He tossed her a weiner, and the camera focused on him. "Now, we have six votes left, and three of you. I'm afraid that tonight, we have a three-way tie. Each of you got two votes."

Chaz and Boris gasped.

"Now, I could be evil and display everyone's votes, causing a sense of paranoia among the voters who would get scared that their votes would open them up for targeting. Or I could just let you stew in your own juices and make you paranoid." Chris tapped his chin. "What to do, what to do...how about both!"

Confessional

"Nobody steals the Chaz's spotlight! Nobody! The audience hates that when it happens," Chaz complained. "Don't worry, audience. We must never be apart. Ruby, you're going down!"

Everyone looked at Chaz angrily.

"What?" Chaz complained. "The audience loves me, and Ruby keeps stealing my spotlight. Nothing personal, I just had to get rid of her."

"Are you kidding me?" Triana complained.

"Yeah," Wendy added. "Everyone loves her."

"Hey, maybe if you were as fabulous as me you'd understand," Chaz said. "Point is, Ruby keeps getting in the way of everyone's favorite, the Chaz."

Chris chuckled. "Yeah, this is entertaining, and totally why I decided to show some votes. So, on to the next confessional!"

Confessional

"I dunno, I'm just not having fun. And I don't really care about money. I think I should just come home to my friends. And I miss Doom Kitty. So yeah, I'm voting for myself," Ruby said.

"Plot twist!" Chris exclaimed. "I'm not showing you the rest of the videos. Just enough to show Chaz up. Yeah, that's right, that's what happens when you try and take my spotlight. Never try and play a player, fool. Ruby, you're going home. The rest of you, stay paranoid."

Ruby stood up. "Can I just say one thing?" she asked.

"Sure," Chris grinned. "Gonna take the opportunity to tell everyone exactly what you think of them?"


"I can't wait to go home
And see all my friends
To get back to Skullboy and Iris
The fun never ends
And I know that Misery
Is missing me too
And Poe, Doom Kitty, and Scaredy
I miss them all too

But it was a good time
Although it's all done
It was a good time
I had lots of fun
It was a good time
I knew all along
It was a good time
I put it in song

Though Rusty is paranoid
And Boris a villain
I know that they will play nice
If you all are willing
Numbuh Two tries to be so hard
But he's sweet inside
He's a lot like Wendy
When she swallows her pride

It was a good time
Although it's all done
It was a good time
I had lots of fun
It was a good time
I knew all along
It was a good time
I put it in song

Let's talk about the other side
Spare a verse for them
Nazz and Marlowe and Ingrid
Are the best of friends
Elise is amazingly gifted
And Steve really sings
I wouldn't want to trade these moments
For anything

It was a good time
Although it's all done
It was a good time
I had lots of fun
It was a good time
I knew all along
It was a good time
I put it in song

Gandhi, you're really nice
If a little strange
You're perfect the way that you are
You don't have to change
Chaz you're a braggart
And really quite rude
But the camera loves you
You're its kind of dude
And Triana, you are my best friend on this island
I wish there was more time to tell you the truth
I'd love if you could come over to Gloomsville
I'm sure everyone would love you
Though your father is creepy and your powers are weird
Don't give up on being yourself
You should know I think you're a fantastic person
Don't try to be anyone else

It was a good time
Although its all done
It was a good time
I had lots of fun
It was a good time
I made some new friends
It was a good time
But good times must end
It was a good time
And I'll miss you all
It was a good time
But Gloomsville, it calls
It was a good time
I knew all along
It was a good time
I put it in song"

As soon as the song finished, Chris stood up, irritated. "Well. That was more annoying than Ella. Okay, as annoying. Slightly less annoying. But still! Not cool. Not cool at all."

Ruby loaded herself into the cannon. "You know, Iris would love this," she said.

"Whatever," Chris responded and lit the fuse. He turned to the camera. "Now that Ruby has left the island, the Bumbling Moose have gotten rid of perhaps the most likable camper. Who will survive after the next episode? What will be left of them? Why did accounting approve that extra musical number but not my naval mines idea? And will I be requesting a raise for having to host this episode? You bet I will! Find out the answers to the other questions next time, on Total! Drama! Cartoon Multiverse!"

The cannon fired, sending Ruby flying through the air. As Ruby flew she screamed delightedly. *Happy Trails* began to play.

"Uh, what's up with this?" Gandhi asked.

"Yeah, the Coop allowed us to use this one on the cheap because of the opening song," Chris responded. "Go ahead, enjoy the tune."

Drums came in and another song kicked in. The rest of the campers shrugged and boogied their way back to the cabins to the sound of horns and electric guitars.

Voting Breakdown:

Chaz Monerainian: Ruby Gloom
Rusty Shackleford: Chaz Monerainian
Wendy Corduroy: Chaz Monerainian
Boris Badenov: Wendy Corduroy
Triana Orpheus: Boris Badenov
Numbuh Two: Boris Badenov
Gandhi: Rusty Shackleford
Ruby Gloom: Ruby Gloom

Final tally of votes received:

Ruby Gloom: 2 (eliminated)
Chaz Monerainian: 2
Boris Badenov: 2
Rusty Shackleford: 1
Wendy Corduroy: 1

*It was a Good Time*: music and lyrics by SteveAtwater

*Grand Finale*: music by Alice Cooper, Glen Buxton, Michael Bruce, Dennis Dunaway, Neil Smith, Leonard Bernstein, Mack David, and Bob Ezrin
The Rain Episode

Chris stood on the docks wearing a rain slicker. "Welcome back to Total Drama: Cartoon Multiverse!" he crowed. "We have a great show for you today, involving hot hot sun, long long runs, and no water at all for our contestants! Or we would, if it weren't for the fact that—it's raining! Yeah. Not what I wanted to see today. So instead of a super-interesting episode where we torture the campers, we're going to have to do something else. Something that happens at camp when it rains and you can't do stuff outside. That's right, it's the arts-and-crafts episode. Whoopee." Chris stormed off the docks.

I roll out of bed and grab my mirror. Perfect as always, mirror me. Why thank you, actual me. We're amazing. Oh, and Righty, you are WORKING IT today! Just on FIRE! Mmm! Oh, Lefty, you're gonna have to—wait. Wait. What's this? Oh, Lefty, you're making a comeback! Righty, you gotta stay hot if you wanna keep looking better than Lefty! Mmm, yes! Oh, I could spend all day checking out this red-hot action. And if it keeps raining, I might just do that. Not like anybody else around here is more interesting. And they're definitely not as good looking.

Oh, there goes the old man, groaning as he lifts himself out of bed. Scratching his side, ew, like we want to see that. Actually we do, it's nice to remind everyone how disgusting other people are compared to yours truly. I still can't believe the people I share this hovel with tried to put in a rule saying I couldn't use hairspray until everyone was awake, I mean hello, how else is my hair going to be this perfect? It's great on its own, of course, but it needs its special little Chaz touch, know what I'm saying? Of course I do! I'm the Chaz! And I still can't believe that baldy number two threatened to break my mirrors. Not cool, baldy number two. But I forgive you. Because you keep the show entertaining, and an entertaining show is what the Chaz is all about. When the Chaz isn't all about the Chaz, of course. And the Chaz is always all about the Chaz. But entertainment is the name of the game, so you get a pass. For now.

And now baldy number two gets up. And instantly puts on his false mustache. What is up with that, I don't know, maybe he's trying to pretend he's not completely bald. Not really doing much for anyone, but hey, not everyone has my amazing hair. And skin. And body. And Chazness. And there goes the floating turd himself, sitting up in his bed and stretching. Why he calls himself Number Two is pretty obvious, but most people aren't that truthful about how much they stink. It must be hard for him, rooming with the great Chaz. Always stuck between envy and disgust with himself. I'd feel sorry for him if it weren't for the fact that I'm the Chaz and just clearly amazing.

Hmm, Lefty, your comeback seems to have stalled. Really gotta put in more effort, Lefty. Righty, though, you just keep doing what you're doing. The Chaz approves. Now, hair, let's settle down and behave a little, hmm? Really can't go out there and shower without looking my best. Although the rain's gonna hurt. Not cool, Mother Nature. The Chaz does not approve of you trying to wreck his perfect hairstyle. Ahh, there you go, hair. That's it.

Man, I wonder what's gonna happen now? The Chaz broke up that union of losers, but now the Chaz has to find something else interesting to do. Like last time, when the Chaz made Ruby realize she was hogging my spotlight and she voted herself off. The camera loves the Chaz, and the Chaz doesn't like it when the camera cheats on him. Baldy number three, now awake. Grandma always mentions how much she liked Gandhi, but I don't see why. Honestly, handjobs? Puh-leeze, like the Chaz doesn't have better things to do. Like figure out when exactly things are gonna start happening. Let's see, everyone's awake except for baldy number one in our cabin, so chances are Chris is gonna use this as an opportunity to pull everyone out of bed. And that's gonna be my cue to hit the shower.
if there's time. I still don't get how somebody on TV as much as Chris is doesn't understand what it takes to look good. For that matter, how does somebody who obviously doesn't have the looks, style, brains, or body of the Chaz get so far? The Chaz is pretty obviously hotter than Chris. Especially you, Righty. Keep rocking that—wait, a little bit more from Lefty! I think Lefty's trying to catch up again! Better keep working it if you wanna keep your lead, Righty! Oh, but there goes Lefty, pushing forward...Righty still in the lead...Lefty catching up...Righty, nice job picking it up a bit—oooh, Lefty, you're just about to catch up with Righty—oh, Righty, turn it on! Turn it–

"GOOOOOO0DDDD MORNING WAWANAKWA!"

Man, there's Chris, interrupting Righty just as things were getting really hot. Blah blah blah something about rain, arts and crafts, mess hall—who cares? It's an hour or so away. I have time to grab a shower and make Lefty, Righty, my hair, and this beautiful beautiful bod shine and glimmer like the magnificent stars they are.


There is nothing like an hour in the shower to leave you feeling your best. I guess that's true even if you're ugly. Although the hot water conked out at about the fifty-minute mark. Not cool, Total Drama. Not cool at all. And the rain! If I didn't bring an umbrella, my hair would look horrible! Hairspray is like the greatest invention ever. Well, besides mass telecommunications, because without those how would the Chaz get his image out to all of his adoring fans? But hairspray definitely helps the Chaz look his Chazziest. Love you hairspray!

Now let's take a look at what's going on in the mess hall today. Sticks, glue, glitter, crayons—guh. It's like kindergarten threw up, only worse. Even Beth couldn't make this more horrible. Oh, and here comes Chris now. Probably gonna say something lame about the so-called challenge in front of us. Whatever.

"Because of the rain, normal camp activities are cancelled," Chris warbles. "Instead, we'll be having..."

I tune Chris out and focus on the cleft in his chin. It looks just like a butt. Does he know that he has a butt where his chin should be? Probably not, but if I was him I'd be embarrassed to go outside, never mind be on TV. I mean, seriously, he has a buttchin! Nobody looks good with a buttchin. Especially not guys with permastubble all around their buttchin. I'd be disgusted if my butt looked like that, never mind my face. It takes courage to go around looking like that. Or probably stupidity.

"...so, whomever makes the best-looking art and or craft wins the contest for their team. Everybody copacetic? Good! Begin! You have five hours!"

Wow, five hours of this. Lame. And the best-looking art or craft? Please, that's even lamer. Why not just hand in a picture of me instead? That'd win hands down.

...

...

...wait a sec...


After about an hour, popsicle stick Chaz is starting to look pretty good. I wipe the sweat from my forehead and look around the room. Everybody else is doing boring stuff. Ingrid is working on some sort of sash, like she's an emperor or something. It's orange, ew. Orange doesn't go with many colors, and with her skin tone? Not a good idea. What is she trying to be, a construction worker? A member
of a road crew? Show her solidarity with convicts? And Nazz isn't doing too well either, what with her attempt at painting—what is that again? It's tough to tell what with the horrible color composition, erratic brushstrokes, and complete lack of any artistic talent. Marlowe's thing isn't much good either—what is it, a box with some rubber bands on it? Is she honestly trying to make a musical instrument out of trash? I'd expect that for her clothes with how she dresses, but making an instrument is lower than I thought she'd sink. Bravo, Marlowe, you've disappointed everyone again. And Steve, who stole the spotlight from Ruby who stole the spotlight from me yesterday is building a—what is that? Glitter everywhere, random assortments of popsicle sticks and glue, occasional patches of duct tape? This is a trainwreck in more ways than one. No seriously, it looks like an attempt at something completely horrifying. Which it is, in part because of how horrible it looks. Finally, Elise is working on a painting with its back to me, but if she's anything like Nazz we have this game in the bag.

Well, maybe. Number Two is making—is that a plane? It's a bit too large to be a model, but too small to be an actual plane. Or does he just want to fly? Either way, this is not going to impress the judges. Maybe. Okay so it will. But not as much as my Chaz head! And Triana isn't doing much either, just making macaroni art. Yeah, this isn't even kindergarten, it's preschool. There's no galleries for pasta art. Wendy is whittling, because apparently we entered the hillbilly zone. And she isn't even whittling a picture of me. It's a carving of a couple of kids, one of them wearing a stupid hat. Gandhi is messing around with paint and glue and who knows what, and he's managed to get a snow globe stuck to his elbow and half the cafeteria shoved up his nose. Obviously his idol is John Belushi. Boris is also working on something: a shoddy ink drawing, colored in with markers. While the precision suggests that it was done by an adult, the simple lines and lack of detail suggest it was done by a nine-year-old, or possibly an animator working on a strict budget. And Rusty is the most incompetent of all, what with his inability to weave a basket. Even jocks can do that correctly.

It's all going to be up to the Chaz to save us from failure with my popsicle-stick bust. It's too bad I don't have more time, or I could get the perfection of my entire body into this. Oh well. Back to work on making the most spectacular work of art ever created—aside from myself, of course.

After another hour and a half, my face is almost perfect. I just have to get the eyebrows to look exactly right. I would paint it, but they don't have any wood stain, so my head's just going to have to be a study in light brown tones. Doesn't matter anyway, the Chaz looks great even when I'm just made of popsicle sticks. And to top it all off, nobody has done anything as good as my Chaz head. Elise is still busy painting, Ingrid's sash makes her look like a crossing guard, Nazz can't paint at all, Marlowe's box thing just sounds like stretched rubber bands and looks like a box, and Steve's horrifying thing is even more super horrifying. Boris finished working on his drawing of him dropping a rock on what was probably supposed to be a moose and a squirrel a while ago, Number Two is putting the finishing touches on his plane, Triana's macaroni art is still made of pasta. Wendy has finished whittling her picture of two kids who are nowhere near as good-looking as the Chaz, and Rusty still hasn't made a decent basket. Gandhi has given up on his whatever it is and is running around the mess hall like a hyperactive child, getting in everyone's way.

Suddenly, Gandhi trips over one of Rusty's baskets and slams into one of the plane's wheels. This jolts the plane, and Number Two stumbles, jostling the engine. The plane roars to life and eases forward. It collides with a table with a bucket of paint on the edge. The paint can tips over and splatters onto the whirling propeller, which sends paint flying everywhere around the room, including onto my clothes.

"Aw, man!" I say in a studly manner. Everyone else around me is screaming, but I don't know what the big deal is. Sure, their clothes and their artwork are ruined, but come on! That's nothing compared to me having one of my sports coats ruined. The Chaz does not like looking sloppy in front of everyone, and he super doesn't like looking sloppy on television. Now everyone is
gonna remember that time I got paint on my coat, and worst of all, this is the second time this has happened to me! What is up with paint and my clothes?

The plane rocks back and forth as it makes its way between the two tables. Numbuh Two races after it and tries to climb aboard as the plane fights to buck him off. The plane continues to approach, speeding up as it makes its way towards me until the propellers of the plane collide with my head.
The Rain Campfire Ceremony

My head is turned into sawdust before my very eyes. Number Two manages to switch off the plane, but it's too late. The damage is done.

"NOOOOO!" I scream. "NOT MY HEAD! NOT MY BEAUTIFUL, BEAUTIFUL HEAD!"

Ingrid wipes paint off of her eyes. "You know, the rest of us had our projects ruined too," she says sourly.

"Yes, but they weren't as Chaztastic as mine!" I exclaim, distraught. "I can't believe you did this!" I say to Number Two.

"Hey, don't blame me!" Number Two says. "Blame Captain Clumsy over there."

Gandhi is staring at us, open-mouthed. He shuts his mouth and says "I tripped over a basket! If anyone's to blame here, it's Rusty."

"Hey, you were running around like one of those tiny Mexican dogs!" Rusty defends himself. "I didn't tell you to trip into a plane!"

"WHO! DID! THIS!"

Everyone in the building turns around and sees Chef staring at us, furious. "WHO! IS! RESPONSIBLE! FOR THE DESTRUCTION! OF MY MESS HALL!" he asks. Almost everybody points at Gandhi.

Chef marches up to Gandhi. "Son, do you know how much trouble you're in?" he asks.

"Well, I–"

"LOTS!" Chef announces. "THE ANSWER IS LOTS! YOU are going to CLEAN UP this ENTIRE MESS!"

"Whoa, what happened here?" Chris says, walking in. "It's like–WHAT THE FUCK IS THAT!"

Chris points at Steve's disturbing sculpture.

"Oh. Um, it's uh–"

"Don't care, it's creepy. Why's the mess hall messed up?" Chris asks.

"Gandhi fell into Numbuh Two's plane and caused a huge mess," Nazz says. Everyone looks at her oddly. "Well that's what happened, I thought."

"It pretty much is," Number Two says.

Chris frowns. "Plane?" he asks. "Okay, nevermind. Gandhi, for screwing up the competition, your team automatically forfeits, and the Mad Scientists win."

"AND!" Chef yells. "YOU WILL CLEAN THIS PLACE UP!"

"Yeah, sure, that too," Chris says. "Bumbling Moose, figure out who you're gonna vote off. I'm gonna get back to thinking up ways to make your lives miserable."
Chris walks out of the mess hall. The rest of us follow. Except for Gandhi, who gets held back by Chef. I need a shower. And a change of clothes. Hopefully that will help get my Chazziness back.

I have to wait for a shower. That's totally unfair. The Chaz deserves first dibs on looking his fabulous Chazzy best at all times, people! He shouldn't have to stand in line behind guys like Number Two and Steve! Especially not for a shower!

And hopefully the hot water wouldn't run out this time. Last time when it did that was totally lame. Not Chaztastic at all. Oh well. I climb into the shower and turn it on. The water is still piping hot, perfect for opening my pores. I let the water wash over me and relax. All I have to do is figure out who to vote off tonight. The Chaz is on a roll!

Now let's see...Boris is a short, bald, creepy weirdo with a strange accent. He's totally going to pull a triple cross at some point. He may be ugly, but he's entertaining. So he's in the game.

Rusty. Bald, creepy, paranoid. Doesn't trust anybody, like at all. Blathers on about weird conspiracy theories that make no sense whatsoever and often rely on future Mongolians, so boo, but also adds that weirdo survivalist who trusts no one vibe to the show, so yay. Also he'll probably be betrayed by Boris, which everyone but him will see coming, so that'll be funny. He's still in.

Number Two. Barely says anything, makes bad puns sometimes, made the Chaz wait for a shower, built a weird plane that destroyed the Chaz's head! Not cool at all! All he has going for him is the fact that his name is stupid! And so is he, so, he's on his way out. Maybe.

Wendy. From Hicksville, Oregon. Also gives off the same crazy survivalist vibe as Rusty. But, you know, with a softer edge. Funny, attractive, likable, but with teeth. She's a favorite on the show, so she's stealing the Chaz's spotlight, but she's also one of the more interesting players simply as a contrast to everyone else, so she stays.


The Chaz. He's the Chaz. So totally gonna win this game just because everyone loves to see the Chaz win.

And Gandhi. Hyperactive, crazy, stupid, and prone to weird outbursts. He's clearly the comic relief of the team. He'll go down soon enough, but he's adding a little levity and augmenting the Chaz's ability to make anything worth watching. He's staying on.

So the choices are boring guy with dumb name and boring girl with dumb style. Well, boring guy did get that thing with Ruby and Andy to happen, and that gave the Chaz the spotlight for forever. It was awesome. So, I guess boring guy stays, boo. But boring girl leaves, yay! And the Chaz continues to be awesome.

Ugh, dinnertime. Like the worst time of the day around here. Chef serves us indigestible slop, and the Chaz does not stomach horrible food. Especially since I need to eat a balanced diet. If I get too many carbs, my pores gape wide open, and if I get too little, my hair loses its sheen. And it's impossible to tell what goes into the food he cooks anyway. The Chaz has had to work extra hard to keep himself looking fantastic under these conditions. Well, as fantastic as the Chaz usually looks. When the Chaz isn't looking fantastic, he still looks fantastic. But the Chaz has had to put in more effort than usual. Which is something that can't be said about Chef. I mean, hot pink? On him? Not a good match. Also those dresses he wears totally don't fit his figure. He needs something with a wider
chest, a slimmer waist, sleeves with ruffles, and maybe a big poofy ending to disguise those mannish hips. And it should be yellow. His skin tone totally goes well with yellow, which is pretty much the only good thing you can say about his normal clothes. They're color-coordinated, at least. I mean, totally frumpy and lame, but color-coordinated.

Also the man needs either braces or a false tooth. That gap in the middle? Not doing much for his looks. He's good on the whole buff body thing, but he could use a bit of hair. Maybe a wig would help. And the mustache totally doesn't work for him. He needs to shave it. Permanently. All told, he really doesn't have much going for him. He needs to update his look. Or backdate his look. Or get a look that doesn't scream 'I have no sense of fashion, hairstyle, or good grooming!' The Chaz might be able to help, but I dunno, this guy's pretty far gone. There's no way he'll ever get close to the Chaz. But maybe he's accepted that he's amazingly unChazzy and decided to go with it, to which I say good for you, Chef! Accept that the Chaz is fabulous, and keep the cameras on him!

And Chef should never wear a thong. He just doesn't have the crotch to pull it off.

Finally, the campfire. We get food that doesn't completely suck. Not a fan of having to put it on sticks, but whatever. I'll take what I can get. Although it always involves Chris talking. For like, forever. Like he thinks he's the most interesting thing on the planet. There's no way he can think that when he's standing across from me, but whatevs. The Chaz will put up with it.

"Welcome, Bumbling Moose, to the..."

Gah, he's so boring! That butchin is more interesting than he is! Wait, is it moving? Is the butt on his chin moving while he talks? That is hilarious! 'Hello, I'm a butt. Look at me be a butt. Words are coming out of me, and they sound like poop, because I am a butt. Butt butt butt. I'm just repeating the word butt and it's already more interesting than Chris, although not as interesting as Chaz, who is fantastic. I love you Chaz! I love you so much! I love you so much that I've decided to give you the money and spend the rest of the show's run just focusing on you you you! And the show'll be super popular and be renewed for like ten years and you'll make oodles of money and have a bunch of endorsements and everyone will want to be you even more than they already do! Chaz, you're so fantastic and amazing and fabulous, I just wanna tell you everything you've ever wanted to hear, for forever! Chaz, why is the guy I'm attached to hosting this show? It's obvious that you're so much better than him!' Why thank you, butchin. I reach up and grab a hot dog thrown at me out of the air. That's very kind of you to say. 'And it's all true, Chaz! All very, very true! You're the one everyone loves and the one who deserves to have everything handed to him on a silver platter because of how Chaztastic you are!' Oh, butchin, you're too kind. Well, maybe not. 'No, definitely not! If anything, I'm underestimating your greatiness! Chaz is great! Chaz is great! Ch–'

"Say whaaaaaaaaat?"

"Say you're going into the cannon, Gandhi!" Chris says happily.

"Say whaaa—" Gandhi starts to say.

"Yeah that meme's dead," Chris says flatly. "Dead. And buried. Now up with you into the cannon."

Gandhi loads himself into the cannon. Chris turns to face us.

"So, the Bumbling Moose lose another competition and another player," he says. "The game is getting more and..."

'Chaz is great! Up with the Chaz! Chaz is great! Up with the Chaz! Chaz forever, Chaz forever,
Voting Breakdown:

Gandhi: Rusty Shackleford
Chaz Monerainian: Triana Orpheus
Triana Orpheus: Gandhi
Wendy Corduroy: Gandhi
Numbuh Two: Gandhi
Rusty Shackleford: Gandhi
Boris Badenov: Wendy Corduroy

Final tally of votes received:

Gandhi: 4 (eliminated)
Wendy Corduroy: 1
Triana Orpheus: 1
Rusty Shackleford: 1
"Attention campers, attention campers, it's time to wake up and get down to the mess hall!"

Chris's morning announcement ripped through the air like a knife, awakening me and several others in our cabin. I looked up at the clock and groaned. 6:30. Who starts their day at 6:30? I didn't know, but I honestly wasn't enthused about getting up this early. I never like to wake up anyway, but beginning the day this early in the summer was just horrid.

Wendy groaned and scratched her side as she rolled out of bed, threw on her clothes, ran a brush through her hair, buried it under her hat, and stomped off to breakfast. I put on my makeup and my regular clothes and followed her. Things had gotten rocky between us since Ruby left. It wasn't until Ruby was gone that I started to realize how important she was to everything functioning properly in our cabin. Ruby got me in a way most other people at this camp didn't. It was probably the goth thing, but it helped that Ruby was so optimistic and kind. She formed a good counterpoint to my cynicism, and she helped bridge the gap between me and Wendy.

But now that gap was widening. Without Ruby to smooth things out, the little differences between us were becoming bigger. Like how Wendy wanted me to just be a normal teenage girl. Yeah, that'll happen. When your father calls himself a necromancer 'because it sounds cooler than magician,' your stepfather is basically your father but more competent, and your mother is a sorceress--yeah. Normal isn't really in the picture. And it's definitely not in the picture when your dad turns your closet into a portal to the netherworld.

I walked into the cafeteria. Immediately, I realized something was different. Not just the fact that nobody was eating— with the stuff Chef cooks, that's not exactly a bad decision. But the fact that there was nothing to eat, that was surprising. Chris and Chef were standing by the kitchen, watching as everyone else wandered in. I shrugged and took a seat by myself, away from pretty much everyone on either team.

Eventually, everyone had entered the mess hall. It was then that Chris chose to start speaking.

"Morning, campers!" he said cheerily. "Now, I suppose you're wondering why we called you all here, and why there's no food."

Nobody played along by responding. Chris frowned.

"Well, anyway," he continued, "there's a simple reason. Part one of today's challenge is to last until noon without eating anything."

Chris stopped and stood there, smiling. He waited for a few seconds.

"Well, have fun!" he said cheerily. Chris left the building while Chef stayed behind to keep watch over us.

Great. Five hours with no friends and nothing to do but think. Sometimes I really wish Ruby hadn't voted herself off.

It's about ten o'clock, and Wendy is so focused on ignoring me that she's decided to cross the lines and started to talk to the girls on the other team. Because of course they're gonna be so much more normal than I am. What is with her, anyway? I mean, sure, we haven't been getting along as well since Ruby left. Or getting along at all. But still, they're on the other side. We used to be almost
friends, but we've been basically at each others throats for the past day and a half. I can't help but
wonder what this is all about.

I mean, I'm not that weird. I go to public school, I have a boyfriend, I'm basically your average
teenage girl. With a necromancer father. And a magician stepfather. And an sorceress mother. And
an ex-boyfriend that's been cloned several times. And magic powers.

So okay, maybe it's the weirdness. But that doesn't seem quite right. When people are confronted
with weird, they usually react in one of three ways: they run away, they shrug it off, or they dive
right in. Wendy isn't doing any of these. Her reaction seems more like denial combined with trying to
push away from me. And I don't get why. Usually when people are in denial, they don't recognize it,
but this seems to be Wendy's intended reaction. Like she knows there's weirdness going on and is
trying to avoid it without running from it. Like she's trying to make it run away instead. The weird,
that is.

God, I wish Raven was here. He always knows the right thing to say. Also, he's fucking beautiful.
And those abs, god!

The Outrider–my stepfather–doesn't really seem to approve of him. Not sure why, since Raven's
always been respectful to him. And Raven seems to like my stepfather. But maybe it's the adjustment
he's had to make. I mean, I lived with my father until recently. And sure, I don't regret taking The
Master's advice and pursuing my magical powers. And he seems to want to be a good parent. But
still, he's had to go from living with my mom to living with my mom and me, and it's gotta be weird
to gain a teenage daughter suddenly.

I admit it. I kinda miss my dad. Sure he could be embarrassing and overprotective, like when he
yelled that I was a virgin at that Christmas party or when he tried to give me the Talk. But he did his
best to raise me as a single father, and I don't think he messed up too much. And let's face it, there's a
reason that he won custody, and I suspect it rhymes with 'Mom didn't want me.' And he did,
obviously.

It's weird. I know I made the right choice, that I always kinda wanted to be a sorceress. And I know
that for all he loves me, my dad wouldn't do a good job teaching me. But still, I miss him. I miss
home. Although last I heard, home burned down and the Venture boys moved to New York.

Still, I can't help but wonder why Wendy is pulling away from me. And why Ruby leaving has
impacted us so much. And if there's anything I can do to change it. Or if I even want to.

At precisely noon, Chris strolled into the room. He stood at the center of the room and cleared his
throat.

"So, you're all probably pretty hungry by now, right?" Some people agreed with him. "Well that's
good, because here's today's challenge: an eating contest!" He let us murmur among ourselves.
"Unlike past contests, this one isn't going to involve disgusting food. Instead, we've gotten a bunch
of roasted chicken together--all white meat--and we're going to see which team can eat more. Which
ever team eats the greater amount of roasted chicken is the one that wins. We've cut it into bite-size
pieces and put a pound each on every plate. In order to ensure an entertaining matchup, everyone has
15 minutes, maximum, and can tap out at any time if they get full. No silverware, no napkins, just
use your hands to fill your mouths. Finally, we'll be lining up one person from each team against a
person from the other team for each matchup because that's better TV. Any questions?"

Elise raised her hand.
"Yes, Elise?" Chris asked.

"They have six people and we have five," she said. "Doesn't that give them an advantage?"

Chris stroked his chin. "Hmm, so it does," he concluded. "I'll tell you what: you get to choose any member of the Moose and remove them from play. Who are you taking?"

"Numbuh Two," Ingrid said quickly. When her teammates looked at her, she shrugged and said "what, he's a teenage boy." Her teammates recognized that this was a good choice and nodded.

"So!" Chris drew our attention back to him. "You all have ten minutes to decide what order you're going in. And Numbuh Two, you're not getting anything to eat until dinner. Because that amuses me." Numbuh Two slumped. "Now, choose your arrangement!"

I got into a huddle with Rusty, Boris, Chaz, and Wendy.

"So, how should we do this?" Boris asked.

"I think we should put the hungriest person last," I said. "More room for food."

Chaz smirked. "Whatever, people, the Chaz is not going to look like a pig on live television. He's gonna eat normally."

Wendy rolled her eyes. "Put him near the end. That way he'll eat more."

"Okay, fine," Boris said. "I'll go second; I'm used to eating bad food, but I'm not used to eating a lot." We looked at him oddly. "Don't vacation in Pottsylvania, kids."

Rusty scratched his head nervously. "I, uh, I'm good at eating fast. I just, uh--I had some bad experiences."

"Would you mind going last?" I asked. "As an ace in the hole?"

Rusty nodded.

"I'm not that hungry," I said. "I guess I'll go third and Chaz'll go fourth?"

"That leaves Wendy to go first," Boris said. "Are you up for it?"

Wendy shrugged. "My family does a turkey-eating contest every Thanksgiving to see who can pack away the most food. So yeah, I'm ready to go."

"Good," Boris said. "So you go first, I go second, Triana goes third, Chaz goes fourth, and Rusty goes last. Everyone clear?"

We nodded.

"Let's do this," Rusty said determinedly. We broke the huddle and sat down at a table. The other team was still discussing their strategy.

A few minutes later, they had finished up. Chris beckoned them to a small table he and Chef had brought out. A plate of chicken sat on each side.

"These platters each contain one pound of chicken," Chris said. "Whomever eats the most wins this round, but remember, it's not who wins more rounds; it's which team eats the most chicken overall. Now get ready...get set...go!"
Wendy dove into her plate with reckless abandon while Steve picked at his food and ate it at a much slower pace. He groaned as he chewed and swallowed, while Wendy plowed through the first platter and quickly finished it off. Chef set another plate in front of her, and she continued to rip through the chicken while Steve slowly continued to eat his meat. Soon, Wendy was on her third plate, and when the bell went off to signal the end of the round she had nearly polished it off while Steve was perhaps halfway through his first plate.

"Chef, if you would?" Chris asked. Chef picked up the plates and put them on two scales set to counteract the weight of the dishes. Soon, they gave their readouts: Wendy had only a tenth of a pound of chicken left on her plate, while Steve had eaten half a pound. Groaning, Steve heaved himself back to his side.

"Remember, it has to stay down to count!" Chris said.

Steve groaned. "I've had a stomachache all day!" he complained.

"Tough!" Chris replied. "Anyway, Wendy, good job eating two point nine pounds of chicken. Steve, you only downed half a pound. Your team trails by almost two and a half pounds thanks to your pitiful performance. Now, who's up next?"

Boris walked up to the table and sat down across from Nazz. Chef set full plates of chicken in front of them and got ready to start the timer.

"Get ready...get set...go!" Chris announced. Boris tore into his chicken almost as fast as Wendy had. Nazz just stared at her plate.

"You can do this," Nazz muttered to herself. "C'mon. Being nine wasn't so bad. And you could do it again. It's just one meal. One meal. Don't worry about it. You can be nine again. You can put up with all that again. C'mon. Do it. Forget what you've been doing the past eight years. Leave it behind. Do it. Go ahead."

Boris finished his first plate. Chef set a new one down in front of him.

"Okay," Nazz said shakily. "I can do this. It wasn't so bad to be nine."

Nazz grabbed a piece of chicken, put it in her mouth, chewed, and swallowed. Her lips parted and she grinned in a manner all too reminiscent of an alligator.

Then she started biting at her food like it was a gazelle that had carelessly leapt into her river.

Boris paused, midway through his second plate, and his jaw dropped as Nazz devoured the entire plate. Chef put another one in front of her and she leapt on this one as well. Boris slowly began to eat again, but his concentration was fixed on Nazz, who went through plate after plate until the timer rang and Chef pulled the plate away from her. Nazz strained for the last plate, but soon the feeding frenzy passed, and she let out an enormous belch.

"...well," Chris said. "That was unexpected. Kudos to Nazz for eating, what was it, Chef?"

"Over ten pounds of meat," Chef said, shellshocked.

"Ten pounds! Nicely done, Nazz!" Chris exclaimed. Chef put her plate on the scale, and it read as weighing 0.3 pounds. "Oh, ten point seven!" Chris was even more impressed by this. "But, since you kept eating after the bell rang, we're gonna have to dock you half a pound. Still, that's ten point two pounds for you. And Boris?"
Chef put the plate on the scale. It weighed in at a tenth of a pound.

"Yep, one point nine pounds for Boris," Chris said. "That gives the Bumbling Moose a total of four point eight pounds of chicken eaten. But with Nazz's monster contribution, the Mad Scientists are now in the lead, with ten point seven pounds eaten. In other words, the Bumbling Moose now have three competitors that have to outeat their competition by six pounds! And next up, we'll see..."

I swallowed heavily and approached the table. Marlowe sat down across from me.

"Marlowe and Triana!" Chris announced.

Marlowe smiled at me. I smiled back nervously. Two plates of chicken were set in front of us.

"Get ready...get set...go!" Chris said.


And there's the bell. Chew, swallow.

"Alright, this looks like a closer one, but we'll just see what the scales say!" Chris said excitedly.

I staggered away from the table. Chaz took my place. Lined up across from him was Ingrid.

"And...go!" Chris announced. Ingrid went after the chicken slower than pretty much anyone besides Steve. Chaz, meanwhile, carefully ate one piece at a time. By the time the bell rang, Chaz wasn't even halfway through his plate while Ingrid had gotten partway into her second.

"Chef?" Chris asked. Chef weighed the plates. Chaz's plate weighed 0.6 pounds. Ingrid's plate weighed 0.7.

"Well, that's another win for the Mad Scientists!" Chris crowed. "And that brings their total to thirteen point eight pounds devoured! The Bumbling Moose are way behind, having only eaten six point seven pounds. To win, they'd need to more than double the total amount they've eaten. This one is just about in the books, and Nazz is going to be the champion for the Mad Scientists!"

Nazz had passed out while I was still eating, done in by the heavy meal. Now it was down to Rusty. I hoped he wasn't lying about eating fast. Although even if he wasn't he'd pretty much have to match Nazz's effort if we were to win.

Rusty sat down across from Elise. Elise smirked at him.

"You're going down, skinny," she said.

Rusty stared her down from behind his sunglasses. "Like in the woods?" he asked.
Elise's smirk turned into a scowl. Chef put plates in front of them. Rusty exhaled deeply.

"Final round," Chris said. "It all comes down to this. Can Rusty bring his team back from the brink? Can Elise hold him off? Is this getting really, really disgusting?"

Chris paused.

"Go."

Rusty ran his tongue over his teeth and started grabbing chunks of chicken and throwing them into his mouth, barely stopping to chew. He ripped through his first plate and was onto his second in practically no time. Elise growled and doubled her efforts, but Rusty kept up his rhythm. He moved on to another plate. And another. Elise finished her first plate and was handed a second, but Rusty was still going hard. He finished his fourth plate and moved on to his fifth. Then his sixth. Then his seventh. Elise finished her second plate and looked a bit sick as Rusty moved on to his eighth platter of chicken. Without slowing down, Rusty continued to eat, while Elise swallowed a few bites and then pushed her plate away. Chef grabbed the plate and put it on the scale. It was almost full.

"Elise adds two point one pounds to her team's total!" Chris announced. "The Mad Scientists finish with a final score of fifteen point nine pounds. But Rusty is chewing through their lead. The question is, can he beat the clock before his stomach ruptures?"

Rusty finished off his eighth plate and moved on to his ninth. I did some subtraction in my head. He'd need to finish off this ninth plate and some of a tenth just to tie. It was an impressive effort, but it was probably going to be wasted.

Rusty finished off his ninth plate. There was only a minute left on the clock. Rusty started shoveling faster, and managed to make progress on his ninth pound of chicken. When the bell rang, he was about two-thirds of the way through it.

Chef took the plate and placed it on the scale. 0.3.

"Rusty has just eaten nine point seven pounds of chicken!" Chris said excitedly. Rusty made his way back to us unsteadily. "That brings the Bumbling Moose's total poundage up over sixteen pounds! Sorry, Mad Scientists, but you lose!"

Our team cheered joyfully. As we celebrated, I caught Wendy's eye, and she smiled at me. Maybe things would work out between us after all.
"It's the only way," Nazz said.

"Are you sure?" Marlowe asked. "I mean, Elise did side with Snidely. Are you sure we shouldn't vote her off instead?"

"We can do that after the merge," Nazz said.

"But that could be tomorrow," Ingrid argued. "And Steve is a good guy. He just has a stomach bug or something."

"But what if it's not tomorrow?" Nazz asked. "Then we've gotten rid of our strongest competitor."

She sighed. "Look, I don't like Elise any more than you do. But we need her up until the merge. After that, she's gone. But she's super useful."

"Name me one challenge she's won," Ingrid said.

"I hate to agree with Nazz—not because I don't like agreeing with you, although I—" Marlowe sighed.

"Let me start over. Nazz is right. Steve may have helped us with the musical episode, but Elise is probably the only thing that's kept us all from being eliminated pre-merge. Even if she did join up with Snidely and try to take us down, we need her. We need her more than Steve."

"Yeah, but—" Ingrid started to say.

"Thanks, Marlowe," Nazz said. "And I like Steve too, but right now Elise is more important for the team."

"Yeah, I don't like it any more than you do, but we have to keep Elise on," Marlowe said.

"It's him or us," Nazz added.

Ingrid sighed. "Fine," she said. "We'll take down Steve."

Ingrid exited the cabin and headed for the fire pit. Along the way, she passed Steve. Steve waved to her, but she avoided his eyes and didn't wave back. As she passed him, Steve's eyes widened and tears sprang to his eyes, although he quickly covered up his reaction with a scowl.

Confessional

"I can't believe it," Steve said. "First Elise uses me as a patsy, now Ingrid's lied to me about how I was worth something." His shoulders shook. Whether he was laughing or crying was hard to tell. "God, is everybody gonna lie to me for their own purposes?"

Confessional

"I can't believe it," Ingrid said. "Are we really gonna vote off Steve just because Elise is more useful to us? It seems kinda wrong. Pragmatic, maybe, but selling out Steve? He doesn't deserve this."

Confessional
Steve clutched his knees to his chest. "They're really gonna do it, aren't they?" he whispered. "They're gonna get rid of Steve. They planned it all along."

Confessional

"I can't believe it," Elise said. "They're really gonna vote out Steve over me, aren't they. No loyalty from these people. Nazz, I knew she was airheaded, but this is just a jerk move. And I know jerk moves."

Elise sighed. "Whatever," she said. "I'm staying on, I guess. But I'm gonna vote against Nazz. She's just been leeching off of Ingrid's brains anyway."

Confessional

Steve rocked on the floor of the confessional in the fetal position.

"It's not different at all, is it Steve?"

Steve choked. He gasped for air. He coughed heavily.

"It's not different at all, is it Steve?"

Steve laughed raggedly. He singsonged the next words out of his mouth.

"It's not different at all, is it? Steve? Is it? Steve? Is it?"

Confessional

Rusty entered the confessional. He lit a cigarette and looked directly at the camera.

"Sorry, Bill, I had to," he said.

He took a deep drag off of his cigarette and exhaled.

Confessional

Steve sang softly.

"It's a lie...it's a lie...I won't get suckered this time...it's a lie...it's a lie...no smile lives in my eyes..."

Steve sobbed but continued to sing.

"They said that they liked me. That they were my friends. But we knew when push came to shove I'd get the short end."

Steve laughed mirthlessly.

"They needed me until they pushed me away. And I knew the rules of the contest, that you can't be kind in this game."

Steve laughed harder and sang through the laughs.

"It's a liE! It'S a Lie! There's NO smile BEhind THESe EyeS!"
He began to choke on his laughter.

"It's a LIE! It's a LIE!"

His laughs died off.

"I GOT SUCKERED THIS TIME!"

Steve lay on the dirty floor of the outhouse and stared at the ceiling.

"And every time," he whispered.

---

Confessional

Ingrid rested her chin on her fist and her elbow on her knee as she thought something over. She stayed in this position for a good while as the wheels turned in her head until she let out a sigh.

"No," she said. "I can't do it."

She bit her lip.

"I can't do it. I can't vote off Steve. He's a good guy, and he didn't do anything worthy of being eliminated. I'm just gonna cast my vote for Elise and hope for the best."

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Confessional

"IT'S NOT DIFFERENT AT ALL, IS IT, STEVE?"

"IT'S NOT DIFFERENT AT ALL, IS IT, STEVE?"

"IT'S NOT DIFFERENT AT ALL, IS IT, STEVE?"

"IT'S NOT DIFFERENT AT ALL, IS IT, STEVE?"

"IT'S NOT DIFFERENT AT ALL, IS IT, STEVE?"

"IT'S NOT DIFFERENT AT ALL, IS IT, STEVE?"

"IT'S NOT DIFFERENT AT ALL, IS IT, STEVE?"

---

By the time the campfire ceremony rolled around, Steve had completed his mental breakdown. He looked completely calm. Chris strolled up with a huge grin on his face and a plate with four hot dogs on it.

"So, is anybody still hungry?" he asked with a huge smile on his face. Everyone groaned.

"Well too bad," he said smarmily. "Remember how we made you get up to get a hot dog after you were all exhausted from the water challenge? Well, we're gonna make every one of you eat the hot dog you get. Don't worry, we cooked them first. If you don't finish shoving the weiner down your throat, you're out. Now, the question is, who goes first? It's a tough choice...ah, heck, who am I kidding, the first hot dog goes to Marlowe."

Marlowe got up, grabbed her hot dog, and casually ate it, finishing in a couple of minutes.
"Well, that's one person safe. Next one up is...Nazz!" Chris announced.

Nazz swallowed heavily, got up, and walked over to Chris. She took the hot dog and managed to choke it down over the course of a few minutes.

"Wow, impressive," Chris said sarcastically. "Almost as good as your performance this afternoon."

Nazz blushed, embarrassed.

"Now, the next hot dog goes to none other than our second-place competitor in the eating contest," Chris says. "It goes to...Elise!"

Elise got up, took the hot dog, and wolfed it down.

"Got a taste for weiners, do we?" Chris needled.

Elise smiled sweetly. "Maybe you should ask my husband about that," she suggested.

Chris smirked. "Two remain," he said. "Both of you ate the least of any competitors. Steve, you say you had a stomach bug. Ingrid, you just didn't eat as much as everyone else on your team. Granted, that's probably a virtue when compared with Nazz--" Nazz's blush deepened. "--but not so much when you're trying to win an eating contest. The fact that your team missed out on a win by only half a pound of food suggests that both of you could have avoided this if you had eaten just a little more, just a little faster. So, the question is, which of you has to eat a little more."

Chris paused for dramatic effect.

"Ingrid," he said. Ingrid didn't react. "That wasn't a statement, actually, I'm saying that you get a hot dog."

Ingrid bounded up to Chris, shaking with relief, and finished her hot dog in under a minute.

"Well, I guess that's all," Chris said. "And tomorrow, we dissolve the teams." Nazz blanched. "Oh, would that information have been useful earlier? So sorry." He turned to the camera and whispered "Not really." He turned back to Steve. "So, Steve, it's cannon time."

Steve walked over to the cannon. He hopped in, and Chris lit the fuse.

"Join us next time," Chris said. "when the teams merge, the Mad Scientists' former cabin becomes completely female, and we do an episode with a lot less eating and a lot more athleticism. Join us, on Total! Drama! Cartoon Multiverse!"

The cannon went off and Steve flew through the air with his lab coat on fire.

He didn't make a sound.

Voting Breakdown:

Nazz Van Bartonschmeer: Steve
Marlowe: Steve
Steve: Ingrid Third
Elise: Nazz Van Bartonschmeer
Ingrid Third: Elise

Final tally of votes received:
Steve: 2 (eliminated)
Nazz Van Bartenschmeer: 1
Elise: 1
Ingrid Third: 1
The Basketball Episode

Chris smiled at the camera as he stood on the end of the dock. "Last time, on Total Drama: Cartoon Multiverse," he said, "we saw everyone stuff their faces in an eating contest. While Nazz ate the most food, ultimately it was the Bumbling Moose who won after Rusty turned in the second best performance of the day. Yeah. I didn't know the skinny guy had it in him either. But he had it in him, and a lot more besides. And by a lot more, I mean chicken. Anyway, the Mad Scientists had to send somebody home, and after some debate they settled on Steve simply because they figured Elise would be more useful when more challenges came down the pipe. What they didn't know was that the teams were gonna merge in this episode--until I let it slip immediately after Steve was eliminated so that I could let them stew in their own guilt over getting rid of him. So, what's gonna happen next? I'll give you a tip. Off!" Chris stopped smiling and glared at the camera. "I know you're writing my dialogue," he said. "I'm gonna let that one slide, but you'd better not do many more of those. Got it?"

The camera moved up and down.

"Good!" Chris exclaimed cheerfully. Somebody threw him a basketball from off-camera, and he caught it and spun it on the tip of his left index finger. "Then let's just say, game on!"

9 o'clock.

I stare at the ceiling over my bunk.

Four guys in one side of the cabin. Again. We're told it's because they need the other room for storage. That's not fooling anybody. They just want to put us in close proximity to one another. It's what the government did with the Mansons. And the Partridge Family. It's horrifying what happens when you do that. And people love to watch a good trainwreck.

Breakfast. That's a good idea. It wasn't a good idea to eat so much yesterday. I just know that people think I'm a freak now.

Screw 'em.

It's shocking how useful that advice is. Somebody doesn't like you? Screw 'em. The government's spying on you? Screw 'em. Your son isn't exactly like you? Screw it, he's his own man. And that's okay, so long as he's a good one. And not working for los federales.

A lot of people don't get that. They've bought the lies. They think it's worse to be gay than it is to work for the government. Christ, my own father tried to pull that on me, he honestly thought I'd be happier thinking he was a federal agent than thinking he was gay. At least Redcorn's never tried to bullshit me. That's why I consider him my friend. Who cares if he's gay? He helps Nancy with her aches and pains, and that's all that matters.

I miss Nancy. And Joseph. And I'm not exactly sure how I ended up here. If I had to guess, I'd say that I was transported here for training by the invading Mongol armies of 2087 so that I'll be ready when my time comes. I don't know what musicals have to do with the future, though. That one was probably a plot by the CIA to brainwash everybody with catchy showtunes so that they won't realize the U.N. is controlling children's television programming. I'm on to you, Dora.

But first, I need to stop at the bathroom and have a smoke.
I have a cigarette, stare at the camera, and say nothing.


I take a seat at the end of a table next to Boris. We've become sort of friends. As much as we can be on an island where nobody can be trusted. At least Boris is honest about it. Everyone else pretends you can trust them.

I don't trust anybody but Nancy, and Joseph, and Hank, and Bill, and Boomhauer. Well, I trust the government to lie and cheat and cover things up. And that's why I trust Boris. Except he's not trying to control me. I think.

Today will be another test. Like every day here. They do a good job of mixing it up. First a test of truth-telling, then a test of stomach strength, then a test of sight followed by a test of endurance. It's hard to tell what today will be. Although if I had to guess, I'd say it would be a test of teamwork. Something to mess with us just because we're no longer on an official team but need to work together anyway.

Now who's gonna be on my team? The Mongols wouldn't want me to have a big advantage, so Elise is out. And they wouldn't want somebody who blindly follows a natural leader, so Nazz won't be on my team. That leaves eight others; I'm guessing Triana will be on the team, since we haven't talked much. Truth be told, she scares me a bit. So she'll definitely be with me so I'll know what it's like to work with scary people. Boris also, since I'll need an ally. And Numbuh Two is cynical about everything like me, so he'll probably be on my side. That leaves Chaz, Marlowe, and Ingrid. I know next to nothing about Marlowe, so she might be it. Ingrid and Numbuh Two have a connection. They're not going to be on the same side. That would make it too easy. Chaz would be hard to overcome.

So the lineup is going to be me, Numbuh Two, Boris, Triana, and Marlowe or Chaz. Chaz probably. Triana fills the role of person I haven't done much with. Chaz would be the one to hurt the team. So of course I'm gonna have to overcome him. Me, Boris, Chaz, Triana, Numbuh Two.

I finish my toast and slop. My stomach moans, and I know it'll run through me in an hour or so.

Time to hit the bathroom. Then a shower. Then the bathroom again.

"Once, you ride, a Mason," I sing to myself, "Vroom! Vroom! Nothing else cuts it."

The shower is one of the only places a man can sing. Of course, I never was much good at singing. Then again, neither are these kids who become internet sensations. But they're good stooges for the Department of the Interior. They suck in the kids with their angelic faces and computerized voices, and then just when everything seems hunky-dory, they start encouraging you to visit national parks. It's how the government takes our land. They just declare it a national park, and woosh! Suddenly you're paying for land you never wanted to pay for! And that you don't even own, because the government owns it and tells you what to do with it!
I finish washing and step out of the shower. I put my clothes on.

And here comes today's breakfast. Also possibly more chicken. But definitely today's breakfast.

Confessional

Another cigarette, another movement.

11 o'clock.

Chris has brought us to a basketball court. He is spinning a ball on his finger. He loses control, and the ball rolls away.

"Today, to celebrate the merge, we're going to play a team sport!" Chris says.

Called it.

"The sport, of basketball. Boys versus girls," Chris says.

"Hey, wait!" Boris says. "That's four on six!"

"It's a good tune," Triana says.

"Fair enough," Chris says. "How about, hmm, Triana, you join the boys."

Triana grimaces but nods.

"The winners of the match gets a gourmet dinner made by Chef." Everybody groans. "Trust me, he can cook. When we don't have him make you stuff that's barely edible. The losers go hungry."

I've survived worse.

"Now, I assume you all know the rules of street ball," Chris says. "No mugging the other players, make sure to dribble, don't break the rules everyone knows. Chef'll be your referee for the game. Chef?"

Chef blows a whistle. "Alright, maggots!" he yells. "First team to fifty wins! I want an exciting game! You got two minutes to figure out your strategy, and then you line up and play! Go, go, GO!"

The men and Triana gather on one side of the court. We huddle to talk shop.

"I'll guard Wendy," Triana says immediately.

"I've got Ingrid," Numbuh Two says.

"I'll be the center," I say, "since I'm the tallest."

"Power forward!" Chaz announces. We look at him, surprised. "The Chaz played youth basketball as a kid. I only stopped because there were too many things that could have ruined my perfect face."

Triana rolls her eyes. "So, Boris, what do you--"

"I will be the one who doesn't know how to play," Boris says.

I frown. This is going to be a disaster.
Chef blows his whistle, and I get to center court. Wendy faces off against me. I look to my sides; Ingrid is on Numbuh Two, but Nazz is on Triana. We'll have to switch coverages at some point.

The tip-off occurs, and I leap in the air and grab it. I look around and loft the ball to Numbuh Two, who's running down the court. Ingrid rips the ball out of the air and dribbles back towards us until Boris runs up, grabs the ball, and starts running the other way.

Without dribbling.

Chef's whistle goes off. "Girls' ball!" he says loudly. "Throw-in from center court!"

Marlowe walks over to the side of the court and takes the ball. Various girls move around, and Wendy cuts towards the inside. I follow her and only stop when I see the ball sail through the net and hear a whistle sound.

"Three points, girls!" Chef says.

Numbuh Two takes the ball and inbounds it to Chaz. Chaz dribbles but Elise runs up, takes the ball away, and tosses it to Wendy, who blows past me for an easy two-pointer. Our next sequence doesn't go any better, as when the ball is passed to Triana Nazz steps in front of it and takes it the other way, sinking a jumper over Numbuh Two.

I call a timeout. We gather together to try and formulate a plan.

"Okay, what are we doing wrong?" I ask.

"Firstly, the Chaz isn't getting enough looks," Chaz says. "Secondly, they each chose a player to match up against, which is why I'm constantly drawing Elise, you're drawing Wendy, etcetera. Thirdly, we're getting beaten in man coverage when we play defense. We should shift to a zone. Oh, and there's the minor fact that Boris isn't going to block anything at all and anything he shoots will get blocked easily."

I looked at him, surprised.

"Well I'm not just an incredibly pretty face, you know, " he says. "Although I am certainly that."

"Okay, whatever," Numbuh Two interrupts. "I'll take the part to the left of the key, Triana, you take the right. Rusty, guard around and in the key. Chaz, just--just keep being the Chaz or whatever."

I inbound the ball to Numbuh Two. He dribbles upcourt, keeping his eyes searching until he locks in on Chaz. He lofts a pass towards Chaz, who catches it and makes a two-pointer off the backboard. We're in the game again--that is, until our zone defense leaves Ingrid completely alone at the top of the three-point circle and she calmly drops in a three. Our next sequence, I inbound it to Triana, and the ball was passed around until I find it in my hands a couple of feet inside the three-point ring. I toss it up, hoping for a lucky break, and make the bucket. The girls come roaring back, but when Ingrid tries another three-pointer I manage to get in her face, and she clanks it off the rim. The rebound sails through the air and is caught by Elise, who drives up the key and makes a layup. The next possession we have, Triana tries to hurl it downcourt to Chaz off the toss and Elise brings it back. Her first shot is a miss, but she grabs the rebound, tries again, misses again, gets another rebound, and this time makes her attempt. We try to go downcourt again, and this time Numbuh Two manages to shake free of Ingrid until she trips him with a well-placed foot. This gets a whistle, and we inbound the ball to Chaz inside the arc, who knocks down another two-pointer. The girls bring the ball back upcourt, and this time Wendy stops outside the arc and nails a 3-pointer. Our next possession does not end well when a pass to Triana is bobbled and lands in Nazz's hands. Nazz
brings it into the key and is driving towards the basket when she suddenly passes it to the side to Elise, who gets another two points. We move the ball downcourt again, but Chaz misses his shot; when Marlowe tries to bring it back, however, Boris grabs the ball and quickly hurls it to Triana, who runs forward to grab it, manages to get it under control, and makes a shot from the side of the basket for two points. Unfortunately, the girls bring it right back and get a three-pointer from a wide open Ingrid.

"20 point break!" Chef yells. "Score is now 22-8. Leading scorer for the girls is Ingrid, with nine points. Leading scorer for the boys is Chaz, four points. Everybody gets five minutes off to regroup!"

"Well that sucked," Triana says flatly.

"We're only down fourteen points," I say, trying to keep our spirits up.

Chaz smirks. "Yeah, the Chaz is pretty much the best player on the court," he boasts. "You need to up your game. The Chaz can't do it all alone."

I sigh. "So, oh great genius, what should we do?" I ask.

Chaz's smile grows wider. "Numbuh Two, play tight defense on Ingrid. She cannot handle pressure. You force her to pass, you take away their three-point option, since she's not going to shoot well with you in her face. Rusty, give Wendy some space to drive, she's been winning on misdirection. If you try and trap her, you'll end up juked out of your pants, and trust me, nobody wants to see that. Triana, you're going to be on Nazz. Always. Nazz has been trying to cover you, and Wendy has been on Rusty, so they're playing straight man and they've chosen their assignments. You two are about evenly matched, so just take advantage when you see it. Also, try to run crossing patterns with me; one of us will get open. Now let's go win this one for the Chaz!"

Annoyingly enough, Chaz had some good points. It was time to see if his strategy would pan out.

Because we won the tip-off, the girls start with the ball. They inbound it and take it down the court. When Wendy charges me, I instinctively want to lunge at her, but I avoid doing so and let her come to me. She tries to spin around me, but I stop her. She tosses the ball to Marlowe, who puts the ball up. It sails over the backboard and out of bounds. Our ball.

I take the ball and inbound it to Triana. She heads downcourt and passes it to Chaz, who tosses it into the basket. The girls come right back, and this time Wendy passes the ball off to Elise, who hits a two-pointer while falling backwards to avoid Chaz's attempt at a block. Our next possession ends poorly when Ingrid takes the ball from Numbuh Two and gives it to Elise, who hits another two-pointer. The next time we have the ball, I run down the court. Triana's three-point attempt plonks off the top of the backboard, but I track it down and catch it at the three-point line. I force a desperation heave, and miraculously, it goes in. Sadly, on their next possession Nazz takes the ball right down the court and pops one in from the free-throw line. We try to get the ball to Chaz again, and Elise grabs it and takes it to the net on a layup. Our next attempt to feed Chaz works when he steamrolls into the key and tosses up an easy two-pointer. We close the gap even more when Triana steps in front of a pass intended for Nazz and takes it the other way, dropping it in off of the backboard. But the girls come right back. Wendy drives into the key and stops before she reaches me to take a quick shot that goes in easily. Then Nazz blocks Triana's shot, chases it down, and makes an easy layup.

We fight back. Chaz boxes out in the key, and we get the ball to him. Two points. Numbuh Two follows this up with a steal off of Ingrid which he tries to turn into a fast break. It almost works, but Marlowe comes over and swats at his shot. She doesn't block the shot, but it misses. However, she
hits him in the face while attempting the block, and Numbuh Two gets two foul shots. He sinks the first and intentionally misses the second, trying to get the ball to bounce directly to Chaz. It doesn't; it bounces to Wendy, who passes to Elise. Elise gets it down in our end, pauses, and then passes it back to Wendy, who puts up a shot. The shot bounces off the rim, directly to Nazz, who tosses it back to Wendy, who puts it through with her second attempt. The ball is inbounded to me on our next possession, and I take it downcourt, where Triana breaks open into the key. A quick pass later and we have another pair of points. The girls bring the ball back towards us, but I manage to get a steal off of Wendy when she gets distracted, and I throw the ball towards Triana. It's a bad pass, and Nazz fires the ball over to Wendy, who makes the shot while Boris tries to tackle her. This draws a foul, and Wendy sinks her shot. We get downcourt, but Numbuh Two tries to force a pass to Chaz, and Elise takes it back for an easy layup.

"40 point break!" Chef yells. "Score is now 41-22. Leading scorer for the girls is Elise, with fourteen points. Leading scorer for the boys is Chaz, ten points. Five minutes and then we finish this!"

"Wow, you guys are really bad at this," Chaz tells us.

"I hope you like going without dinner," Boris says back.

Chaz shrugs. "I'm the only one really doing anything out there. And you know it."

Triana groans. "Let's just finish this."

We get the ball for the final period. I pass it to Triana, who immediately has it stolen by Nazz, who passes it over to Wendy. Wendy makes a basket, and I pass it out to Numbuh Two this time. Numbuh Two tries to force a pass to Chaz, and Elise steals it and tosses the ball to Nazz. Nazz spins around Triana and puts the ball through the hoop. This time Numbuh Two passes it out to Triana, and we head down the court. I get a pass and start to dribble but lose the ball to Wendy, who takes the ball back and puts it in for another two points. Triana inbounds the ball to me, I pass it to Numbuh Two, he gets it to Chaz inside the arc, and Chaz gets two points. The girls come right back, and when Wendy gets open at the free-throw line Ingrid passes it to her. Wendy puts it in, and I head out of bounds to start our next possession. I inbound the ball to Chaz, and he heads down the court. Elise and Wendy double-team him. Elise steals the ball and throws it over Chaz's head, where Wendy grabs it and then puts it up. It bounces off the backboard, circles the rim, and pops out, but Marlowe is waiting. Marlowe grabs the ball and throws it up again, and it falls through the net.


Points Breakdown:

**Girls:**

Wendy Corduroy: 18 points
Elise: 14 points
Ingrid Third: 9 points
Nazz Van Bartonschmeer: 8 points
Marlowe: 2 points

**Boys:**

Chaz Monerainian: 12 points
Triana Orpheus: 6 points
Rusty Shackleford: 5 points
Numbuh Two: 1 point
Boris Badenov: 0 points

Final score:

Girls: 51 (won)
Boys: 24
The Basketball Campfire Ceremony

"Welcome to the cabin!" Nazz cheered. Wendy smiled. "Sorry we didn't get to welcome you yesterday, but now we can celebrate!"

"Thanks," Wendy said. "But look out for Triana. She doesn't like to celebrate anything at all."

A concerned look crossed Nazz's face. "Really?" she asked. "Why's that?"

Wendy shrugged. "I dunno. She's just been super moody ever since Ruby left."

"Well maybe she's--" Marlowe started to suggest.

"She's not," Wendy cut her off. "She's just bitter for some reason."

"Well that doesn't mean we can't all be friends," Nazz said hopefully.

Sorrow appeared in Wendy's eyes. "Yeah," she said softly. "It doesn't."

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Confessional

"Geez, what is with Triana?" Wendy complained. "We were getting along fine when Ruby was here. But now it's all mopiness and 'everybody I like leaves me.'" She scowled. "People leave every day. It's part of the game. Why be shocked when it happens?"

Ingrid walked into the cabin. "So, what'd I miss?" she asked.

"Oh, we're just celebrating getting a couple of new bunkmates!" Nazz said cheerily.

"And you're happy about the cabin getting crowded again why?" Ingrid questioned. She turned to Wendy and smiled. "Sorry, I'm just not used to sharing a bedroom with so many people. It's nice to meet you, I'm just--"

"Oh, I hear you," Wendy said quickly. "I have my own room at home, being the only girl and all. But my brothers, they share rooms and it's constantly noisy. And it was—an adjustment—sharing a room with everyone here."

Marlowe walked into the cabin. "Don't mind me," she said. "I'm just gonna go practice my bass." She smiled at Wendy. "Welcome to the cabin, it's nice to have you here."

"Thanks," Wendy said casually. "So, a musician huh?" she asked.

"Uh, yeah," Marlowe said, smiling. "We've seen each other around."

Wendy nodded. "Yeah. I dated a musician once."

"Lemme guess," Marlowe said. "Someone who thought he was hardcore but was really as soft as a puppy's fur?"

"Uh, yeah," Wendy said, surprised. "How did you know?"

Marlowe shrugged. "There are basically three types of musicians when it comes to teenage guys.
They're either trying too hard to be cool and have an edge, trying to pretend that they're sensitive
guys when really they just want to get into your pants, or they're nervous and shy but actually know
how to play."

"Okay, well, how'd you know he was the first kind?" Wendy asked.

"You didn't seem happy about dating him," Marlowe said. "So it was one of the first two."

"Both, actually," Wendy said.

Marlowe winced. "Ouch."

Confessional

"Suddenly I'm glad I don't date musicians," Ingrid said.

"So yeah, I'll see you around," Marlowe said. She left the cabin and walked over to the campfire
area. Nobody was using it since it was mid-afternoon and there was no ceremony planned for that
night. She sat down on a stump, pulled her bass out of its case, tuned up, and began working through
some chord progressions.

From the woods, Triana paused her magical studies and perked up her ears. She didn't recognize the
song Marlowe was playing, but it had a good groove and it subconsciously lifted her spirits. For
pretty much the first time since Ruby had voted herself off, Triana felt good.

Triana made her way to the edge of the campfire pit and stood next to it, listening. Marlowe finished
working through the progression and moved on to a different song. Triana soon recognized this tune,
and stepped into the pit. Marlowe noticed her then and quickly stopped playing.

"Oh, hey," she said nervously. "Was I, uh--"

"Is that My Funny Valentine?" Triana asked, genuinely interested.

"Uh, yeah, it is," Marlowe said, curious where Triana was going with this.

"You're a really good bassist," Triana said.

"Oh, thanks!" Marlowe said, surprised.

"Yeah, I really liked listening to you play. Thanks for doing that," Triana told her.

Confessional

"I wonder what Wendy has against Triana?" Marlowe asked herself. "She seems fairly nice."

"I was just practicing," Marlowe said.

"Mind if I stay and listen?" Triana asked.

"Go ahead," Marlowe said, blushing.

Triana took a seat on a stump and listened to Marlowe play.
"I know it may sound crazy, but listening to Marlowe's practice really did make me feel better," Triana said. "I really got the feeling that maybe I could fit in around here. Maybe I'm not so strange after all. After all, Marlowe seems cool, and Ingrid seems like the kind of person I could get along with."

On the other side of camp, the guys were hanging out in their cabin, lamenting their lack of food.

"Man, this stinks," Numbuh Two said.

"Yeah," Rusty said.

"I hate to admit it," Boris said, "but the girls worked together really well. If they wanted to, they could probably team up and take us down."

Rusty caught on. "What are you saying?" he asked.

"I'm saying that now is probably the time to team up," Boris said. "We couldn't win a game of basketball. I admit that's partially my fault. But if there's one thing to take away from this game, it's that the women in this camp outclass us physically. We're looking at a long run of losing when we go up against them, and if they don't turn on each other we'll all be eliminated."

Numbuh Two shook his head. "I dunno, Boris," he ventured. "I mean, I don't think the girls have an alliance or anything. And when Andy was doing that, well, didn't everybody have a problem with that? Secret alliances are always bad news."

"Come now, comrades!" Boris said. "If there is a time when we need to stand firm, it is now. Else we risk seeing every single one of us eliminated."

Rusty scoffed. "Yeah. And you'll betray us when it suits you."

Boris shrugged sheepishly. "Admittedly true."

"Face it," Chaz says. "No woman could ever vote off this beautiful hunk of Chaz flesh. No man, either. The Chaz has nothing to worry about."

After a pause, Numbuh Two spoke up. "Outside of Chaz's delusions, I don't think that a guys' alliance is in the cards. It wouldn't work, and it would just make us look like jerks."

"Or make you look like a jerk in front of Ingrid?" Boris suggested. Numbuh Two blushed.

"Face it," Rusty said. "This alliance isn't happening."

"I'm kinda getting sick of Triana," Wendy said. "And if Nazz and her friends become my friends, then hey. Maybe we can kick her out and have a good time without her magical gothiness bringing everyone down."

"Yeah, so me and Ingrid discover a secret alliance, expose it, and then Boris wants me to join a
secret alliance?" Numbuh Two asked. "Yeah, no thanks, I have principles."

Confessional

"I really liked Marlowe's bass playing. And she seemed to be warming up to me," Triana said. She smiled. "Maybe I'll make some new friends after all."

Confessional

"Yeah, I know Triana might have lied about liking my bass playing," Marlowe said. "After all, who likes to listen to just the bass? But it was nice of her, and she did stay and listen. Maybe Wendy's wrong, and Triana just wants to have friends."

Confessional

"Oh, the Chaz is working it, baby! Past the merge and looking hot hot hot!" Chaz told the camera. "I'm just here for the extra screentime, isn't it fantastic? Oh, I know you love the Chaz."

Confessional

"I'm going to wait to judge Triana," Ingrid said. "Maybe Wendy doesn't like her, but I'm not sure how much I should trust Wendy's impression of her. I try not to rush to conclusions."

Confessional

Boris shrugged. "It was worth a shot," he admitted sheepishly.

Confessional

Rusty lit up a cigarette and took a drag off of it.

"I don't trust that guy," he said.

Confessional

"I'm so glad all the girls are together in one cabin!" Nazz exclaimed. She frowned. "It's a shame that Wendy and Triana don't get along, though. It would be nice if everyone could be friends."

Confessional

"Okay, Dan, seriously, come up with a plan to get me out of this place," Elise said. "NOW."
The Return Episode

Chris was on top of the cliff, next to a setpiece of a bank. "Last time, on Total Drama: Cartoon Multiverse," he began, "we saw the players get a day off from elimination due to the merger. What happened instead? Why, they played a game of basketball! It was originally going to be boys against girls, but as it turned out, there were only four boys. So we put Triana on the boys team. And what did we learn? Well, Wendy and Elise are really good at basketball, Boris, Numbuh Two, and Marlowe are really bad, and Triana's gonna have a really tough time making friends with the rest of the girls on the island. Wendy already doesn't like her anymore, and after talking with Wendy it doesn't look like Nazz is going to be too friendly to Triana either. Marlowe does like it when you compliment her bass playing, however. Meanwhile, Boris tried to set up a guys alliance but found no takers because he's completely untrustworthy. Also because Numbuh Two has a gigantic crush on Ingrid. And after all this the girls, except for Triana, had a delicious dinner, while the boys and Triana went hungry. What's gonna happen next? Well, we're gonna go back to an old classic, so stay tuned to Total Drama: Cartoon Multiverse for another action-packed episode!"

I was woken by the familiar sound of a police siren outside my door. I briefly panicked and began trying to alert Natasha until I remembered where I was.

"Attention campers!" came an announcement through a megaphone. "Come out of the cabins with your hands up."

Well. This was not optimal. The sole window is at the front of the room, and while the top bunk would help conceal me, it would be of no use if the cops rushed in. I needed a quick disguise, an alibi, and Rusty to stop rushing around the room like a maniac. Although he might provide some cover.

And then Numbuh Two, like a complete idiot, decided to open the door for the police. He stepped outside, leaving the door wide open behind him.

"Really, Chris?" I heard him ask. "This is how you choose to wake us up?"

I heard a megaphone-enhanced laugh. "Yes. And yes, campers!" Chris announced. "This is related to today's challenge."

Thank Fearless Leader, it was just another one of Chris's stupid games. Rusty stopped running around the cabin trying to gather his stuff and stood up, sheepish. He then started changing clothes in the middle of the cabin with the door still open.

"Whoa, Rusty!" Chris barked through the megaphone. "Nobody wants to see that!"

"Gah!" Rusty yelped, embarrassed. He quickly shoved his hands over his crotch. Numbuh Two shut the door, and Rusty continued to get dressed. I was already dressed, as I sleep in my clothes; no sense in delaying yourself when you might have to escape at any moment. I hopped out of bed and exited the cabin. I was joined by Rusty a minute later, and by Chaz after about another quarter of an hour. Sadly, this was one of Chaz's shorter primping times.

"Good morning, campers!" Chris announced after Chaz finally left the cabin. "I'm glad you're up and dressed, because today, you're all going to rob a bank!"

"What, did the show's budget get cut?" Triana asked sarcastically.
"What budget?" Chris asked. "It's a fanfic." He winked at the camera.

Something about his comment seemed familiar. Almost as if I knew what it was like to be on a show with a tiny budget. It tickled the back of my mind, but before I could focus on it Chris spoke up again.

"Anyway, that's not it," Chris said. "This one is a more classic challenge. Way way back in Total Drama Action, we did a bunch of movie genre challenges. Yeah, that—that was a gimmick. For twenty-some episodes. Anyway, we got a bit esoteric because you try to think of twenty movie genres, it's hard, but one of those genres that we went after? The heist movie!"

Chris stopped, waiting for us to acknowledge this. Everybody just looked bored, except for Ingrid, who looked skeptical.

"Fine," Chris said, frowning. "Point is, we're gonna reenact parts of that classic challenge. Now follow me to the top of the cliff, where we'll kick things off by robbing a bank."

Chris led the way. We followed. As we walked, I contemplated the day's challenge and the current state of the game. If this was anything like a real bank robbery, I might stand a chance of pulling it off. After all, I almost got away with it in Frostbite Falls; I would have were it not for that pernicious moose and squirrel. Although that was the last time I tried to pull a job without Natasha. We're not very successful together, but we're even less successful apart. I think. I never thought to ask her what she did while I was working as Babyface Braunschweiger. Perhaps I should do that. But first, the money here. I'm sure its far more than the two dollars I almost died over when I sold that banana. So I'm going to stay here and get that money.

On that note, my attempt to secure my position by ensuring I wouldn't be voted off did not work. Rusty, always paranoid, refused to trust me; Chaz pretended that he was too self-absorbed to believe he'd be voted off, but I could tell that he also didn't believe I wouldn't sell him out when it became convenient—which I would, admittedly, but it was still rather rude of him to not even give me the opportunity—and Numbuh Two was too deeply in love to commit to his own survival. Love, pah! When has it ever been good for anything? This idea that you should always trust someone, that you should know deep inside that there is one that will never betray you, that you never lie to a certain person—it's so good. So kind. So wholehearted. So it makes me sick!

Soon we arrived at the top of a cliff. Somehow, a bank had sprung up there overnight.

"The first part of your challenge," Chris said, "is to rob this bank. We've set up fairly basic bank security: a simple laser grid on the floor—we made the lasers visible because that makes for better TV—bulletproof glass in front of the tellers stations, a locked door between you and the tellers' stations, the door to the vaults, and, of course, combination locks on the vaults themselves. Get in, find your vault, and claim the loot inside the vault to move on to step two. Now, if everyone could reach into this hat?" Chris gestured to Chef, who was holding a hat with slips of paper tucked inside. "The slip you get says when your turn is and which vault is yours. Also, as a special surprise, we got this TV!" He motioned towards a large flat-screen to the left of the bank. "This is hooked up to the security cameras so that everyone else can watch and learn. Now, everyone take a paper!"

I took a sheet of paper. I was going to go ninth.

"Who's first?" Chris asked. Rusty stepped forward. "Good! Now are there any questions?"

"Uh, why are we doing this?" Chaz asked. "I definitely don't look my Chazziest."

"Good question!" Chris replied. "Whomever wins the challenge cannot be voted off of the island
today. If there are multiple winners, they can't be voted off, and if there are no winners, well, we'll just see what happens."

"Why does that sound ominous?" Rusty asked.

"Because it is. Now get in there!" Chris pushed Rusty through the open front doors of the bank. Rusty fell forward and landed sprawled on the floor, setting off the laser grid.

"Ooh, too bad!" Chris said unsympathetically. "Well, who's our next lucky bank robber?"

Chaz stepped up. "Watch and learn, peeps, because the Chaz is gonna show you how it's done! He's gonna get the screentime he deserves! Not gonna have to hang out in that smoke-filled confessional anymore! Gonna--"

"Oh would you just get on with it!" Chris said, annoyed.

"Hey, do I interrupt you when you're doing the hype thing?" Chaz asked.

Chris stared at a camera. "For the sake of the fourth wall, I'm not gonna answer that. Just get going."

Chaz shrugged and walked into the bank. He carefully stepped between squares on the laser grid and walked over to the door to the back room. He looked at it, then tried to open it. The door didn't budge. He tried harder but failed at doing so. Confused, Chaz looked at the door. He then shrugged, walked over to the laser grid, and decisively put his foot in the way of a laser.

"And Chaz is out! Who's number three?" Chris asked. Elise put her hand up. "Ooh, this oughta be good! Let's see what you can do!"

As Chaz exited the bank, he passed Elise, who shot him a sharp look. Hmm. Maybe there was something exploitable there. Elise was going to be a strong opponent and had a decent chance of winning, but if she did so, I might be able to get her to vote off Chaz. Giving the guys a sense of danger might make them want to buy in to my alliance and consolidate power around me.

Elise easily made her way through the laser grid, along the way doing some somersaults just to show off. She reached the door and with a well-placed kick knocked it off of its hinges.

"Hey!" Chris yelped. "That takes time to replace!"

Elise ignored him, kicked through the second door, and carefully made her way to Vault 3. She put her ear to the combination lock, and worked her way through it like a professional. Soon, the door swung open, and she grabbed the item inside: a magazine with Chris's face on the cover. Elise raced back out of the bank, avoiding the laser grid on her way out as well.

"Good job!" Chris said. "And bonus points for avoiding the lasers on the way out!"

"Bonus points?" Elise said hopefully.

"Yeah, but this isn't being done on points, sorry," Chris said cheerfully.

"Okay, what's with the magazine?" she asked.

"It has my face on the cover. Therefore, it's super valuable," Chris said. "Who's up next?"

Triana stepped forward. "So, my turn?"

"In a couple of minutes," Chris said. "The interns need to reset the doors. Thanks, Elise," he said
A little while later the bank's security systems were reset and Triana entered the bank. She also got through the laser grid easily, and when she came to the clear space near the door, she took an aggressive stance, ran forward, and rammed her shoulder into the door. The door trembled and cracked slightly. Triana grimaced, rubbing her shoulder, stepped back, and took another run at the door. This time the door almost split in two. Another good hit would break it. Triana closed her eyes, rubbed her shoulder again, got into position, and ran full speed at the door. The door gave way easily, and Triana stumbled into the next section. Tired, she walked over to the next door and leaned against it. After steeling herself for a few seconds, she took a run at the door. This one she hit perfectly, and it flew open. Triana made her way to her vault, put her ear against the door, and listened, gingerly picking her way through what she thought was the combination. She managed to get it right, and the door to the vault swung open. Inside was another magazine. Triana rolled her eyes, grabbed the magazine, and ran back out, also managing to avoid tripping the laser grid.

"Not as stylish as Elise, and you broke my doors again," Chris said. "But a pass is a pass. Who's gonna bring us the halfway point?"

Marlowe stepped up.

"Ah, good. Get to it!"

Marlowe raced into the building. She high-stepped through the laser grid, made her way to the vaults through the still-broken doors, and got to work on Vault 5. Chris slapped his forehead when he saw that the doors hadn't been replaced.

"Well, she failed," he said. "I'll tell her when she comes out."

"Why wait?" Nazz asked.

"It's funnier that way," Chris responded.

A few minutes later, Marlowe came back out with her magazine.

"Nicely done," Chris said. "But, because we hadn't replaced the doors, I'm afraid you're disqualified."

"ARE YOU KIDDING ME?" Marlowe yelled, irate.

"No," Chris said.

"Because you screwed up, I get punished?" Marlowe asked, incredulous.

"Yeah pretty much. But we're replacing the doors right now...who's up next?"

Wendy stepped up.

"Alright, you go in soon. But right now, we're at the halfway point of this part of the challenge. Elise and Triana will move on to the next part, but Rusty, Chaz, and Marlowe are now eliminated from the competition. We'll see if our second half brings some better play, now that they've gotten the chance to see half of their competition attempt to pass this challenge. Stay tuned, for more Total! Drama! Cartoon Multiverse!"

Chris grinned. We stared at him oddly.
"Okay, just, just let me get this straight," Triana said. "You think this is a fanfiction, right?"

Chris shrugged.

"So how come you're treating it like a TV show?" she asked.

"It's a fanfic that's pretending it's a television show," Chris said. "Oh, and look at that! The fourth wall just crumbled as if you put your shoulder through it! Good job!"

"You know that doesn't make you sound any more sane," Numbuh Two told him.

Chris smirked. "Let me ask which you'd prefer: an insane host who believes that some author is writing the challenges to be fairly survivable, or a sane host who intentionally tries to make death as likely as possible while skirting any legal liability for doing so?"

Nobody responded, mainly because they didn't want to. Chris was right.

"On that note, we should up the likelihood somebody dies!" Chris exclaimed. "And we're back. Doors are in place, Wendy, let's go."

Wendy walked into the bank confidently. She strode through the visible laser grid, reached the clear space, lowered her shoulder, and easily bulled through the door. It fell over, and Wendy stood up. She eyed the next door, got into ramming position, and broke through it. She headed for the vaults, found Vault 6, and got to work cracking the lock. After a few minutes, the door swung open, and Wendy walked in and grabbed the magazine. She calmly made her way out again, avoiding the lasers, and walked over to Chris.

"Was that acceptable?" she asked sarcastically.

"Meh, sure," Chris said. "But does everyone have to break my doors?"

"You've made it the only way to win," Ingrid pointed out.

"Yeah, but you could all fail," Chris suggested. "I'm bored with how long it takes to set them up each time. Although it looks like they're set up now. Who's number seven?"

"I am," Numbuh Two said. "Actually, I'm Numbuh Two, but–"

"Boo!" Wendy said loudly. "Boo! No puns! Boo!"

Numbuh Two frowned. "Fine," he said. "I was seven that pun for later anyway."

Everyone groaned. Numbuh Two grinned and walked through the front door of the bank. He jogged through the lasers, walked up to the door, wrestled with the lock, and then took a deep breath and pulled on the knob, lifting his entire body off the ground. The door didn't budge, and Numbuh Two hit the ground hard. He sighed, and then performed the same operation everyone before him that had gotten through the doors had, knocking them down with his left shoulder. When he finished, he winced and rubbed his shoulder as he made his way to Vault 7. Once there, he quickly figured out the combination, opened the door, grabbed the magazine, and hustled back to us.

"That puts four people in the next round!" Chris announced. "Who else is going to do it? I hope it's not every single one of you, because that would be pretty annoying and make for poor television. Also we only prepared for six people to survive this one."

Nazz rolled her eyes and stepped forward. "So like, when can I go?" she asked.
"A couple of minutes, just hold on," Chris responded.

We stood there in an awkward silence until Chris said "Okay, go."

Nazz darted into the bank. I watched closely; this was my last chance to gain an advantage in this part of the competition. She moved swiftly through the laser grid and stopped at its edge. She then stared at the door, closed her eyes, and ran straight at it. The door broke upon impact, and Nazz fell over. She got up slowly, rubbing her arm, and walked over to the second door. She put her hand on the door handle and opened it.

Jaws dropped on everyone who had gone ahead of her.

"Was that door unlocked this whole time?" Triana asked.

Chris smiled. "Yes."

Nazz got to work on the vault and soon opened it. She grabbed the magazine and swiftly ran out. As she ran, I noticed an air vent cover in the wall behind her. I smiled. If it wasn't just a painted-on background, I might be able to bypass most of the challenge entirely.

"Good job, Nazz! You would have been the fifth person to pass if you hadn't tripped a laser on your way out," Chris said.

Nazz frowned. "I thought that wasn't part of the test," she said.

"I know," Chris grinned. "I never said it was."

Nazz scowled, threw her magazine to the ground, and walked over to everyone else.

"You may want to keep that!" Chris called after her. "It could be useful!"

I stepped forward. Behind me, Nazz collected her magazine off of the ground.

"Since Nazz only broke one door, thank you Nazz, we're up and running quickly," Chris announced. "Boris, let's see you rob the bank."

I walked through the front doors and took a deep breath. I scanned the laser grid and the left wall. The air vent didn't look fake. With any luck, I'd be able to pry it free and it wouldn't set off an alarm.

Oh well. No way I'd be able to knock that door down. Safecracking, sure. Avoiding lasers, sure. Brute strength? Not my forte. I shuffled through the lasers and over to the vent cover. I pulled at it, and it came free easily. There was actually a vent behind it, too. I crawled in and found that it was large enough to allow me to maneuver inside and that it only followed a single path. I followed it and came to a ladder. I climbed the ladder and then followed the vent when it twisted sideways again. Soon, I found a vent cover and looked down. The floor of the vault room was perhaps fifteen feet away.

I sighed. "Hoo boy," I muttered to myself, and leapt out of the vent. I landed smoothly and walked over to Vault 9. I listened carefully to the tumblers as I turned the lock to the right. It clicked on 6, and I moved it back to the left until it clicked on 3. One or two numbers should do the trick; I rolled it to the right until 2 gave me the sign. I waited, but the door didn't open, so I moved the lock to the left until it settled on the final number, 7. The door swung open, and I walked inside and collected my magazine.

Now how to get out? I didn't bring a ladder, I didn't have any dynamite, and I couldn't break down
the doors.

Wait. Maybe I wouldn't have to. If Chris was willing to leave the inner door unlocked to mess with us, he might be willing to allow the doors to open from the inside. Plus, it would provide an explanation for the vent part of the game.

I opened the first door, as I knew I could. The locked door was facing me now. I took a deep breath, walked towards it, and pulled it open.

All that was left was the laser grid. I smiled confidently as I walked through it. Step. Step. Step. And then I tripped.

Right after I had gotten out of the grid. My win was secure, but not my pride. I blushed, embarrassed, as I pulled my hat down lower on my head and exited the building.

"We have five!" Chris announced. "Also, Boris, thanks for figuring out that vent thing. I was afraid nobody would get it. Oh, and P.S. people? That's how we expected you to go through the maze in the first place!"

I doffed my hat and wandered over to the others. The last contestant, Ingrid, walked up.

"Well, the vent cover has been replaced and the doors have been shut again," Chris said. "Anytime you're ready is good, so long as it's now."

Ingrid walked through the door calmly. She also used the vents to access the vaults. However, once inside, she entered the wrong combination on her vault, and an alarm went off.

"And then there were five!" Chris announced. "And now, we get to the second part of the challenge: the getaway!"

"Wait, hold on," Nazz complained. "I was eliminated for setting an alarm off while I left, but you're doing a getaway challenge for the people who didn't set off any alarms? How did the cops get there?"

Chris shrugged. "Don't know, don't care. Now, Chef, if you would?"

Chef opened a garage door on the side of the bank, and several little red wagons rolled out and came to a stop against some traffic cones that had apparently been set up for just that purpose.

"The rules for this one are simple," Chris said. "Get to the bottom of the hill in your wagon without crashing. If you succeed, you're still in the game. If you fail, well, we've got a special little surprise for you. And as for the people who didn't get away with robbing the bank...just stay here. We're going to talk to you. Now then, everybody choose a wagon!"

Five people ran towards the wagons. I got there late, and just grabbed one that nobody had yet occupied. I then dragged the wagon to the starting line and stood there along with everyone else as Chef stood in front of us, holding a flag in the air.

"Now then--"

"Why is Chef the flag girl?" Numbuh Two asked. Chef scowled at him and he shrank away.

"Nevermind."

"As I was saying," Chris continued, irritated, "you just gotta get to the bottom of the hill safely and with your wagon intact. And no, you can't just walk. But the handle does steer, so use that. If you
can. Are you ready?"

Nobody answered.

"Too bad. We wanted Watterson to storyboard this, but he turned us down. So, everyone, on your marks, get set, GET IN YOUR WAGONS AND GO!"

Chef dropped the flag, and we all obediently hopped into our wagons. They started slow on the steep incline but soon picked up speed. I was soon unable to focus on anybody competing with me, as the densely wooded forest proved itself a difficult obstacle to conquer. I heard Triana scream and heard a crash, but I didn't look back. Instead, I focused on steering my wagon down the hillside and through the trees. As I moved through the forest, my speed soon hit terminal velocity. It was at this point that I started to worry: what would happen at the finish line? I didn't have to worry for long, as after a few more white-knuckle turns I finally made it out of the woods. The wagon slid into a bunch of mushy oatmeal and had slowed to almost a stop by the time I exited the oatmeal. I hopped off and turned around to survey the area around me. Wendy and Elise were on my left, slightly oatmeal-splattered but otherwise no worse for wear. Neither Triana nor Numbuh Two had made it, and as we waited we heard a megaphone crackle to life in the woods.

"Okay, you three survivors, this is the last part of the heist! You've pulled off the robbery and the getaway, now you just have to hide until the heat dies down! Three hours, starting now, and oh by the way, every single one of the other campers is searching for you! Get to it!"

We quickly scurried off to find hiding places. Inwardly, I groaned. Generally running away was where things went wrong, so I'd never made it to the hiding part. Except when I was counterfeiting box tops, but even then I ended up exposing myself and Natasha when our printing press blew up. But that wasn't relevant. First, I had to figure out where nobody would expect me to hide, and then I had to go there.

The confessional! Nobody would expect me to hide in the confessional. It's too likely that somebody would just wander in. And if they did, I could live with losing this game. That wouldn't be a problem. Plus, I had drunk a lot of water last night to try and fill the hole in my stomach, and it was about to come out.

I took off for the confessional while Elise and Wendy headed for the woods. I quickly reached the bathroom and locked the door. No one would ever find me here.

Once inside, I sat down and breathed deeply. I just had to stay quiet and not attract too much attention. Nobody was going to come in here. I'd be fine.

I closed my eyes and let my mind drift away. Just three hours. Not very long. I had lasted longer. In Pottsylvania you become skilled at keeping quiet. And that's all I had to do. Rusty, Numbuh Two, Chaz, all of them were out. And Elise seemed to have a boatload of anger issues regarding Rusty and Chaz. I'd either have to inform them of her intentions, or vote one of them off myself. Perhaps both; strike a deal with Elise if she won and then convince the other men that the girls wanted to get rid of us. Maybe remind them of the Amazon song. Or of how they voted off Steve instead of Elise. Elise was a huge threat by herself; she'd be voted off as soon as she didn't have immunity unless she was able to rally others to her side. Everybody else was tough to figure out. Nobody besides Elise seemed to have a clear advantage anywhere, and what small advantages they did have were often cancelled out by their weaknesses. So what were these weaknesses, and how could I exploit them? That I had to look into more deeply. If I could–

The door opened. Triana crooked an eyebrow.
"Really?" she asked.

I shrugged sheepishly and stepped out.

"Boris is now gone!" Chris announced. "Wendy, Elise, you have two hours and twenty-seven minutes left on the clock. Boris, you're now part of the search party. Get to it."

Hmm. If I was Elise or Wendy, where would I be? Elise was probably hiding in some hard-to-reach out of the way spot, but Wendy, she was almost certainly in the trees. So to the woods I must go to find her.

I remembered that she was good at climbing and liked tall trees. So obviously she would be hiding where the tallest trees were. I looked at the forest. While it was hard to be certain, it seemed that the tallest trees were on the west side of the island, near the campfire pit. I headed towards them, keeping my eyes towards the sky. Soon, I spotted a vague silhouette of somebody against the sun, although it may just have been my eyes making up images. Nevertheless, I closed my eyes and headed towards it. When I reached the forest, I was able to look straight up. I stopped and listened. Above me, I heard nothing.

"I know you're up there, Wendy!" I called. "Come down!"

No reply was given. But I heard the sound of pant legs rubbing together high above me. I grinned. I had found my prey.

"Do I have to climb up there?" I called. "Because I will. I'm guessing you're in...this tree?" I touched a tree. No reply was given, but I knew that Wendy was up there. I grabbed the tree and slowly began to climb it. After I had gotten a few feet up, I saw a figure leap over to another branch.

"Alright, alright!" Chris announced through a megaphone in the distance. "This isn't a running once you're caught contest, it's a hiding contest. And Wendy, you've been found. Everybody, Elise is the last one left. You have an hour and forty-three minutes to find her."

I stiffened. It had taken me that long to find Wendy? Time was running out, and running out fast. Now where would Elise be? That was a tough one to answer. While handicapping her by making it impossible to run away was helpful, the fact remained that she was an even fiercer opponent than she appeared—a tough bar to clear, but one she cleared anyway. She could be hiding just about anywhere on the island. The only question was where she would choose as her hiding place. Would it be underneath the cabins? In the woods? Perhaps underwater? It was tough to say, but if I had to guess I'd say that underwater was the most likely hiding spot for her to choose due to what a good swimmer she was.

But how far offshore would she hide? For that matter, how would I find her? The entire island itself would be hard to search; expand that to the water off of its coastline, and she would be almost impossible to find. Especially if not many people thought to search the water.

So if Elise was going to win, what was I going to do? Wendy was obviously the second-largest threat behind Elise, but it might be hard to get rid of her. If I could rally every man to my side and convince Triana to vote her off, that might do it; after all, Triana and Wendy hadn't been on the best of terms. But that plan required too many variables to fall into place easily. It needed the guys to all side with me, which they might not. It needed Triana to be willing to vote off Wendy; despite the recent rift in their relationship, they had seemed to be friends less than a week ago, and she might have an attachment to Wendy. Furthermore, it might backfire on me; it is never good to be seen as the leader, as that means everyone is looking to take you out. It's better to pull strings from behind the scenes.
If not Wendy, then who? I suppose I could talk to Elise and see who she wanted to get rid of. She might have a good idea of who was the biggest threat outside of her. And if it was one of the men, that might help them to understand that an alliance among ourselves was the best option. If so, I would hope that the one getting voted off would be Chaz. Something about him seemed too slick for the narcissistic face he presented to the world. There was more going on inside than there appeared. If not Chaz, though--

The docks.

Elise could hide under the docks.

"One hour left, people!" Chris announced. "That's all until Elise has a win!"

I had a good feeling about this hunch, so I ran towards the docks. I paused at the edge, stripped off my clothes, and dove in clad in only my skivvies. I looked around under the docks, searching the entire space. It took me a while, but eventually I was satisfied: Elise was not there. I sighed and climbed out of the water, donning my clothes which clung to my wet skin. I had no ideas left.

A few minutes later, Chris yelled, "Alright, that's all, folks! Elise wins the game! Everyone, please come to the middle of camp, especially Elise!"

I joined the rest of my comrades in the middle of camp. As we waited for Elise to join us and the others to come in, I noticed several odd things. You start to do that in my line of work. One of the things I noticed was that there seemed to be more interns around than usual, many of them in the woods. Furthermore, they weren't acting like most interns; they weren't as aware of the cameras, and they all seemed to be ready for action. As I listened, I also realized that I could hear helicopters approaching. This was very odd, as we weren't in any flight paths as far as I could tell; no planes seemed to have flown over us in the time I had been here, let alone helicopters.

Something was definitely going on.

After a while, Elise arrived. Chris smiled.

"Elise, thanks for coming," he said. "Good job proving to everyone your skills at pulling off a bank heist."

Elise smiled. "It was nothing," she said.

"Au contraire," someone said, exiting the wood. He was dressed in a bright red uniform, had well-shorn blonde hair, and was wearing a hat. He was stalwart and true, with eyes of blue, and he stopped in front of Elise.

"I am Dudley Do-Right, of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and you are under arrest!" he announced, clapping handcuffs on Elise. Elise's jaw dropped.

"I'm sorry, what?" she asked, upset.

"Yeah, see, Canada's banks experienced a rash of robberies right before you came to the island," Chris explained. "The RCMP was able to figure out that the bank robber was one of the contestants on this island. So, we set up a bank heist to see who the robber was. And as it turns out, it was you!"

"What? But--no!" Elise exclaimed. "That is totally not true! I have never robbed a bank!" Her eyes darted around nervously.

"Yeah, sorry, but you're going to jail," Chris said unsympathetically. "And you're eliminated from
"WHAT?" Elise screamed. "YOU SAID I COULDN'T BE ELIMINATED IF I WON!"

"No, I said you wouldn't be voted off if you won," Chris said calmly. "I never said anything about being arrested by the RCMP."

The interns helped Dudley drag Elise into a helicopter. As she was pulled away, Elise's body fell limp and she screamed at the sky.

"CHRRRRIS MCCC克莱eeeeeeeeaaaaaaaannn!"
The Return Campfire Ceremony

Geoff and Bridgette were making out on a couch on a stage. After a few minutes, Bridgette pushed Geoff off of her.

"So, why are we doing this?" Bridgette asked.

"Well, babe," Geoff said, "I'd assume it's because it's time for another episode of Total! Drama! Cartoon Multiverse! Aftermath!"

"So it is," Bridgette agreed, "and not only that, but we've got an episode jam packed with questions we can answer."

"So who's first?" Geoff asked. Harold stepped up.

"Who robbed the banks, anyway?" Harold asked. "Elise doesn't seem like the kind of person who would rob a bank."

"Well, Harold, you're wrong about Elise not committing a bank robbery," Bridgette said. "She's actually done that. But the robbery she committed occurred in the U.S., not in Canada. The robberies that the RCMP was investigating were committed by a contestant on the show, however: none other than fiendish villain Snidely Whiplash!"

"That's right, folks!" Geoff chimed in. "A Total Drama contestant this season was indeed guilty of bank robbery. It just wasn't Elise. Well, for these specific bank robberies, anyway. Next question?"

"Why is this called 'The Return Episode'?" Gwen asked.

"To mislead readers into thinking one or two beloved characters who had previously been eliminated were coming back," Bridgette said. "This was done for no reason other than the author enjoys messing with the audience."

"Why does the author--" Zoey started to ask.

"We have no idea," Bridgette said. "Next?"

Lightning stood up. "Why was Triana on the boys' team in basketball? Lightning knows the difference between boys and girls, and Triana is definitely not a boy."

Jo screamed loudly.

"Anyway," Geoff started. "Triana was on the boys' team because they needed a fifth member. Granted, with how they played they probably needed a sixth. And a seventh. And maybe an eighth, just to have a fighting chance. But because they needed a fifth member Chris decided to put Triana on the boys' team. It definitely won't have any plot ramifications at all. Next question?"

Brick shot up and saluted. "Sir! When was Arts and Crafts Day originally, sir?"

Geoff smiled. "It was originally planned as the 14th episode overall and the second episode after the merge. That's why the winner would have been whomever made the best piece of art. If it had gone as planned, there would have been nine people making art, the winner would get immunity, and then somebody would have been voted off. However, it was always there in part so it could be shuffled in
as a stopgap if a rainstorm hit or something, which it did."

"Sir, thank you, sir!" Brick said and sat down. Scott stood up.

"So, about Nazz," Scott began. "Snidely was pretty mad at her because he thought she let go of the rope intentionally. Did she?"

"Good question," Geoff responded. "She did let go of the rope, but if Elise hadn't fallen into her she would have grabbed back onto it after resetting her feet."

"But," Bridgette interjected, "Nazz was expecting Elise to not be ready for her and to fall into the water and lose the game for them so that the Mad Scientists could vote off Snidely. So she did throw the game, if that's what you're asking."


"Alright, who's next?" Bridgette asked.

Dawn stood up. "Is Steve okay after his mental breakdown? I can't seem to get a read on his aura."

Bridgette shrugged. "Maybe? I mean, he hasn't gone all Ezekiel or anything, but he's in New Jersey, so...yeah."

"But the Eagles finally won, so he's kinda stoked about that," Geoff said. "Who else has a question?"

"Will there be any more classic challenges?" Owen asked. "I love those."

"Yes," Geoff replied. He didn't say anything else.

"Oh," Owen said, surprised by the shortness of the answer. "Um, okay."

After a few seconds, Jo stood up. "Which remaining competitor is strongest?"

Bridgette chuckled. "Well, everyone certainly has a chance at winning," she said. "But there are different reasons for this, so it really depends on what challenges come up and how things shake out between them."

"So we're gonna do something special here," Geoff said. "We're gonna run down everybody's biggest strength and weakness in the game and what they'll have to do to win. Bridgette, you wanna start us off?"

"Alright," Bridgette said. "I'll open with Chaz. Chaz's biggest drawback is that he's really annoying. I mean, *really* annoying. But he doesn't really pose a risk to any of the other contestants, and he probably won't do something stupid that hurts everyone else. Combine this with his occasional bursts of craftiness and surprising physical ability, and he could actually pose a threat to win. If he wants to win, he basically has to avoid annoying people to the point he gets voted off, not lose an elimination challenge, and get a little bit lucky. Geoff, your turn."

Geoff smiled. "I'll take Triana, the remaining goth chick. She's the most average of the remaining competitors, not dominant physically or mentally, although she does have some magic powers. Her biggest strength is probably that she's fairly easy to get along with and doesn't appear to be a huge threat, but her biggest weakness is that her friendship with Wendy has been crumbling since Ruby left and Wendy is now kind of gunning for her. If she can win over some of the girls in her cabin, she has a shot at pulling off a win, but like Chaz she has to avoid annoying people, not lose an elimination challenge, and get a little bit lucky."
"My turn. I'll do Marlowe," Bridgette said. "Her biggest strength is that people like her. She's friends with Nazz and Ingrid, and both Wendy and Triana seem to like her. That gives her a majority of people who wouldn't make her their first choice to vote off. But her biggest weakness is that she's not very physically gifted. If an elimination challenge comes along that requires physical strength or dexterity she could see herself leaving the island. Still, she's a fairly good choice to win."

"Nazz," Geoff said. "She's nice, pretty, and popular. Also, she's got some physical abilities to her; when you think about it, she's probably the third-most physically skilled player left, after Wendy and Numbuh Two. But she doesn't seem that bright, so if a challenge based on brains comes up she could see herself going home—especially if somebody smart and crafty wanted to get rid of her. To win, she'll need to basically make sure that it never has to come down to a situation where her friends have to choose between themselves and her. So she'll need some luck."

"You mentioned Numbuh Two as being physically talented," Bridgette said. "That's true. He does have skills, although he rarely shows them and he couldn't hit a shot in basketball. He also has a friendship with Ingrid that can help give both of them insight on their opponents. But he's been acting like a skulking figure the whole game. He's been playing detective, sure, but part of the problem with that is detectives work alone. Consequently, he doesn't really have any friends outside of Ingrid, and if it becomes convenient to push him off that'll happen. To win, he needs to not get caught in a vote between him and somebody more popular."

"My turn!" Geoff said. "Now, with my comment about smart and crafty at the end of my bit on Nazz, I was really trying to lead you to Boris."

"Oh, sorry," Bridgette said, giggling.

"No problem, that just means I get to do Boris," Geoff said, smiling. "Now, Boris is villainous, sinister, and certainly Badenov to go all the way. But everyone knows that Boris is villainous, sinister, and Badenov to go all the way. So, his strengths? His ability to come up with sinister plots that have a decent chance of succeeding so long as a certain moose and squirrel don't get involved. His weaknesses? Everybody knows that he's a villain and will stab them in the back. They sorta like him, but they'll probably get rid of him if no better options are available. To win, Boris is gonna need a lot of luck involving people more dangerous than him or more annoying than him getting voted out instead of him. And of course, he can't lose an elimination challenge. Bridgette?"

"Wendy," Bridgette said, "is the strongest person left in camp with Elise's departure. Along with her physical strength, Wendy is also charismatic and affable, and has already made friends with the other girls in her cabin. While not as popular with the guys, she's still fairly well-regarded by them, especially by Numbuh Two. Her biggest weakness is that she might seem too strong, and might lead her opponents to overestimate her or vote her out early. However, I'd put her as the odds-on favorite to go all the way due to her combination of intelligence, strength, and charm."

"And then there were two," Geoff said. "Ingrid is the smartest camper left on the island. Physically, she won't win many strength competitions, although she has been shown to have a fair bit of stamina and an accurate throwing arm when not pressured. Her biggest asset is her brains; after all, she discovered Snidely's alliance, which has now seen every member eliminated, and she's been sharing info with Numbuh Two whenever things seem suspicious—although again, with Snidely's alliance dissolved, she hasn't seen much out of the ordinary. Her biggest weakness is that she's a bit of a loner, despite being friends with the other girls in her cabin, and that she won't win a contest based on pure strength. To win, she'll need to avoid placing last in an elimination challenge, not be the best option on a voting day, and have a bit of luck besides."

"Finally, we have Rusty," Bridgette said. "Paranoid. Creepy. Bald. All of these are apt descriptors of
Rusty Shackleford. His biggest strength is probably his paranoia and his ability to squirm out of surprisingly tight situations on a regular basis. His biggest weakness is that because he trusts nobody, he is also untrusted and is a good candidate to get voted off. To win, he'll need to have people become more unpopular than him and probably get some immunities besides.

"Well, that's all our contestants," Geoff said. "Next question?"

Tyler stood up. "Why was everyone in the basketball game so good at shooting hoops?"

"Nobody wants to read a play-by-play transcript of a game where the players hit less than one of every ten shots," Geoff said.

"Yeah," Bridgette added. "It was long enough with just people making shots. If it was a realistic record of makes and misses it would take forever to read."

"Not to mention write," Geoff noted.

"And, if you don't like that, it was magnets," Bridgette said.

"Fricking magnets, how do they work?" Geoff asked rhetorically.

"It's a miracle," Bridgette replied.

"So why is the goth chick such a big deal?" Courtney asked. "Not Triana, the other one. Ruby. I mean, she voted herself off!"

"Good question," Bridgette said. "Long story short, Ruby was the heart of the girls' cabin when it came to the Bumbling Moose. She was really kind and upbeat, which contrasted well with the cynical natures of both Wendy and Triana. Ruby was able to bridge the gap between them because she's incredibly personable and really optimistic, and was able to get Triana and Wendy to open up to each other some, in large part because they knew that they could say pretty much anything and Ruby wouldn't make fun of them for it. If anything, Ruby would be encouraging. But when Ruby left, Wendy and Triana weren't willing to speak as freely because they were afraid of being made fun of, so they started guarding themselves. Each saw the other putting up barriers, took it as a statement of distrust, and now you get to where Triana and Wendy openly have problems with each other. So basically, Ruby was able to bring them together as friends, but they drove themselves apart. Next?"

"How do the girls feel about Triana?" Beth asked.

"It depends on the girl," Bridgette said. "Wendy is done with Triana. Like, completely done. She's sick of Triana's attitude and how their friendship has been torn apart. Nazz is a bit apprehensive about Triana due to how Wendy talks about her, but she kinda wants to be friends with Triana; she wants everybody to be friends, really, although she accepts that it can't always happen. Ingrid has basically just been watching how things play out and is reserving judgement on Triana; she doesn't want to jump the gun and ostracize Triana for no reason, but she wants to protect herself from the possibility that Triana is a bad egg. And Marlowe likes Triana, probably because Triana sincerely complimented Marlowe's bass playing. Does that answer your question?"

Beth nodded and sat down. Cameron stood up.

"So this has been bugging me," he began, "we saw Boris lock the door to the confessional, but Triana opened the door on him. How did that happen?"

"Yeah, the lock doesn't work," Geoff said. "It's one of Chris's tricks. Either the lock doesn't work or it's easily broken."
Cameron began to shake. "So you mean--"

"Yeah, you kinda don't want to poop on this show. Just in case," Geoff said sympathetically. "Now, we all know what the last question's going to be, so how about I ask it?"

"Sure, go ahead," Bridgette said.

"What have the eliminated contestants been doing since they've been eliminated?" Geoff asked.

"Snidely has been crashing on his aunt Faye's couch and planning his next move," Bridgette said. "Ruby went back to Gloomsville, where she's been hanging out with her friends; Iris has been pulling her into grand adventures. Misery has been living with disaster. Skull Boy is nursing a crush on her--a crush that she returns, by the way--and Doom Kitty has just been glad to have her back. Also Frank and Len and Boo Boo and Scaredy Bat and Poe and anybody else I might be forgetting missed her and are glad to have her back, and Frank and Len wrote her a special welcome back song. Gandhi, meanwhile, was captured by the League of Shadowy Figures, flash-frozen, transported to Exclamation, U.S.A., and thrust back into the freezer of that slaughterhouse. Steve--I think we covered this earlier, but Steve has been drinking a lot and watching episodes of Aqua Teen Hunger Force. No, we don't know how that works. Elise is trying to get her quasi-governmental agency to help her out, but they're not sure what to do and are still busy trying to come up with a plan to bust Elise out of Canadian prison."

"Well, that about covers it!" Geoff announced. "I'm Geoff, this is Bridgette, and this has been Total! Drama! Cartoon Multiverse! Aftermath! And remember, if you have a question about the show, feel free to ask it in the comments section below, and if you're lucky, we might just answer your question here! Until then, keep watching!"

Geoff and Bridgette smiled at the camera for over a minute. Eventually, Bridgette began to speak through clenched teeth.

"Aren't we supposed to be done now?"

"I thought so," Geoff whispered back to her.

The camera stayed on.

"Oh, right!" Geoff exclaimed. "We gotta make out to close this episode."

Bridgette cast an aside glance at the camera. "Well, I can't argue with that," she said.

Bridgette climbed on top of Geoff, and the two teenagers began kissing.
The Comedy Episode

Chris was standing in the mess hall, wearing a black tuxedo and standing at a podium. He smiled widely at the camera. "Welcome to another episode of Total Drama: Cartoon Multiverse!" he said. "Last time, we put made everyone try and pull off a bank robbery. Half of them did the robbery, three of those five got away, and only Elise managed to hide the entire time and win the game. Problem is, the whole thing was a sting for the RCMP, and Elise was arrested and eliminated from contention! Now, we're down to nine: four guys, five girls. And on the girls' side, things are heating up; Triana has sort of made friends with Marlowe, but Wendy has completely turned on her, and Nazz is more inclined to believe Wendy about Triana's personality. So what's gonna happen next? Well, there's a reason I'm wearing a tux, and lemme tell you what it is: tonight we're gonna have a roast! Find out who ends up burned, who ends up raw, and who ends up eliminated, right now, on the first ever Total! Drama! Roast!"

Aw yeah, the Chaz is looking good tonight. The Chaz always looks good in a tux, but I gotta say that I am rocking it tonight. And on international TV, no less! Chaz, you have outdone yourself. I am so glad that Chris decided to tell us to dress up nice, because the Chaz always dresses nice but tonight he's gonna totally wow everyone.

Not like Triana. Ooh, same shirt as usual, a skirt, striped tights, and red sneakers. Yeah, that's gonna impress everyone. Not! And lumberjack girl, seriously, your normal getup? That's not gonna cut it. But blondie, you're looking good! Blue is a good color on you, and the white heels are a nice touch. Totally got the Cinderella thing going on. All you need are some pearls, perhaps a necklace, but the Chaz'd say this is a pretty good look for you. And wow, spy guy also cleans up nicely! I mean, it's basically a gorgeous suit on an ugly ugly little man, but at least the outfit's good. Rusty, no no no, you gotta dress up, not wear your normal ugly clothes. Not good. Although like Boris you'd probably ruin your suit too. Ingrid, still with that same little black dress. You don't really carry that one well. Maybe try, I dunno, a dash of color now and then? Although the fact that you thought orange would be a good color on you suggests that it's for the best that you don't attempt anything in that direction. And Number Two, you actually dressed worse than usual! I mean, what is that, chili dog stains on your shirt? Not a good idea at all, I say. Not a good idea at all. And Marlowe, I don't know what they told you, but pink isn't really your color, and you should get some tops that, I dunno, aren't pink.

Time to swagger in after everybody else and whoa, what is this? It's like Chef actually got some decorating sense! Decent lighting, a long table with a white tablecloth and ten chairs, and a nice wood podium. It's almost as if they're about to host an awards show.

Maybe that's what's up tonight. They're gonna give out a bunch of awards, and I'm gonna win them all. The Chaz is ready for this, people!

I take a seat along with everyone else. As soon as I do, Chef comes out in a dress and puts plates in front of everyone. Steak? With mashed potatoes? And clear water in clean glasses? This is probably the best thing Chef's ever cooked. Of course, it's only right that the Chaz gets a good meal for his awards show. And then Chris walks behind the podium to start hosting. Oh well. I suppose I can put up with him saying stuff if it's all to give awards to me.

"Welcome, campers, to the first ever Total Drama Roast!" Chris announces. "Now, I'm gonna keep this short so we can get to the part where you all insult one another, so here are the rules. Everyone will come up, one-by-one, and draw a name from the pot on the right over there. They then get to perform a tight three minute segment on the person they get. After they finish, Chef will grade their
roast on a scale from one to ten and give feedback. The best roaster wins invincibility in the next
game. The worst roaster gets eliminated. Chef will also pick each roasting contestant. Now I'm
gonna go back to my seat and enjoy dinner and a show! Chef, if you would?"

Chef walks up to the podium. "Our first roaster is: Wendy." Wendy gets up and picks a name from
the hat. "And your roastee is?" Wendy shows him the piece of paper. "Okay, we have Wendy
roasting Rusty. Knock us dead, girl."

Chef goes over to his judging table and sits down. Wendy takes her place behind the podium, bites
her lip nervously, and looks out at us.

"So, uh, Rusty," she says nervously. "Yeah. Let's see here."

Wow, she is bad at this!

"Tell me something, Rusty, what's with the hat?" she asks. "I mean, don't get me wrong, it fits you.
But seriously, a Mack hat? What, did you always want to be a trucker? Because that isn't a trucker's
hat. It's a baseball cap. Make up your mind, you know?" She pauses. "And speaking of needing to
make up your mind, WOW do you ever need to figure out your conspiracies. I mean, seriously.
You're gonna fight off the Mongol hordes of 2087, but you also support them? Which is it, Rusty? I
mean, if anybody was gonna listen to you, they'd either think you were crazy, or a liar. Oh and uh,
peaking of lying, how's the whole not trusting anybody thing going for you? I'm sure it's helped you
get dates."

"I'm married!" Rusty blurs out.

"Oh my god that poor woman," Wendy segues. "I don't mean to insult you, but are you sure that
she's not just a corpse in your basement?"

"No! She's my wife! And I have a son with her!" Rusty complains.

Wendy falls silent for a few seconds before speaking again. "Oh. My. Word. That? That right there?
That's just completely insane. That someone like you was able to breed? Seriously, God is looking at
the world right now, seeing that, and saying 'shut it down, shut it all down! Humanity isn't smart
enough, we're gonna give kangaroos a shot!' I mean, no offense, Rusty, but my father made us do
survival training every year instead of having Christmas, and you still seem nuts. And my dad's got
other things going for him. Like a job. And hair. And you got married? This is just proof that
everything is bigger in Texas, including the idiots. Let's be real, I'm sure she's a wonderful lady. If
she's still married to you, there are only two options: either she's a saint, or she's looking for the
insurance money."

"I'm not insured!" Rusty says loudly.

Wendy shuts her eyes and then opens them wide. "Wow. Just, just wow. We got the poster boy for
bad life decisions right here, folks! Doesn't have insurance, does have a bucket full of conspiracies
that make no sense! I swear, he could run a radio show with his laundry list of theories."

"I did!" Rusty says proudly.

Wendy shrugs. "This roast? It's honestly just writing itself at this point. I might as well just let Rusty
up here to tell you his life story, because no matter what I try to do to mock him it turns out that yep,
he is indeed that crazy. I wouldn't be surprised if he said that he has a secret basement lair, tried to
make a weather balloon himself, or wrote a giant book about all the weird stuff he thinks he sees."

"Hey, I never did that last one!" Rusty complains.
"Not the point." She stops talking. "I don't have any more material on the guy. Chef?"

Chef scratches his head. "Well, that wasn't three minutes. That was more like two and a half. Most of it was mediocre, but there were some bright spots, and since you're all amateurs I'm going easy on you, so...six. Next time, try to work in more details, use more pauses, and make sure that it's more relatable to the audience. Next up is Marlowe."

Marlowe walks up to the hat and chooses a person to take on. Her eyes bug slightly when she sees who it is.

"Who'd you get?" Chef calls up to her.

"Nazz," Marlowe replies. She ascends to the podium and clears her throat.

"So Nazz and I are friends, right? We're friends. We've been on the same team for most of the game, we've been in the same cabin the whole game, we hang out together a lot, we like each other. That said, Nazz, there are some things you do that are just weird. Let's see, where do I start? Oh yeah, there's the fact that you don't wake up until most of the morning is gone or Chris rips us out of bed, take 5 minutes to get ready to go, and still somehow look incredible. I'm serious, people, this is her morning routine. Triana needs fifteen minutes to become properly gothy, and I need 10 minutes to get ready, and yet Nazz rolls out of bed, throws on her clothes, and puts on her lipstick in five minutes flat. I'm serious, you talk to the guys, they say that Chaz takes hours to get ready, and here's Nazz looking wonderful in just a few minutes."

"While we're talking about Nazz and her sleeping habits, she snores. Not loudly, but consider it. There you are, lying in bed. The camp around you is filled with the sounds of nighttime. And then you hear a soft wheezing. Heenh-hoo, heenh-hoo, heenh-hoo. And as you listen to it, you start to wonder what the heck it is, because it sounds like—and I'm not joking—an asthmatic rabbit. And then that rabbit rolls over and yawns loudly like HWOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAaaaaaahhhhh."

Triana, Wendy, Ingrid, and even Nazz all laugh at this explanation.

"Yeah, I know, right?" Marlowe says. "It's the sort of thing you'd think you'd get used to after a while, but uh, nope! It surprises me every night it happens, which has been almost every night so far. And you know what I did the night it didn't happen? I laid awake waiting for it to happen! Yeah, the snowball fight was not the easiest challenge to do, but thank goodness it was non-elimination, right? I mean, I have to say the same about the basketball challenge, too, because I can not play sports. I'm serious, I'm a musician, not a jock. Not like Nazz, who apparently has some real basketball skills. Which is not what I would have expected from her. Because seriously, you look at her, you don't think she's a sporty girl. But nope, apparently she plays sports. Which makes sense; she plays sports and I'm not a jock, but I play music and she can't carry a tune."

"Seriously, we all heard it in the musical episode. But that's not like walking into the shower room while Nazz is showering. Protip: don't do it if you enjoy your hearing. Nazz, I like you, but you seriously can't sing. You sound like an asthmatic rabbit taking a suppository! All I can say, is thank goodness this isn't World Tour, or we'd all be cringing. And Nazz would be voted off or eliminated early, leaving us with no chance to get to know such a nice girl. That's about all the material I have. Chef?"

Chef rolls his eyes. "Two minutes and thirty-six seconds, your insults were weak and didn't actually go after Nazz, and you only had a couple of jokes. Your delivery was good, except for the nervous tick where you kept saying 'serious,' but your material was thin. Five. Numbuh Two, it's your turn."

Marlowe leaves the stage and heads for her seat while Number Two hops up, grabs a slip of paper
"So, Marlowe," he begins, "that was a nice set you had there. Too bad your number just came up!"
He laughs at his own joke. "So yeah, I'm taking on Marlowe in this one. You'd think it might be hard, coming up with ways to insult Marlowe, but I think these jokes have a good bassline! I mean, I don't wanna get in too deep, but I think I've found the right range! And even if I haven't, I can come up with punchlines all day!"

"So, perhaps the most interesting thing about Marlowe is that she's from Canada. And you know Canadians: their heads are made of solid rock! And Marlowe's no exception, although she really knows how to swing! But seriously, folks, sometimes talking to Marlowe is like banging your head against a metal wall! I don't want to sound like a punk, but sometimes I get the blues when I'm in this country. And Marlowe is one of the most Canadian folks I have ever met. And I don't want to nitpick, but sometimes she just tells stories that string out forever. They just wander around in circles, moving a whole step forward and a half step back. I'm serious, her stories just keep walking."

"Not that that's a bad thing. She usually picks enough details to keep them from getting boring. But when she doesn't, be prepared for a long drone. I don't want to sound ungrateful, but sometimes her stories have no melody. They just hammer on the same note the whole time, never striking a new chord. Of course, that's better than the alternative, where a story can move so fast it becomes atonal. But sometimes I wish she would show some pluck and alter them a bit. Maybe add some new overtones or something."

"Of course, Marlowe doesn't want feedback on her storytelling prowess. She dances to her own beat. Admittedly, she's not a very good dancer, which is odd because she knows how to play rhythm. So she can't dance, but she can rock 'n' roll. But she can't sing, or play sports, or do much of anything. You know what that reminds me of? Canada."

"Some people call Canada America's hat. This is incorrect, because hats usually make you look classy. Canada has never looked classy, unless that class was in a reform school. Canada's more like a boot, since it's covered in nature and smells horrible. I shouldn't be so cruel, though. I'm sorry. I don't really know what I'm talking about. Canada's given us plenty of memorable things, like maple syrup. And maple candy. And maple leaves. And Celine Dion. Honestly, I could go on. If it weren't for the fact that Canada has no culture besides yogurt. I jest, I jest, you also have Justin Beaver."

"Speaking of beavers, one thing I've always admired about Canada is its wilderness. I mean, you have giant forests up here. One thing's for certain: being a lumberjack is something you wood always be able to do. I can't say I pine for the timber life, but I never was big into construction. Yeah, I never was a walnut. Although I wood be willing to admit I almond got cast as a tree in the school play. It was called 'How Wood You Treet Me?' I was just never able to nail down the character. My performance came off as wooden. I wasn't able to see what the director saw. I should have axed for advice, but I was too timber. But I learned from the experience, lumbered up and treed out for the football team. They put me in the backfield so I could lay some wood. I thought this arrangement was just cherry. But I branched out, and--"

"Okay, that's three minutes!" Chef declares angrily. "Insulting Canada? Puns? Not actually going after Marlowe at all? Son, that was some of the worst comedy I have ever seen!" He lets out a deep sigh. "But, you did give us three minutes of comedy, so...4. Ingrid."

Ingrid walks up to the hat, takes a piece of paper out, and walks up to the podium.

"I drew Boris," she says. We wait a few seconds for her to start.

"So, Boris is short," she says. "How short? He's so short that eight-year-olds look down on him."
She pauses for a few seconds. "He's so short that he's the last to know when it's raining." She pauses again. "He's so short that he's never ridden a rollercoaster."


Boris doesn't laugh this time.

"Boris is old. How old?" Pause. "He's so old, he's the oldest camper here." Pause. "He's so old, he has to shave off a long white beard every morning." Pause. "He's so old, he remembers when dinosaurs were invented."

Boris frowns.

"Boris always dresses in black." Could this be any more boring? "Why does he always dress in black?" I hope it couldn't. "Maybe he's in mourning." Stop pausing to think! "Maybe he's trying to blend in with the night." That's dark blue, and just blurt something out! "Maybe he just hates fashion trends."

Boris looks as bored as me.

"Boris is from a foreign nation. How foreign?" Please tell me she's gonna say something controversial. "So foreign, it's on the other side of the ocean. Its main exports are bombs and poorly-made automobiles. It is renowned for its skills in espionage, and supplies much of the world with mercenaries. Its schools mainly teach students how to expertly lie, steal, and cheat, while also training them to speak in code and to craft secret plots exceptionally well. Its deception skills are immortalized on its flag, which features a triple cross, and in its national anthem, which further exemplifies the country's devotion to deception and conspiracy. Besides this, Pottsylvania is respected for its abilities in terms of subtle destruction and making deaths look like accidents. Furthermore, Pottsylvania is known for its high level of assassinations, to the point where a decoy once committed suicide as part of a plot to depose the Fearless Leader of Pottsylvania."

Boris stands up and applauds when Ingrid finishes.

"She's right!" he says, eyes filling with tears. "That is my home, all right!"

Ingrid continues. "Boris is very pale. How pale?" Another freaking pause. "So pale, when he goes out into the sun, the sun runs away." It just keeps getting worse. "So pale, he has to use sunscreen at night." How long can three minutes possibly take? "So pale, albinos are shocked by his skin tone."

"Boris is very strange. How strange?" JUST GET TO THE FREAKING PUNCHLINES ALREADY! "Children stay away from him." Okay. that one was at least a bit understated— "Because he's a stranger." DON'T EXPLAIN THE JOKE!

"Well, Ingrid," Chef interrupts, "your three minutes are up. Thankfully. Because that was hand-down the worst stand-up performance I have ever seen. Andy Kaufman would be embarrassed to attempt that. You filled the time, so you get three points. But that's all. Somebody would have to do...I dunno. You should probably pack your bags. Rusty?"

Rusty stands up stiffly, grabs a piece of paper, and walks up to the microphone.

"Hello," he says. "I am D–Rusty Shackleford. And I am going to do a piece on Wendy Corduroy."

Dale coughs nervously and shivers slightly. He then smiles widely at the audience with all of his
teeth and nothing else.

"So, Wendy. You say that you're the daughter of a lumberjack. But if that's true, why didn't you bring an ax? Huh? And why don't you habitually go after all the pancakes at breakfast? Everyone knows that lumberjacks love pancakes. Instead, you always eat eggs. Eggs, and ham! When it's available. Which it isn't always. Anyway! I posit that you aren't the daughter of a lumberjack at all, but rather a time-traveler from the early nineteen-nineties! That is why you wear flannel all the time, and still listen to a Walkman! Because you come from the past! And why do you come from the past? You were brought here as part of a sinister conspiracy to infiltrate this camp with your classic rap stylings, because nobody would expect a tall white girl wearing flannel to be a good rapper! However, you plan to save your rhymes until a point at which you need them, when you will unfurl your abilities to lay down some classic rhymes and classic lines to hypnotize us all into your unwilling slaves! Well I'm not gonna fall for it! You hear me? Rusty Shackleford will not be brainwashed by your crimes of rhyme! I am a free man, and I am no one's slave! Ever!"

Wendy frowns. "Dude. I come from eastern Oregon. Everyone wore flannel there, even before grunge broke. And I use a Walkman because our family's not exactly rich, you know? And also because, you know, eastern Oregon. It's like a more civilized Idaho."

"Oh." Rusty frowns and tries to think of something new to say. "Well, uh, Wendy, you also always wear those heavy boots! Isn't that weird? There's not much mud around here, but Wendy is always ready for mud! Does she know something we don't? I say yes, she does. She knows that eventually there will be a monster truck competition, and she plans to defeat us by being the first one to get into a monster truck. Well I'm on to her! I have actually driven a truck before, so I know what it takes! And I know a guy with a monster truck, so I also know what that takes! Maybe. But when it's monster truck time, Wendy will not have the advantage she thinks she'll have! I swear that to you all! And on that note, her hat will not help her! Mainly because there's no advantage to be gained by wearing a bomber hat in the middle of summer, but still! I swear to you all, her hat isn't going to do anything to save her in the monster truck game. Where is it going to help her? When we are forced to run through acid rain, of course!" Chris quickly began scribbling something down. "And the corpses found in Ciudad Juárez, how are they connected to this? I'll tell you how! Wendy knows who the murderers were, but she won't tell us. And why? Because that hat was made by one of the murdered women! Out of raw materials from where? Peru! The plot thickens. Yes, you guessed it, Wendy's hat is made out of llama hair. And why is it here? Well, there is a tracking device embedded in the collar, and when the time comes, we will be swarmed by the Incas, who will retake the Americas on live television, dancing on the ashes of our wakes! I say ashes, because they will use the wakes to set our bodies aflame! Especially yours, Boris." Boris gulps. "They will start by taking over Canada, and then they will destroy civilization as we know it! That is your plan, Wendy!"

"Three!" Chef yells. "And that's also your score. You filled time, but you didn't pause for laughter. Then again, nobody was laughing, because most of that was a crazy homeless guy rant thing. And I still don't appreciate you insulting Canada. Next victim is Chaz."

I smirk. I'm going to absolutely destroy whomever I get. I proudly walk up to the hat and pull out a piece of paper. I look at the name on it. Triana. This ought to be fun.

I walk up to the podium and grab the microphone.

"Hey there folks, I'm the Chaz, how y'all doing tonight? The food good? The jokes popping? Well, I know they haven't been recently, but hold on to your hats, because the Chaz is here. And I've got my sights set on..." I pretend to scan the room. "Oh, hi Triana! Nice lipstick application. Was the mirror broken, or did you suddenly decide to use your toes to apply it? Oh, I know, you looked at yourself in the mirror, and you wondered what the point was. Usually I don't condone that type of thinking,
but I can't really blame you for thinking that. And I'm only talking about your lips! Expand that to the rest of your face, and yowza. It's hard to imagine being able to get up in the morning." I look at the audience to see how they're taking it. They're not sure whether to laugh or feel sorry for her. "But hey, I'm just joshing with you. You're obviously able to get up every morning. Probably because the beds in this place are so incredibly uncomfortable." That got a laugh. The audience was moving towards me. "And Chef's cooking, that's not a reason to get up at all, is it? That's gotta weigh pretty heavily on your decision." The audience is on my side. "It's not like there's much else to worry about. Well, Chris's sadism, sure, but it's not like your family is bugging you out here. I mean, that's one of the few benefits of being away from home, am I right folks? No family drama." The audience is rolling, but Triana looks wounded. I've hit my target. "But you still gotta get up and put on that lipstick with your toes." And the room laughs.

"Now I know what you're thinking. You're thinking that what's on the outside doesn't matter at all. What matters is what you have on the inside. And you know, I can't help but think you're kinda right. So let's take a look at that." I smirk at the audience. At this point, they want to see the victim bleed. "You have no friends at this camp. You push people away because you're afraid of what they might say. And your entire look is calculated to make sure pretty much nobody wants to get close to you."

"At some point you probably found somebody desperate enough to love you, didn't you? Somebody horribly broken just like you, and you thought, yes, this is right. And then you found some way to convince yourself that it was all wrong, and that not going out with him would be the right choice for both of you. Well it was the right choice for him, at least. You? Enh, not so much."

"Or maybe you have a boyfriend back home, and he's so perfect that you worry about pushing him away with your imperfections because you know you'll never measure up." Boom! Right to the heart! "Which is hard to believe, because you're not as short as Boris. Hey, have you heard? Boris is so short, he's never gone on a rollercoaster!" The audience laughs. "And that's how you make that joke Ingrid. Aw, I love all of you. Even you, Triana. I take back what I said about you being unlovable. You're lovable." I pause for a second. "That is, as long as I don't have to look at you, or listen to you, or think about you. You know, when you're a nonentity. Or did I just point out why you're a goth?"

Wendy laughs sadistically. Everybody else joins in. Except for Nazz. She's been remarkably subdued during my piece. Actually, she's been quiet the whole roast. Earlier, it was obviously because the jokes weren't very good, but she should be laughing now. Maybe she doesn't really have a sense of humor.

"But seriously, folks, let's give Triana a break. It can't be easy getting up every day and putting on the mask of an outcast in a place where you can actually get cast out." That gets a small laugh. "I mean, doing the whole goth loner thing, and then actually being a goth loner? That's a pretty strange way to win, isn't it? Although I suppose it could be worse. She could be putting on a hockey mask and acting like a Canadian!" People laugh at that one. Thanks for warming them up with the Canada jokes, Number Two. "Or putting on a hockey mask and acting like a killer!" People laugh. The old bait-and-switch. "Or, for that matter, putting on a normal mask and trying to convince us you're normal. Thanks for being the real you, Triana. Thanks for being a complete outcast and doing your best to make sure we know it. I'm the Chaz, and this has been Triana's roast! Thank you!"

Chef actually applauds as I leave the stage, smiling. "Well done, Chaz! Only a few seconds short of three minutes, lots of good jokes, some good insults in there, that was the strongest performance I've seen yet," he says. "Soldier, you get nine points. All I can suggest is a bit more audience interaction, maybe use more physicality in your presentation, and quit ragging on Canada. For an amateur, though, that was pretty much top notch. Alright, Triana, your turn. Heck, maybe you'll draw Chaz."
Triana stands up and walks towards the stage, shoulders stiff. I got to her pretty good, and all with insults that wouldn't appear to cut too deeply. The Chaz is an artist! She grabs a piece of paper from the hat and glares at the name printed on it. I sit down and dig in to my steak again. This should be good. She’s about to unleash her rage on an unsuspecting contestant.

"Ingrid," Triana hisses when she reaches the microphone. "Let's talk about Ingrid."

Oh, this is gonna be good. Pure hate in the guise of three minutes of stand-up. Steak doesn't exactly work for this scene; I need popcorn. And the best part is that when I glance at the rest of the crowd, they look worried. They have no idea what they’re about to see.

"You know the strange thing about Ingrid?" Triana starts. "She doesn't wear anything but black. Seriously. Think about it. All day, every day. Black dress, black shoes, black hair. And all of this over pale white skin. Almost translucent. Almost ghostly."

Triana smiles mirthlessly. "Sit back, my friends, and let me tell you the story of a girl who became invisible. Somebody so boring that nobody ever noticed her. She could disappear today, and nobody would notice. Hey Ingrid, name me one instance in which you've influenced the outcome of a game. Name me one time that anybody actually contemplated eliminating you for a reason besides convenience."

"Really? Nothing? Not one instance? You know, you're a lot like Chaz in that regard; the only reason you've survived this long is because nobody thinks that you're important enough to eliminate." Well that one hurt. "You come up here and tell lousy jokes, and that's probably going to be the biggest takeaway for anybody watching. 'Oh, Ingrid, she's the nobody who couldn't tell a joke.' And the really hilarious thing? That's probably not going to be enough to eliminate you. Mark my words, somebody will put on a worse performance later on this evening, and boom. You've made it to the final eight. Why? Because you just didn't have enough personality to be removed."

"Yeah, I get mocked for being a goth. But you know something? At least I'm somewhat interesting. I've actually helped my team compete on occasion. You? You fell in with the right crowd on the wrong team and managed to not annoy them. Big surprise. I've been in your cabin for three days and I have no idea what you bring to the table. Wendy? She may be overly-obsessed with her social status–"

"Hey!" Wendy exclaims, upset.

"–and be too afraid to tell anybody what she really thinks–I mean seriously, she drew the easiest target at this table, no offense Rusty, and I still got the sense she was holding back–but at least she interacts with people. Nazz? She just wants everyone to get along, and its hard not to want to get along with her. Marlowe? She's laid back, just wants to play her music. And you? You just stand in the corner, only speaking every once in a while. Your place could be taken by an Etch-a-Sketch and we'd only notice because the toy would be more talkative! You're only in this room because you've managed not to say anything that could possibly offend anyone. You just keep your head down, and everyone glosses over you. You're somebody who always wanted to be ignored, and now that you have the opportunity, you're going to take it. Because who needs friends, am I right? Surely not you. Because nobody joins this game to make friends. Do they, Wendy?" Wendy scowls. "So you're going to sneak into the final five and then quietly get the boot because you're just the most convenient target. Congratulations, Ingrid! You're a fucking ghost!"

Triana stormed offstage and back to her plate. She grabbed her fork and stabbed at her potatoes.

"Wow," Chef says. "Okay, first things first. That was harsh and about half a minute short of the three-minute mark. So, not good on those counts. Also, it wasn't really very funny; it was more of a
manifesto. However, it was impressive as a performance, and it was better than Rusty's hobo rant, so I'm gonna give you a 4. Boris, your turn."

Boris stands up, grinning nervously, and walks towards the hat. He jumps to reach it, pulls a piece of paper out, and glances at it.

"Numbuh Two?" he asks Chef.

"Okay, get onstage," Chef says. "Because you're not tall enough to reach the podium, we'll bring you a stool."

We wait for a few seconds as an intern comes in with a stool and places it behind the podium. Boris climbs to the top of the stool and clears his throat.

"Hoo boy," he mutters. He falls silent and stares at us.

"So, uh, hello! People," he finally says. "I am, um, how you say, unaccustomed to the stage? And the lights, yes. I'm more used to, er, being, behind the camera? Just like Step-crack. "But, I am, er, here now! Heh heh." He falls silent again. "And uh, that Numbuh Two! Wow. What a, what a guy. He is, um, yes. A real, a real, hey. Why's he called Numbuh Two, anyway? I never see his Numbuh One around! Heh. Heh."

Number Two groans sadly. "He's not with us anymore," he says.

"Oh. Uh, oh my! I am so sorry for your loss!" Boris blurted. "Eh. Er. Uh. Ahem. Well, um, I'm uh, I'm sure there are other topics we can uh, we can, um, discuss? About Numbuh Two. Er, let's see here. Um. Hey, has anybody noticed that he's always wearing goggles? Like he flies. A lot. Maybe Numbuh Two secretly thinks he's a squirrel! Hmm?"

Thinks. He's. A. Squirrel. This was the intelligence level of the competition? Peeps, the Chaz totally has this game in the bag.

"Oh. Er. Okay. Um. Well. Numbuh Two also, he also, he also, he also doesn't, uh, doesn't talk much. Except to uh, make puns. I guess? I'm uh, I'm not sure what to say about him. Besides, uh, the flying thing. And also he um, uh, er, Numbuh Two is always, um, punctual? He uh, always shows up on time? And he um, likes to sleep in? But not too much? He's, uh, on the edge? With his sleeping? And uh, his bed. It's um, always a bit, uh, messy? And he kinda, tinkers? With...stuff? He uh, he messes with it. A lot. Using tools. Like screwdrivers. And hammers. He um, he packed these tools. For I guess, um, tinkering? I think? Because he um, he does a lot of uh, tinkering. Uh, all the time. He, uh, messes around. A lot."

"Okay, that's three minutes!" Chef announces. "You get three points for filling three minutes, but lose a point because you didn't tell a single joke. Or anything that could be construed as a joke. Not even that squirrel line was anywhere near mirthful. So two points. And here's my advice: NEVER DO STAND-UP AGAIN! Finally, we have Nazz. Just...just don't do as badly as Boris. That's all."

Nazz stands up, walks to the hat, and picks the last name out of it. She then walks over to the podium, pushes the stool to the side, and taps the microphone.

"Good evening!" The microphone squeals, and she blushes. "Ladies and gentlemen, dudes and babes! Welcome to the Total Drama Roast! I'm Nazz, and I'm going to talk about Chaz!"

Oh please. Trying to insult me? Everyone knows it's almost impossible to insult the Chaz.

"So, Chaz, let's talk about you. Does everyone love the Chaz?" she asks me.
"You bet they do!" I say.

"Do they think he's the most fantastic thing ever?" she asks.

"Of course!" I say.

"Do they need more Chaz in their lives?"

"Who doesn't?" I ask. "Peeps, I know I need more Chaz in my life. Speaking of which, anybody who wants to spend more time with the Chaz, talk to me and we'll see if we can set something up. The Chaz always has time for his fans. Except when he's busy."

Nazz smiles sweetly. "Everybody loves the Chaz. But nobody knows what it is about him. His big ego? The way he only thinks about himself? The way he only talks about himself? The way that the Chaz is just plain boring?"

Whoa, what? The Chaz is not boring!

"Let's be honest, nobody really likes the Chaz." Yes they do, you idiot! "It's because he's not likable at all. At least when it comes to personality." I have tons of personality! And it's fantastic, everyone loves it. They're laughing because they can't take the idea seriously. "I've spent time with more interesting hunks of wood."

My popsicle-stick head was NOT more interesting than the Chaz! Although it's close. And people need to stop laughing! It's only going to win her points with the judge.

"But Chaz would probably say it's not what's on the inside that counts. So let's talk about that."

Wait, why is the audience smiling like that? Like they're hungry...animals...

Oh no.

"Hey Chaz, nice jacket. It hasn't been in style since 1973, but hey, good attempt. And that shirt fits you well. Totally the wrong color, totally the wrong style, but at least you read the measurements correctly. Good job! Also, the hairstyle? Maybe it makes you look like a total dweeb, but at least you put a few new holes in the ozone layer! Thumbs up, Chaz! And that makeup you're wearing almost completely hides that zit on the right side of your nose. Good choice of skin product!"

That. Smiling. BITCH!

MY FACE IS PERFECT! THAT ZIT WAS A ONCE IN A LIFETIME OCCURENCE! AND ARE THEY LAUGHING? STOP LAUGHING AT ME! STOP LAUGHING AT ME! THIS IS NOT FUNNY AT ALL!

I keep a smile on my face as Nazz smiles at everyone and they laugh at her jokes.

"Also, it may just be me, but you've got a bit of a bald spot forming on the back of your head. Maybe look into a combover or something, huh? I mean, that's what everyone else does when they want to pretend they're not losing their looks," Nazz continues. "And by the way, your shoes? Completely tacky."

That's it. Nazz Van Bartonschmeer must die.

"Thanks everyone! You've been a wonderful audience! Nice to see you all enjoyed the show, but I think we can close it out now. Chef?"
Chef applauds. "Well done. That was pretty much perfect. But it was less than two minutes and the shortest one of the night. You only get seven points. Alright, Boris, you go home. Chaz, you get immunity. Goodnight, everybody!"

Scoring Breakdown:

Wendy Corduroy: 6
Marlowe: 5
Numbuh Two: 4
Ingrid Third: 3
Rusty Shackleford: 3
Chaz Monerainian: 9
Triana Orpheus: 4
Boris Badenov: 2
Nazz Van Bartonschmeer: 7

Final tally of scores received:

Chaz Monerainian: 9
Nazz Van Bartonschmeer: 7
Wendy Corduroy: 6
Marlowe: 5
Triana Orpheus: 4
Numbuh 2: 4
Ingrid Third: 3
Rusty Shackleford: 3
Boris Badenov: 2 (eliminated)
The Comedy Campfire Ceremony

After Nazz departed the stage, she returned to her seat and continued eating and talking with her friends. Around the mess hall, everyone else continued to eat their dinners. The first one to finish was Triana, who quickly tore through the rest of her steak and potatoes and then left without talking to anyone. Boris was the next to finish, and he gulped as he looked around the room.

"Hey, is there any desert?" he asked.

"Nope!" Chris said. "Now get your butt over to the cannon."

Boris hung his head as he exited the mess hall. Chris grinned. "And then there were eight," he intoned. "Who will be eliminated next? Who will stay in the game? I mean, besides Chaz. And will our next episode be a learning experience for the campers? You bet it will! Tune in next time, for more Total! Drama! Cartoon Multiverse!"

Chris grinned at the camera for a few seconds, and then dropped his arms and his smile.

"Well, I'm glad that's over," he said. "Thanks for dinner, Chef. Could I get dessert?"

"Sure," Chef said. "I'll get the chocolate mousse."

"Thanks, Chef," Chris said.

"Hey, I thought there wasn't any desert!" Numbuh Two complained.

"Not for you," Chris said. "But for me and Chef? Sure."

Numbuh Two scowled and took his last bite of potato. Rusty noticed and picked up what was left of his steak in his left hand.

"Uh, what are you doing?" Wendy asked.

"Going for a walk in the night air, it goes well with steak, why?" Rusty said.

"Whatever," Wendy said.

Rusty left. He was followed out by Numbuh Two. After they got a few feet from the entrance, Rusty stopped. Numbuh Two walked past him, and Rusty eyed the mess hall suspiciously before continuing after Numbuh Two. He followed Numbuh Two for a while before finally speaking.

"So I just wanted to tell you I'm sorry," Rusty said.

Numbuh Two gave Rusty an odd look. "About what?" he asked.

"About, you know, back there..." Rusty scratched his neck awkwardly. "With uh, the uh, y'know..."

Numbuh Two continued to look at Rusty oddly.

"The mockery, um, it was pretty harsh..."

"You must've been at a different roast than I was," Numbuh Two said. "Boris didn't say anything hurtful about me at all."
"Not Boris," Rusty said, uncomfortable. "I mean, um–look. I'm sorry you had to watch your girlfriend get insulted."

Numbuh Two's mouth dropped open. "Girlfriend?" he asked.

"Yeah, you know," Rusty said conspiratorially. "Your mystery-solving girlfriend."

Numbuh Two blushed. "She's not my girlfriend!" he said.

"Sure she's not, casanova," Rusty teased.

"Shut up," Numbuh Two groaned.

The duo headed off into the night, with Rusty continuing to tease Numbuh Two and Numbuh Two attempting to deny the allegations. Back at the mess hall, the girls were deep in conversation as they slowly polished off the rest of their food. When Chaz finally left, however, their discussion of whether lipstick or lip gloss was better suddenly ceased.

Ingrid sighed. "I admit it. Triana's insults hurt."

"I hear you," Wendy said. "Triana can be harsh when she wants to."

"Yeah, that was pretty mean," Nazz added.

Marlowe looked uncomfortable. "She was pretty bad back there."

"I know, right?" Wendy said. "I don't know what's been up with her lately. She's just been a total grouch."

"Was she always like this?" Nazz asked. "Or has it been one of those, y'know, new things?"

Wendy shrugged. "She was always a bit unfriendly, but today...man, she was just–she went too far."

"It was part of the challenge," Marlowe offered.

"Yeah, but did she have to be that mean?" Ingrid asked. "That was hands down the angriest attack. I think–I think she hates me."

"I'm sure that's not true," Marlowe soothed. "Chaz was insulting too. She was probably angry at Chaz."

"I dunno," Nazz said. "Chaz didn't seem like he wanted to really get under Triana's skin."

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Confessional

"Who read the signs? Chaz read the signs!" Chaz bragged. "The Chaz knows how to pick at his opponents' weaknesses and make them look like jerks! Triana's on her way out, and the Chaz is in in in! Oh and btw Nazz, if you ever see this, I don't have a bald spot. That's right, I checked. My hair? Still perfect. Like me."

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"Either way, Triana went too far," Wendy said. "Let's just agree on that."

"Okay," Ingrid said.
"I think so," Nazz agreed.

"I guess," Marlowe said hesitantly.

"Either way, we should probably talk somewhere else," Ingrid said.

"We should," Nazz said. "How about the cabin?"

"Triana might be there," Wendy cautioned. "Let's try somewhere else."

"How about the beach?" Marlowe suggested. "Nobody hangs around the beach at night."

Ingrid shrugged. "I'm in."

Shortly thereafter, the girls had gathered at the edge of the beach. They were the only ones there; by this time the rest of camp was turning in for the night.

"So why are we here, anyway?" Wendy asked.

Nazz favored her with a smile. "Strategy," she said.

"Yeah," Marlowe said. "After Megan got the boot, we started meeting after every challenge to make sure we were all on the same page."

"And since you're our friend, we figured you should have a say," Nazz continued. "After all, we don't want you to be randomly kicked off."

"That's nice, but what does it have to do with anything?" Wendy asked.

"The next challenge will probably have a campfire ceremony," Ingrid said. "Two elimination contests in a row? Chris will definitely want to break things up. Usually the show doesn't stray from voting for very many episodes, so chances are the next challenge will have one player get immunity and then the rest of us choose whom to vote off."

"Exactly," Nazz said. "We can figure out who we most want to get rid of and stand a chance of eliminating one of our top targets tomorrow even if none of us win. So we're here to decide who the biggest threat is."

Wendy's jaw dropped. "Really? That makes a lot of sense."

"Hey, when Snidely's plotting against you, you have to be sharp," Ingrid said proudly.

"Yeah," Marlowe said. "And for our biggest threat, I think it's Rusty."

Wendy frowned. "Really? Are you sure?"

"He did leave with Numbuh Two," Nazz said. "They could be plotting something."

"Numbuh Two? In some grand conspiracy?" Ingrid snorted. "Not likely."

"Either way, he's got a lot against him," Marlowe said. "And I can't really see any reason to trust him."

"Let's put him at the top," Nazz decided. "Unless something changes. Who's number two?"

"Numbuh Two," Marlowe said quickly. "If he is in an alliance with Rusty, we'd better be ready to
get rid of him quickly."

"I see that," Nazz said.

Ingrid scowled. "Well Triana is definitely a threat. I think she should be number one."

"I think she was just trying to play the game," Marlowe said.

"Whatever," Wendy said. "I think Triana should be at the top, but we definitely know that our top targets are probably Rusty, Numbuh Two, and Triana. Let’s just put them in that order. Everybody good with that?"

The girls all agreed and headed back to their cabin.
The School Episode

Confessional

Triana frowned at the camera. "I think I went too far," she said. "I mean, Ingrid didn't deserve that. At all. It's just, Chaz was just–how'd he know what buttons to press?"

She sighed. "I just hope Ingrid's still willing to deal with me after today."

Chris grinned at the camera. "Gee, Triana, I don't know. Last time on Total Drama: Cartoon Multiverse, we held a roast. Food was eaten, laughs were shared, and everyone got the opportunity to insult somebody else. Chaz went all-in on Triana, and made her so mad that she leveled both barrels at Ingrid in a sequence I declared hilarious and Chef declared too harsh. Either way, nobody wanted to be Triana's friend after that display, and while her cabinmates have declared her only the third most threatening of the remaining competitors, she's still pretty much persona-non-grata to them–and probably to everyone else, too. Besides this, Nazz did a good job on Chaz, Numbuh Two told too many puns, Rusty sounded like a crazed hobo, Ingrid's jokes fell flatter than Chef's souffle–"

"Hey!" Chef barked from offscreen.

"Sorry dude, but it's true!" Chris called back. "And oh, yeah, Boris didn't tell any jokes, so he got booted off the show. Now we're down to eight players. What's going to happen now? Well, take a look at the chapter title and take a wild guess!"

Chris cackled maliciously.

I heard a school bell ring and sat bolt upright in bed. My head grazed the ceiling, and I winced as I bent slightly and picked splinters out of my scalp. The school bell continued to ring, and I climbed out of the bed and to the ground. I flicked the splinters out of my hand and looked around.

Ingrid and Nazz had gotten out of bed quickly and were getting dressed. Triana was groaning as she slowly peeled herself away from her bedsheets and blankets. And Marlowe looked annoyed as she quickly stowed her bass under the bunk bed we shared.

"Hey Marlowe, what's new?" I asked.

"Yet another morning where I can't practice because of Chris's annoying challenges," she said. "And that school bell is more annoying than his voice."

I laughed. "I know what you mean," I said. "Why do you think he's doing this?"

"Probably some sort of school challenge," Ingrid said.

I rolled my eyes and threw on my clothes. I was the second one out of the cabin, after Marlowe. After about two steps, I looked up and stopped dead in my tracks. The door slammed shut behind me, but I was looking at the object in front of me.

A school bus. Chris had gotten a school bus.

I scowled and walked towards it. The doors opened, revealing Chef behind the wheel.

"Get on! You don't want to be late!" he said, harsh as usual.
"Good to see you too, Chef," I said, rolling my eyes. I took a seat at the back of the bus. Marlowe had chosen one near the middle. As I sank into the seat, the rest of the campers boarded. When Chaz finally made his way onto the bus, Chef shut the bus doors and took off, sending Chaz falling down the aisle. Everyone laughed at him as he popped up, blushing, and climbed into a seat.

Chef took us on a one minute bus ride to the mess hall. Naturally, we were all annoyed when we left the bus and entered the mess hall, which had been turned into a makeshift classroom.

"Welcome to summer school, kids!" Chris said.

"Stow it Chris!" I complained. "Nobody likes school in summer."

Chris grinned. "That's today's challenge," he said. "One day of summer school. Anybody who passes all the classes gets immunity. Anybody who doesn't can be voted out. Today's challenge should be easy enough for all you high schoolers. Maybe not for Rusty, but for everyone else, this challenge should be a breeze. So, is everyone ready?"

Nobody said anything.

"Good! Consider this explanation homeroom. Now it's time for your first class of the day--"

"Wait!" Chaz said. "I have immunity, right?"

"Um, yeah," Chris said slowly.

"So can't I just take the day off?" he asked.

Chris sighed. "Fine. Chaz passed all his classes this year with flying colors and doesn't have to go to summer school. Okay?"

"Cool, just one more request," Chaz said. "Can I stay here and do commentary?"

"Hmm..." Chris said. "One part of me says no. Another part says NO! A third part says that it could be interesting. But a fourth part says you'll try and steal the spotlight from me. So I'm gonna say no. Go do whatever Chazzes do when they're not annoying me."

Chaz frowned and walked out of the mess hall. At the door, he turned around.

"Hey peeps, you know you want to see me," he said. "I'm addressing this to all my fans, so they can--"

"Chef?" Chris asked. Chef walked over to the door and slammed it in Chaz's face.

"Now that that's over," Chris said, smiling, "it's time for your first class. Math. Everybody have a seat."

Soon we were all seated at the desks.

"Welcome to math class, children," Chris said. "I'm your teacher, Mr. McLean. With me is this giant spinning wheel. I just spin it, and whomever comes up will get a question. If it lands on Chaz we'll respin. You've all been given scratch paper just in case your teeny-tiny brains can't figure out the answer on their own. So, who will the first question go to?"

Chris spun the wheel. It landed on Chaz. Chris frowned and spun again. This time, it stopped on
Marlowe's face.

"Marlowe!" Chris said. "What is one plus five?" The equation appeared on the board behind him.

Marlowe wrinkled her nose. "Six?" she guessed.

"Correct! Next question!" Chris said. He spun the wheel, and it landed on Rusty. "Rusty! What is one thousand, six hundred and thirteen plus eight thousand, four hundred and thirty-six?"

Rusty scratched his head, wrote the problem down on a sheet of paper, and spent a minute figuring it out. Chris stood there crankily until Rusty blurted out an answer of "Ten thousand and forty-nine."

"Yeah, you got that one right," Chris said. "Folks at home, you're lucky; the cameras cut straight to the answer. I have to sit through this. Next up is..."

Another spin.

"Triana! 237 minus 183!"

Triana stared at the question and then said "Fifty-four."

"Correct!" Chris said. Another spin. "Numbuh Two! Eight divided by four!"

"Two," Numbuh Two said.

"Correct!" Spin. "Rusty! Eight times four!"

"Thirty-two."

"Correct! Wendy!"

Oh crap that's me.

"Eighty-four divided by four!"

Let's see, eight over four, two, four over four, one, twenty-one.

"Twenty-one," I said.

"Right!"

I felt relieved. Chris spun the wheel again.

"Triana! 252 times 136!"

Triana wrote it down and began to work out the problem slowly. After a few minutes, she put down her pencil.

"Thirty-four thousand, two hundred and seventy-two?" she asked.

"That's it! Nazz, what is 48433 divided by 17?"

Nazz also took a while to work this one out. Eventually, she said "Two thousand, eight hundred and forty-nine."

"That's right. Triana! Five eighths times eight sixths?"
Triana took a minute and then said "Five sixths?"

"Good. Rusty! Five to the third power, aka five cubed?"

Rusty thought about it and said "One hundred and twenty-five?"

"Correct. Ingrid! Three twenty-eighths divided by fifteen twenty-firsts?"

"Three-twentieths," Ingrid said after about ten seconds.

"Right! Marlowe, what is twenty percent of 1615?"

"Um, about...three hundred and twenty-three?" Marlowe asked.

"Correct. Ingrid! If x minus twelve equals negative seven, what does x equal?"

"Five," Ingrid said almost immediately. "X equals five."

"That's the right answer. Triana! If x squared equals three x plus four, what does x equal?"

Triana wrote it down and spent a few minutes working it out before looking up and saying "X equals either negative one or four."

"That's the right answer," Chris said. "Come on! We're in high school, and nobody's flunked yet? That's just wrong! Okay, fine. Next player is...Rusty!"

Rusty gulped.

"Tell me, what is eight to the power of five-thirds?"

The equation appeared on the board. Rusty looked at it, confused.

"Um. Uh. Er," he stammered. "I'm gonna say...thirty...two?"

"You're guessing, aren't you," Chris said.

"Um...no?" Rusty said.

"Whatever. You got the answer right. Somehow. Next...Wendy!"

Great. Another hard question.

"Suppose there is a triangle."

Wait, geometry? I took this freshman year.

"The first angle is ninety degrees."

Let's see, a right triangle...

"The second angle is seventy-five degrees."

I scribble down the angle measures. Triangles are 180 degrees, so that means the third angle is...

"What is the measure of the third angle?"

"Fifteen degrees!" I blurt out.
"Correct!" Chris says. He spins the wheel again, and it lands on Numbuh Two. "Numbuh Two, here's your question. There is a triangle. Side a is 2 miles long. Side b is 6 miles long. How long is side c?"

Numbuh Two thought about it for a few seconds and then somehow managed to answer "Two square root of ten miles."

Chris grinned widely. "Really? Let's see what the blackboard has to say about that?"

Chris turned towards the blackboard, grinning. The blackboard displayed the answer ‘2√10 miles.’ Chris's face fell.

"Fine. You're right," he said. "Next up is...Nazz! And your question is..." He stopped. "Forget it. Just read it off the board."

The blackboard displayed the question ‘(5+2) • 20 ÷ 21 – 4^3 + 11 = ?’

This was getting tricky. Nazz spent several minutes on the question. As she worked on it, I crossed my fingers that she'd get it right and wouldn't be the first one knocked out.

"Negative one hundred and thirty-nine thirds?" she finally guessed.

"Hmm," Chris said. "Maybe?"

He turned to the board. It read '-139/3.'

"Okay, you're good. Next question goes to Ingrid! Find the sine, cosine, tangent, cosecant, secant, and cotangent of pi over three on a unit circle."

Ingrid looked at the board silently. After about a minute, she started to speak.

"The sine of pi over three equals the square root of three over two. The cosine of pi over three equals one half. Tangent of pi over three equals the square root of three. Cosecant of pi over three equals two over the square root of three, secant of pi over three equals two, and cotangent of pi over three equals one divided by the square root of three."

"Um..." Chris said. The board flashed six answers: sin(π/3) = (√3)/2, cos(π/3) = 1/2, tan(π/3) = √3, csc(π/3) = 2/(√3), sec(π/3) = 2, cot(π/3) = 1/(√3)

"Well, I guess that's correct," Chris said. "Next question goes to...Marlowe! What is infinity plus negative infinity?"

Marlowe shrugged. "Indeterminate?"

"I'll take that," Chris said. "And now, folks, it's time to up the ante. Calculus time! See how you like that. This is pretty much college-level math, so, y'know, hopefully people will start to flunk. And our first contestant is...Nazz! Tell us, what is forty-six times two i?"

Nazz shrugged. "Eighty-two eyes?"

Chris smirked. "Okay, first of all, it's the mathematical value i, not eyes. Secondly, it's ninety-two i, not eighty-two eyes. Thirdly, I wanted ninety-two times the square root of negative one but would have accepted ninety-two i. Anyway, you're wrong, so..."

A hole in the ceiling opened above Nazz's desk and a bunch of mud fell out, completely covering Nazz.
"Better tell the world about that dirty little girl!" Chris said, laughing. Nazz got up and left, humiliated. "Don't forget to wash behind the ears!" he called after her. He finished laughing and turned back to us.

"Well, that was fun," he said. "Next question goes to..." He spun the wheel. "Marlowe! What is the limit, as x approaches four, of x to the fourth power minus eight x plus twenty-nine?"

The equation appeared on the board. Marlowe peered at it, wrote it down, and then got to work. After a few minutes, she looked up again.

"Um, two hundred and fifty-three?" she asked.

"Correct! And...Wendy?"

OH COME ON!

"What is the limit as x approaches zero of one divided by x?"

Wait. It's impossible to divide by zero.

"Undefined!" I said. Thank you Marlowe!

"That's right!" Chris said. "For mathy reasons I don't quite understand. Anyway, we have two more questions, and only one of you has failed. You people are seriously starting to annoy me here. Anyway, next question goes to...Ingrid! Tell me, what is the derivative of x squared over two plus x plus one?"

The question appeared on the board as 'dy/dx of (x^2)/2 + x + 1 = ?' Ingrid stared at it for a few seconds, and then said "X plus one?"

"Correct! Final question!" Chris said. "Who's it gonna be?"

Chris intentionally reached for the wheel in an exaggerated manner.

Please not me. Please not me.

Chris spun the wheel.

Please not me. Please not me.

The wheel spun around and around.

Please not me. Please not me.

It started to slow to a stop.

Please not me. Please not me.

The wheel slowed and stopped just one tick away from me.

Don't move. Don't move.

"Triana!" Chris said.

Oh thank God.

"Please integrate twelve x to the fifth minus ten x to the fourth minus four x to the third plus seven
hundred and twenty x plus one."

Wait, what? I looked at the board, confused. It read \( \int 12x^5 - 10x^4 - 4x^3 + 720x + 1 = ? \)

Oh thank GOD I don't have to answer that!

Triana began scribbling on a piece of paper. After about ten minutes, she looked up.

"Okay," she said. "I think it's two x to the sixth minus two x to the fifth minus x to the fourth plus three hundred and sixty x squared plus x."

Chris, who had been reading his notecard along with Triana, looked up and grinned.

"That's correct!" he said. "Except you forgot the plus c."

Triana visibly deflated. "What?" she asked.

"No plus c," Chris said. "Which means no right answer. Which means..."

A hole opened in the roof and a giant spring beneath Triana's desk shot up, sending her flying. She screamed as she sailed through the sky.

"She won't find nobody home," Chris said cryptically. "Class dismissed! You have five minutes until your next class. Get out of here so we can set up."

When the five of us that still remained came back in, five tables had been set up, each with five plants on them.

"Welcome to botany class, students!" Chris said. "On your tables are five plants. Figure out which ones are poisonous and which aren't. I'll come by to grade your assignment in fifteen minutes."

I approached my table and stared down the plants. I had never seen any of them before.

I exhaled deeply and thought about what to do. Finally, I concluded that my best option was to see if anybody else had similar plants. Nobody did, so I decided to guess. Let's see, this first one...round green leaves, no scent. I decided to call it okay. The next one had red leaves and sharp edges, so I called it poisonous. The one after that had round leaves and a harsh scent. I chose to put it in the poison pile. After that I encountered a plant with sharp edges and a sweet scent. This one was tough. I shrugged. Might as well call it safe. And the final plant, something with purple leaves that smelled sickly sweet. That's poisonous. Probably.

I sighed and sat back. All I could do now was wait for Chris to grade my project.

Wow, that's an odd sentence.

"Let's see," Chris said as he looked at everyone's tables. "Numbuh Two, you managed to say every poisonous plant was okay and every okay plant was poisonous. F. Wendy. Nice job. You got them all right. You move on. Ingrid. Also a good job. You get to go to your next class. Rusty, they're not all poisonous. F. Marlowe, they're not all okay. F."

Chris looked at all of us. "Alright, get out of here. We're gonna take ten minutes to set up the next class."
When Ingrid and I returned to the classroom, we found that two desks had returned, along with a bunch of note paper.

"Welcome to English class!" Chris said. "Your assignment today is a seven-paragraph essay all about how great I am. You have one hour."

I stared at the paper. What could I say about Chris?

Geez, it was impossible to come up with anything positive.

Chris is a jerk? No. Chris is...what is Chris?

Besides a horrible person, of course.

Think. What can I say about Chris? He's uh, good-looking? Maybe? Except for the weird cleft in his chin that looks like a butt.

Heh. Butt-chin.

Geez, Wendy, focus! You've only got a limited amount of time to write this thing!

Okay. Just lie. You've lied before. You're good at lying. Figure out some good lies to write about Chris.

Like...

Like...

Ugh, this is hopeless!

Chris is...stupid? Annoying? Self-absorbed?

Yes, yes, and yes. But I can't praise him for that.

How can I remake that to sound good?

Hmm...

Maybe...

Uh...

Well if I...

GAH! I HATE THIS STUPID ASSIGNMENT!

The school bell rang. I looked at my paper. Twelve sentences, all of them written within the past few minutes. And Ingrid had been relaxing for a while. This wasn't good.

"Hmm," Chris said, examining my paper. "Poor composition, or word choice, or whatever. Point is, it's not long enough and doesn't praise me enough. F." He walked over to Ingrid. "Hmm. Long enough, talks about my eyes, which are great thank you...enh, it could be a lot longer, but it's passable. C. Ingrid, you're headed for your final class of the day!"

Wait, what? Another class? She was the only one left!
Chris led us out of the mess hall and to the center of camp, where everyone else had been gathered by Chef. He then took us to a boxing ring that had been set up on the beach.

"Ingrid, if you would?" he said, gesturing to the ring. Ingrid climbed in and sat down on a stool in the corner. Chris climbed in after her and picked up a microphone at the center of the ring.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the last class of the day!" he said. "Gym class! Now, Ingrid, do you want the good news or the bad news first?"

Ingrid shrugged. "Bad news?" she said.

"The bad news is, gym class will only last three minutes, maximum," Chris said.

"And the good news?" Ingrid asked.

"The good news is, the challenge consists of going one whole round in the ring with Chef!" Chris said.

Ingrid's jaw dropped. "Um, how is that good news?" she asked, worried.

"It's good for the viewing audience," Chris said, chuckling. "What, you thought that when I did the good news, bad news bit I was referring to you? No, I was talking to our loyal viewers. Now then, Chef?"

Chef climbed into the ring and stood in the opposite corner from Ingrid.

"In the Chef's Corner—" Chris started to say

"That should've been mine," Chaz said.

"AHEM!" Chris said. "In the Chef's Corner, we have the one and only world boxing champion, Cheeeeeeefff Hat-chet!"

Nobody applauded.

"And in the other corner, we have Ingrid. Now let's goooooo!"

"Should'n that be—" I started to ask.

" Couldn't afford the rights," Chris said. "Now get to the middle of the ring, Ingrid!"

Ingrid stood up shakily. "Crackers," she said. She walked towards the center of the ring and started to put up her dukes. That's when Chef's right hook plowed into her face.

Ingrid flew backwards and landed hard. Her eyes were shut and her nose was bleeding. Chris ran over to her.

"One! Two! Three! Four! Five! Six! Seven! Eight! Nine! Ten!" he counted. The bell rang. "And Chef wins in a knockout! Congratulations, Chef! Everyone else, you're on the chopping block!"

"But what about—" Chaz said

"Yeah yeah, except for Chaz. Everybody but Ingrid, figure out who you're going to vote off. Ingrid?" Chris knelt down beside her. "Have a nice sleep."

Chris laughed evilly.
When Ingrid finally came to, only three of us were waiting—me, Nazz, and Numbuh Two.

"Why does my face hurt?" she asked.

"Chef knocked you out," Numbuh Two said. Ingrid groaned.

"Are you okay?" Nazz asked.

"I got punched in the face by Chef," Ingrid said. "This isn't exactly the most pleasant thing that's ever happened to me."

"Well, are you going to be alright, do you think?" Numbuh Two asked.

Ingrid slowly sat up. "Sure," she said. She looked at me and Nazz. "I'll meet you back at the cabin, okay?"

"Yeah, see you there," Nazz said. She pulled me away from Ingrid.

As soon as we were out of earshot, I asked, "What was that all about?"

Nazz smiled. "Love. It's a beautiful thing."

"Make one man weep, make another man sing?" I asked.

Nazz looked at me, confused. "Uh, sure," she said. "Anyway, let's just leave them alone for a little. I'm gonna wait at the cabin."

"I'll get lunch," I said. We split up, and I headed towards the mess hall where I'd already spent too much of my day.

Soon, I had gotten a tray containing a bowl with some sort of soup and a sandwich made with stale bread and probably expired ingredients and was heading for a seat. As soon as I sat down, somebody else sat down across from me. I looked up, and our eyes met.

Triana was wearing an expression of shock that I'm sure was on my face as well.

"Um, sorry," she said. "I'll move."

"You better," I said. As soon as the words left my mouth I regretted them. Triana frowned and stopped getting up.

"On second thought, I'll stay here," she said.

Well, in for a penny in for a pound. What the heck does that expression mean, anyway? A pound of pennies? Whatever.

"Really? Don't you have any friends to sit with?" I asked nicely.

Triana blushed. "Not anymore," she said quietly.

"Oh, well that's a surprise," I said. Triana shut her eyes tightly and then began picking at her food.
Geez, what's with her? She goes onstage and tears into Ingrid, who's never done anything to her, then I insult her to her face and she just stays silent? Ever since Ruby left, she's just been unpredictable. I once thought we could be friends or something, but nope. I'm completely fed up with her.

And she's the reason we had to meet on the beach last night. I like being friends with the other girls, but Triana's throwing a wrench into the whole thing. She's just always in the way. What next, she'll somehow manage to beat me in some sort of elimination challenge? She shouldn't even be on this show! Ruby filled the goth quota! What does Triana fill, the annoying player quota? Because news flash, Chaz does a good enough job of that on his own. Having Triana here is just making things suck.

Screw it. She's here, eating lunch, so I'm going to be somewhere else. Like the cabin. Maybe Ingrid's feeling better.

And maybe Triana's actually a bigger threat than Rusty. She is making it harder to decide who to get rid of.

I got up, tossed the rest of my food, and exited the mess hall.

When I arrived at the cabin, Ingrid was lying in bed while Nazz stood over her.

"Now are you sure you're alright?" Nazz asked.

Ingrid winced. "Just a pounding headache. Probably a concussion, although the fact that I was able to get up and wasn't dizzy is a good sign. Do you have any aspirin?"

"No, sorry," Nazz said. "I could ask Chris for some."

"Don't bother," Ingrid said. "They probably won't give me any if I ask, and they might even work something headache-inducing into the next challenge just to take advantage of it."

Nazz shrugged. "Okay. Hey Wendy."

"Hey," I said. "You feeling better, Ingrid?"

"I guess," she said.

Marlowe walked in. "Hey guys, just grabbing my bass," she said.

"Wait," I said. "We need to talk."

Marlowe took a seat on her bed. "About what?" she asked.

"About Triana," I said. "I think she's the most important player to get rid of."

"Are you kidding me?" Marlowe asked. "Why are you so down on Triana?"

"She's a dead fish!" I said. "She attacks Ingrid onstage, when I went to eat lunch today she pestered me, she openly doesn't like any of us besides you, and if she was here right now we'd be having this conversation somewhere else. Which we already have to do anyway!"

"She's a nice girl!" Marlowe said. "You just don't like her for some reason. But Triana's pretty cool! Sure she's kinda weird, but—"
"You only like her because she listens to you play bass," I said. Marlowe's jaw dropped.

"Whoa, let's cool off," Nazz said. "We don't need to--"  

"Oh, and you hate her why? Because she's not exactly like you?" Marlowe asked. "Because she has interests outside of just hanging out in the woods all the time?"

"Like you're one to talk!" I said. "Half of your stories happen in the mall! 1980s much?"

"You dress like a Nirvana groupie!" she said.

"Oh you did not!" I said.

"Could you please stop yelling, my head is starting to hurt," Ingrid said.

"Yeah, guys, chill out," Nazz said.

"Whatever. I'm out of here," Marlowe said, grabbing her bass and leaving.

"Me too," I said. I followed her out. We passed Triana, who was coming back from lunch, and as she passed me I gave her the stinkeye.

Marlowe and I avoided each other for the rest of the day. But when the campfire ceremony rolled around, we took seats next to each other. I had voted for Triana. I could only hope that the rest of the girls had decided to do the same.

Chris walked up to the podium.

"There are eight of you here today. That's because Chaz decided to come, probably because he wanted more screen time," Chris said.

"You know it, peeps!" Chaz said.

"Anyway, Chaz is immune, but we weren't expecting him to show up because he totally blew off today's challenge, so he's not getting a weiner. I have six hot dogs with me right now. And the first one will go to...Marlowe!" Chris said. Marlowe got up and took her weiner.

"The next frankfurter is a very special one...Rusty!" Rusty followed Marlowe's lead.

"And the next person to swallow a big sausage will be...Numbuh Two!" Numbuh Two took his sausage. "Looks like it's just girls now. Four girls, three weiners."

Chris paused for some time to let suspense build.

"And our next one goes to...Nazz!" Nazz got up and took her hot dog. "And of course we're gonna let Ingrid in on this sausage party."

Ingrid wrinkled her nose but took the hot dog. It was just me and Triana now.

Geez, did Marlowe organize some sort of resistance? Did she vote for Rusty when all the guys voted against me? Did she convince the other girls to get rid of me?

"And our final weiner goes to..."

Please pick me please pick me please pick me
"..."

please pick me please pick me please please please please
"...

please please please please please please please please

"Wendy!"

I stood up, half-shocked, and walked towards Chris and the weenie platter. As I made my way towards him, a huge grin spread across my face. I took my sausage and looked back towards Triana. She stood up.

"Well, good game everybody," she said. She looked at Chris. "Guess it's cannon time?"

"That's right," Chris said. "Time to stuff yourself into a cannon and get shot through the air for everyone's entertainment."

Triana shrugged and took a couple of steps towards the cannon. Suddenly, she halted, and her eyes shone bright white. After a few seconds, the glow faded, and she shook her head. She looked at Chris with a grin.

"Do I get any final words?" she asked.

Chris shrugged. "Usually, no," he said. "But this time, I'll allow it."

"Thanks," she said. Triana smiled and turned to us. She opened her mouth to speak. Suddenly, a plume of purple smoke that curled away in the form of skulls appeared beside her. When the skulls cleared, a Dracula-like figure was revealed.

"Ready to go, pumpkin?" it asked.

"Hmm, let's see," she said. "Leave the island by cannon, or go home with you. Tough choice."

The figure's face fell. Triana giggled. "I'm just kidding, Dad."

"Dad?" we all asked.

"Oh, right. This is my father, Doctor Orpheus," she said to us.

"And you're a...magician?" Nazz asked.

"Well, if you must call me that, yes," Doctor Orpheus said. "But if you are after mere parlor tricks, you will be sorely disappointed. For if I reach behind your ear, it will not be a nickel I pull out, but YOUR VERY SOUL!"

We all looked at him, stunned.

"I'm a necromancer," he said. "Anyway, time to go, pumpkin."

"Sure, Dad," Triana said. Suddenly, she stopped. "Wait. Could I just do one thing?"

"Of course!" Doctor Orpheus said.

Triana turned back to us.
"Don't trust her," she said.

And father and daughter disappeared in another plume of purple-skulled smoke.

Voting Breakdown:

Nazz Van Bartonschmeer: Triana Orpheus
Ingrid Third: Triana Orpheus
Marlowe: Triana Orpheus
Wendy Corduroy: Triana Orpheus
Triana Orpheus: Nazz Van Bartonschmeer
Numbuh Two: Wendy Corduroy
Rusty Shackleford: Numbuh Two
Chaz Monerainian: Ingrid Third

Final tally of votes received:

Triana Orpheus: 4 (eliminated)
Nazz Van Bartonschmeer: 1
Ingrid Third: 1
Numbuh Two: 1
Wendy Corduroy: 1
The Poker Episode

I wake up without the aid of an alarm and look around the cabin. Chris hasn't called us out, so chances are today will have an afternoon or evening challenge. I focus on the clock. 10:16. It might be too late to get breakfast, but I have time to kill before lunch. So maybe now is a good time to think about strategy. After all, I probably won't have to interrupt my train of thought to deal with the people around me at this time.

So who's the biggest threat? I can't tell who I should get rid of. Numbuh Two is a bit of a snoop, and he helped break open Snidely's alliance. He's always sniffing around, although he mostly stopped after Snidely left. The likelihood that he'll figure out that I'm really running this game is pretty low, but it's possible that he could suddenly figure things out and turn on me. Rusty's also a snoop, but he's oblivious to everything around him. He thinks that the game is a huge conspiracy and doesn't look to see what's actually going on right under his nose. He's surprisingly agile, physically speaking, but mentally he leaves a lot to be desired. And Chaz is just a fame hog. Occasionally he shows flashes of aptitude, like when we played him in basketball or when he did stand-up, but overall it's tough to see him as anything other than a minor annoyance.

So which of these three guys needs to go down today? Yesterday it was Triana, at Wendy's insistence. That wasn't the best thing to happen; we had a plan to get rid of Rusty, but she basically took a firm stance that we had to vote off Triana. The fact that we gave in so easily could spell trouble. But now there's four of us, and we can take out anybody we want. Four of seven is pretty good, so long as we can keep it together. Although that may not be easy. Wendy's assimilation may have given us a numbers advantage, but it's also thrown off the makeup of the group. And it's hard to keep a group of more than three all focused on the same goal. Plus, if we all make it to the final four she might be more liked than me and I might get the boot.

But what if she didn't make it to the final four? After all, there was that time a traitor appeared in our midst, early on in the game. What if that traitor were to make a return appearance and vote off Wendy? That could work. But is it a good idea?

Should Wendy leave the show? She's a strong competitor, she's on our side, and she's clearly willing to help us. But on the other hand, she's a strong competitor, she's on our side, and she's starting to become more popular than me.

So the downsides to voting her off are that I lose an ally and cannot control the votes as effectively. That's a fairly small price to pay. On the upside, if I vote her off, I get rid of a big threat, still have the votes to force a stalemate, don't have to worry that Wendy takes control, and am able to dangle the possibility that there's a traitor among us over everyone's head. But this only works if Wendy actually gets voted off. I can't go up to the rest of the girls and tell them we should get rid of Wendy. After all, she's our friend and ally. Even if she's trying to take control of our unspoken alliance. And if a guy gets voted off this week, there's no way to force Wendy out. So it has to be this week.

Unless it's an elimination game. If that's the case, all bets are off.

Okay. Think about it. It's helpful to stay a step ahead. Just consider all likely possibilities.

If there's a vote tonight, I need to appear loyal. So I have to choose somebody we should attempt to vote off from the guys' side. Which of them is the best candidate for removal? That's the question I started with. And it's tough to say. But chances are that it'll be easiest to get rid of somebody the girls can all believe is a threat, which effectively takes Chaz off the table. So that narrows it down to two players, assuming neither of them win immunity. But if one of them does, it's bound to be the other
that gets advocated for. And Rusty was at the top of the hit list until Wendy decided it was Triana's turn, so he'll probably be public enemy number one.

So push for Rusty to get booted, or if not him Numbuh Two. But the tricky part will be getting rid of Wendy. I'll need the boys to all decide to vote in lockstep. That's gonna be hard. How do I get them to all decide that Wendy is their worst nightmare? I don't have an in with any of them.

Maybe I'll get lucky and they'll band together of their own accord. Or maybe they'll each decide to vote off Wendy. But I can't reach across the aisle without looking suspicious, and I don't know how I can throw a hint their way. Still, the guys have to realize that there's something fishy going on. Maybe if we shove our friendship in their face they'll take the hint.

That one could backfire though. Three on three could be a problem next week, and if it's an elimination challenge, it could be two on three. But if Wendy isn't gone now, it'll be impossible to vote her off, and she's probably going to avoid being eliminated. She's hands down the toughest competitor still in the game.

So what are my options? Let's see, I can vote for Wendy, hope she gets booted, and hope that the rest of our unspoken alliance survives the next challenge and holds a numbers advantage. Or I can vote for a guy, in which case we'll hold the numerical advantage but it'll be nigh-impossible to kick Wendy off the island. Especially since she seems like she's trying to take position as queen of the game.

I have to vote off Wendy tonight if she doesn't have immunity. If she does, I'll go with Rusty. But if she doesn't, hopefully the guys also decide to vote off Wendy.

Now what if there's no vote? Then I have to consider voting strategy for the next few games. Unless I'm eliminated. Let's just take that one off the table. Thinking about it is a moot point since all of this won't matter anyway if I leave. So if one of the girls is eliminated and it's not Wendy, I have to keep her on. We need the numbers advantage. But if one of the guys is eliminated, it becomes practically impossible to get rid of Wendy until the final four. So this is my last chance to eliminate Wendy in a vote, and I need three other people to vote with me, but I can't tell them how to vote.

I'm gonna need a whole lot of luck today.

I get up and head for the mess hall at 11:23. It's late for breakfast, but it might be lunchtime. It's impossible to tell with Chef. Usually food is served in the general areas of morning, afternoon, and evening, but he always changes opening and closing times. I'm pretty sure this is done to mess with us.

I admit, it works. The fact that challenges pop up at seemingly random times also add to how disconcerting things are. But since the last two challenges took place in the mess hall, chances are we'll be doing something outside, and there will be food.

And then I round the corner and spot Chef wearing a tuxedo and sunglasses and standing in front of the closed mess hall doors. He has a meaner look on his face than usual, and I slow to a stop in front of the mess hall.

"What's all this?" I ask.

He looks me over meanly. "Doors don't open until noon," he says.

"Okay, but why?" I ask.
"Doors don't open until noon," he says.

I turn around. No food here. But it looks like it's going to be another indoor challenge today. Wonder what it'll be.

As I walk away, I spot Marlowe approaching.

"Hey!" I call to her. "The mess hall's closed."

Marlowe sighs. "Really? Why?"

I shrug. "I guess we're having another challenge in there."

"Fine," Marlowe says. "What should we do?"

"Apparently, wait until noon," I say.

"Okay," she says. "What's today's challenge?"

"I don't know," I say. "Chef wouldn't tell me anything."

We head back towards the cabin. I look over at her.

"Hey, I'm sorry about Triana," I tell her.

She shrugs. "I voted against her too."

"Yeah, but I know you liked her," I say.

"It's just, well--" she says. "It feels like we never gave her a chance, you know? I mean, I know Wendy knew her better than I did, but I really thought--I dunno."

"Yeah, but look at it this way," I say. "Triana was going to have to go down at some point, right?"

"Right," she says hesitantly.

"And Wendy's valuable as an ally, right?" I ask.

"I guess," she says.

"So keeping her on our side is worth it, right?" I ask.

"Sure," she says. "But what about when we need to get rid of Wendy?"

Is this my chance? If Marlowe really dislikes Wendy, she might go along with me and try to vote her off. And that would leave at worst a tie between our votes and the other two votes from the girls. Then it would only take one vote from one guy to push Wendy out. It would be really easy to accomplish. But then again, Marlowe might shrink away from the opportunity. She could be shocked that I'd propose such a thing. She could rat me out to everyone else. And that would be a sure way to get sent packing.

"Let's cross that bridge when we come to it," I say. "Just one question."

"Yes?" she asks.

"What the heck was up with Triana's dad?" I ask.
She shrugs. "Her dad's a necromancer, her stepdad's like this super-talented warlock, her mother's a sorceror, her ex-boyfriend's been cloned a bunch of times, and she's got magic powers."

I look at Marlowe, astounded.

"What?" she asks.

I quirk an eyebrow.

"Look, she's either a consummate liar or all of those things are true," she says. "And given her dad's appearance last night..."

"Point taken," I say. "But still, that's a pretty wild home life."

Marlowe and I enter the cabin.

At 11:52, we leave for the mess hall. A few minutes before we left we had heard an announcement telling everyone to be there by noon, and when we arrive we see that everybody but Numbuh Two is there and Chef is still standing guard. As we wait, Numbuh Two runs up, panting and out of breath. A little bit later Chef steps away from the mess hall doors and they fly open, revealing that Chris is wearing a waiter's outfit and a dealer's visor.

"Welcome to the Total Drama Poker Tournament!" he announces.

Well this is good news. I'm pretty familiar with poker.

"Today you're all going to play Texas Hold-Em," he tells us. "I hope you all know how to play! Each of you will get a thousand chips to play with, and the first place winner will get a special advantage! I'm not gonna tell you what it is, but you're gonna wish you had it tomorrow!" He winks at us. "Now let's play!"

We enter the mess hall. It has been decorated like a casino. In the middle of the mess hall is a crescent-moon table with seven seats placed around it and a seat in the middle for the dealer. Every seat has an assortment of chips in front of it. Chef tears off his suit, revealing a cocktail dress, and takes his position in the dealer's seat. I sit down in the seat just left of the center chair. Marlowe sits next to me on my left, and Rusty sits down on my right. I glance at my chips. They're helpfully labeled; 10 20s, 6 50s, and 5 100s. Everyone else finds their place, and Chef shuffles the cards. He pushes the dealer button over to Chaz, on the far left side of the table, and deals each of us two cards.

"Blinds are 20 and 40," he says. "Ante up."

Nobody moves.

"Wendy! Put twenty dollars in!" he barks. Wendy does as commanded, and Numbuh Two pushes in forty without having to be told to do so.

I look at my cards. Three of spades, four of diamonds. Not a very good hand.

Next to me, Rusty raises to 80. I fold. Marlowe follows my lead, and Chaz calls. On the other side of the table, Wendy goes all-in, and the players immediately after her follow her lead. Rusty and Chaz push their cards away, and Chef lays down the hand.

Jack of spades, eight of spades, four of hearts, ace of hearts, four of spades.

Wendy flips over her hand, showing a pair of tens. Numbuh Two grins and shows off the ace and
The two girls scowl and leave the table. Chef pushes the pot towards Numbuh Two. Once Numbuh Two has moved it out of the way, he deals the next hand. Numbuh Two lays down 20, and Rusty puts in forty. I glance at my hand. Ten of spades, three of clubs. I fold.

Next to me, Marlowe does the same. It's hard to draw conclusions from just two hands, but either she's getting bad cards or she's going to play conservatively. Chaz calls, and Numbuh Two raises to 120. Rusty and Chaz both call, and the flop comes down. Four of diamonds, nine of clubs, five of spades.

Chaz bets forty. Both of his opponents call.

The turn card is a six of clubs. Chaz bets eighty. He gets called again. Either everyone has a good hand, or they think Chaz is bluffing.

Final card is the king of hearts. Numbuh Two visibly collapses.

Chaz bets eighty again, and Numbuh Two folds. Rusty's face cracks into a grin as he raises 120. Surprise flits across Chaz's face, but he calls the bet.

Rusty turns over his hand. King of clubs, queen of hearts. He has a pair of kings. Chaz scowls and tosses his cards towards the dealer.

"Stupid river card," he mutters.

"Ha ha! You lose, you lose!" Rusty taunts.

"Yeah well, at least I'm not bald!" Chaz retorts.

Rusty grins cockily. "Are you sure about that?" he asks.

Chaz scowls but shuts up. The button moves over to Numbuh Two, and Chef deals us our hands. Rusty puts down 20, and I put down 40. I take a look at my cards. Three of hearts, ace of spades.

Marlowe calls. She must have a decent hand as well. Chaz folds, and so does Numbuh Two, but Rusty raises to 80. I call, and so does Marlowe. The flop arrives: eight of diamonds, eight of hearts, three of spades. Rusty grins and bets 100.

Rusty's a heavy bettor. Chances are he doesn't have an eight, and he might not have another pair at all. The question is, do I think my two pair will hold?

Call.

Turn card is an ace of diamonds, and Rusty puts 100 in again, but I'm unfazed. Two pair including the high pair should beat him, and I raise 100. Rusty calls me, and the pot grows to 840. The river card is a king of spades, and when Rusty checks I bet 200. Rusty grimaces but calls me, and when he turns his cards over he reveals a queen and a three. I turn my cards over, showing my pair of aces, and rake in the pot.

"Well played," Rusty tells me. I smile graciously.

The button moves, and I put in 20 as the small blind. Marlowe puts her money in as well, and I look at my cards. Jack of clubs, three of spades.

Chaz raises to 80 right off the bat. Numbuh Two raises again, to 120, and Rusty calls the bet. I look
at my cards again and put 100 in. Marlowe shrugs and calls, and Chaz follows her lead. The flop appears.

Ace of clubs, ten of spades, five of diamonds.

That is not good for my hand. I check, Marlowe checks, and Chaz bets 40. Numbuh Two raises to 200, Rusty calls, me and Marlowe fold, and Chaz matches the bet. The turn card is the nine of hearts. Chaz smirks and goes all-in for 160. Numbuh Two calls, but Rusty goes all-in as well, pushing his last 700 into the pot. Numbuh Two calls, and everyone flips over their cards.

Numbuh Two has a three of spades and the ace of diamonds. His hand is a pair of aces.

Rusty has a pair of nines in his hand. With the nine of hearts on the table, he has three of a kind.

Chaz has the ace and jack of hearts. Pair of aces.

Tension hangs in the air. It's clear that Chaz is hoping for a third ace, Rusty needs anything but an ace to come up, and that Numbuh Two has already lost.

Chef puts down the river. Four of diamonds.

Chaz punches the table as Rusty does an awkward victory dance in his seat. "Ow!" Chaz whines. "No fair! I should've won."

"Shoulda coulda woulda!" Rusty says. "You didn't, I did!"

Chaz leaves his seat and storms out of the room.

"Hey, just wondering, do we have to to leave if we lose?" Numbuh Two asks.

"You can stay if you want as long as you don't help anybody at the table," Chef says. "Oh, and you're now the big blind."

"Aw!" Numbuh Two says. The button moves over to me, Marlowe puts in the small blind, and Numbuh Two puts in the big blind.

Seven of diamonds, eight of spades.

Rusty raises 40. I fold, Marlowe calls, and Numbuh Two calls. The flop is the two of diamonds, the queen of spades, and the three of clubs. Marlowe checks, but Numbuh Two bets 200. Rusty and Marlowe both call, and the turn card appears: the five of spades. Marlowe checks again, but Numbuh Two bets 240. Rusty folds, but Marlowe calls.

River card. It's the nine of hearts. Marlowe bets 80, and Numbuh Two calls. She turns her cards over, revealing a queen and a jack, giving her a pair of queens. Numbuh Two sighs and pushes his cards to the dealer.

Marlowe smiles widely as she takes the pot. "Thanks," she says to Numbuh Two.

"Don't mention it," Numbuh Two says sarcastically. He puts in 20, and Rusty puts in 40. I look at my cards. King of clubs, two of spades. I call. Marlowe calls. Numbuh Two raises to 80, and we all call him.

The flop is the jack of spades, the seven of hearts, and the five of spades. Numbuh Two puts in eighty, and Rusty raises eighty. I fold, but Marlowe calls. Numbuh Two folds, and Chef puts the turn card on the table.
Four of diamonds. Rusty bets 200, Marlowe raises 200, and Rusty calls. The pot's getting big, and the river still has to come in.

Five of diamonds. Rusty goes stock still and pushes his whole stack to the center of the table.

Marlowe freezes. She looks at the pot, at her hand, at the pot, at her money, at the cards on the table...and finally decides to go all-in. As soon as she does, she shuts her eyes tightly, as though she's sure she made the wrong decision, and flips over her cards.

Jack of clubs, four of hearts. That's two pair. It should be enough to win.

Rusty cackles madly and turns over his cards.

Queen of clubs, five of hearts.

Three of a kind on the river.

Chef pushes the pot towards Rusty. Marlowe gets up slowly and looks at me.

"Good luck," she says without a trace of bitterness.

"Thanks," I tell her.

Marlowe walks over to another table so she can watch the rest of the game. Luck. Interesting concept. It's why I like poker, actually. It's a game of skill, sure, but it's also a game of luck. You can be the most skilled poker player in the world, but if the cards aren't with you, you'll lose eventually. But if you're a skilled player and play the other people at the table, you can win consistently.

People are easy to manipulate. It's just about reading them correctly.

Rusty's been getting lucky so far. He's knocked out Chaz and Marlowe with three of a kind; one on the turn to match his pair, and one on the river to put a pair to one of the cards in his hand. He's getting a fair bit of card luck today, which he needs; Rusty's an aggressive bettor. I can't tell whether he's trying to scare off better hands, or whether he's just getting lucky, although I suspect it's a little of both.

Numbuh Two, meanwhile, has won one hand early and hasn't been doing so well since. I actually have more chips than him because I'm folding more often. He's a lot like Rusty in that he bets big, but he seems less confident in his cards and, more importantly, hasn't had the luck Rusty has had recently.

I'm going to have to take more risks if I want to win.

The button moves over to Numbuh Two. Rusty puts in 20, I put in 40. I look at my cards.

King of hearts, three of diamonds.

Numbuh Two calls. Rusty raises to 200.

Might as well risk it. I call.

Numbuh Two folds, and Chef lays down the flop. Jack of spades, seven of clubs, nine of hearts. Rusty bets 300 and I fold.

Next hand. I put down 20, Numbuh Two puts down 40, and Rusty folds immediately. My hand is the ten of diamonds and the seven of spades.
No thanks.

I fold. Numbuh Two takes my 20. Chef rolls his eyes, and Rusty passes the button to me. Chef deals the cards, and I look at my hand. Five of diamonds, six of spades. Fold.

Numbuh Two raises to 80. Rusty reraises to 160. Numbuh Two rolls his eyes and calls. Chef deals the flop: the three of spades, the seven of clubs, and the seven of diamonds. Numbuh Two bets 200, and Rusty calls. Chef lays down the turn card, the two of spades, and Numbuh Two bets 200 again. Rusty raises 200, and Numbuh Two calls the raise but looks worried as he does so. The river is the ten of spades, and Numbuh Two looks worried as he checks. Rusty bets 80, and Numbuh Two calls.

Numbuh Two turns over a six and a queen, both of clubs. Rusty grins as he shows his three of hearts and queen of spades.

Two pair. Rusty takes the pot. And he's now much richer than either of us.

I pass the button to Numbuh Two. C'mon, cards, be good to me. I need a good hand.

Chef deals the cards, and I place the large blind. I look at them. A pair of sixes.

Numbuh Two gnaws at his lower lip before saying decisively, "Alright, all in." He pushes his chips towards the center of the table. Rusty's smile seems to widen even farther as he calls the 380 bet.

Should I call this? A pair of sixes is a good starting point, but is it good enough?

Nope.

I fold, and my opponents show their cards. Both of them have queens, but Rusty has the king of clubs as his second card while Numbuh Two only has the two of clubs to assist him. Numbuh Two winces and grits his teeth.

Chef lays down five cards. The nine of spades. The ten of clubs. The eight of diamonds. The queen of diamonds. And the queen of hearts.

"Rusty wins on a three of a kind with a king kicker," Chef says. Rusty accepts his winnings and laughs.

"Who's gonna take me down now, huh?" he asks nobody in particular. "You?" he says, laughing as he looks at me. "I'm the king of the table!"

Numbuh Two looks at the ceiling, mutters "Aw, crud," and leaves the table.

Well, this sucks. I've got slightly over a thousand chips while he's got close to six thousand. If I want to win, I'm going to need to have to win at least three hands by going all-in.

The only good thing about this situation is that the logic is simple. And it's all down to just me and him. I can hope Rusty stays overconfident in his cards. All I have to do is go all-in on any good hand and hope for a win.

C'mon, luck. Do me a favor and come over to my side of the table.

The cards are dealt. I'm the small blind, Rusty's the big blind. I stare at my hand. Ace and jack, both of clubs.

"All-in," I say, pushing my chips forward.
Rusty smirks and puts his chips in. He flips his cards over. I mirror him. He has an eight and a nine of spades.

Flop is a ten of diamonds, a two of clubs, a queen of spades. Turn is a seven of clubs. No jacks no sixes, no eights no nines, please luck, please luck, please...

River card is a two of spades.

I win.

Rusty grimaces. I smile as I take my winnings. I'm still behind, though.

I put 40 down and glance at my cards. Ten of clubs, three of spades. Rusty calls, and I check.

Three of diamonds, queen of diamonds, queen of hearts. That's two pair on my side.

Rusty checks. He's got nothing. I bet 200, and he folds.

I take the pot, and we get a new hand. I put my 20 down and look at my cards. Six of hearts, king of diamonds. I go all-in, and Rusty folds.

Another hand. I put my forty down and glance at my cards. A jack of clubs and a three of spades. Should I check?

Rusty pushes all his chips to the center of the table.

Well, why not? "All-in," I say, trying to sound confident as I push my chips into the pot.

Rusty flips his cards over. A two of hearts and a queen of clubs. Not that much better than my hand. Probably good enough, but who can say?

Ten of spades, five of diamonds, four of diamonds. Ouch. Turn is a seven of hearts. Okay a six or a three or a jack would be really nice here thank you.

River turns over as the jack of diamonds.

Pair of jacks, I win.

I smile as Chef pushes the chips my way.

"Dammit!" Rusty says angrily.

He's right. I've got the lead now. I can take him all-in, lose, and still be alive.

Of course, I'd rather win and wrap this up quickly. I plunk down the small blind and look at my new hand.

The six of clubs and the three of spades. Forget it. I fold.

The next hand is a seven of clubs and a nine of hearts. I think about it, but when Rusty goes all-in I fold.

Four of diamonds, two of clubs. Fold.

Two hearts. One of them's a two, the other one's a three. But Rusty folds the small blind away, and I get 20 back in my stack.
Okay. C'mon, luck. Show up and do something for me. Please. I just need *one more good hand*. Just give me the cards and let it roll. Please.

I put my 20 down and look at my cards. Seven of clubs, six of hearts. I'll pass.

I fold away my 20 and get a new hand. After putting down the big blind I take a look at my cards.

An ace. A jack. Both of them hearts.

And then Rusty folds.

I shut my eyes. I just need one good hand right now. Well, I just need a *winning* hand that we both go all-in on.

I open them, plunk down the small blind, and take a look at my cards. The ten of clubs and the jack of spades.

Good enough.

I go all-in. Rusty calls me. I flip over my hand and grin. Rusty's face falls as he slowly reveals his cards.

A ten of diamonds and the jack of hearts.

Huh. This oughta be interesting.

Ace of spades, queen of hearts, king of clubs, queen of clubs, five of spades. No flush, both of us have straights, both of us get our money back.

Chef sighs and deals us yet another hand. I put my 40 down and look at my cards: a two of clubs and a nine of spades. Rusty goes all in, and I fold.

Chef deals again. I put down the small blind of 20 and look at my cards. My heart skips a beat when I see the ace of clubs staring right back at me.

All-in.

Rusty calls. I show my ace and my three of spades. Rusty grins evilly and flips his cards over to show me the queen of clubs and the ace of diamonds.

I'm almost certain that Chef delays putting down the cards to build tension. But as soon as he does, I exhale heavily.

Three of diamonds. Four of clubs. Ace of spades.

I have two pairs. Rusty has one.

So long as there aren't any queens, I win.

No queens. No queens. No queens. No queens.

Turn card. Five of clubs.

No queens. No queens. No queens. No queens.

Chef tosses a card off the top of the deck.
Chef picks up the river card.

He places it on the table.

Ten of hearts.

"Congratulations!" Chris crows. "You have just won the Total Drama Poker Tournament, and with it, the entire game!"

I freeze with shock. When I finally manage to speak, all I can do is stutter out "What?"

"You win the game! The Poker Tournament was the final challenge, and you won it!"

I stand there, shocked. I can't believe it. This is it? Down to seven and then suddenly I win the game by winning a poker tournament?

"Just joking!" he says, laughing. "You should've seen the look on your face! And on everybody else's faces. Anyway, care for a drink of water?"

"Sure," I say, still stunned. He hands me a glass, and I down it.

"There's plenty more where that came from!" he says. "That's your special reward!"

"What?" I say, shocked again.

"Yeah, see, in real poker tournaments generally everyone who places in the top three gets money," he says. "Because we're not gonna give you money, we decided that instead the top three players receive immunity! Congratulations!"

Well that's just great. Rusty and Numbuh Two have immunity.

I guess that leaves Chaz as the only option.

We're gathered in the cabin.

"Chaz," I tell the other girls. They nod. By now the news about who has immunity has spread. And they're all going to vote off Chaz.

I just need the boys to choose a single target and stick to it. If they vote for Wendy, she's gone. This is my big chance.

I'm really glad she went all in on that first hand. It might have a worse payoff than she feared.

Confessional

"Wendy," I tell the camera. "I don't like how she got rid of Triana. Marlowe's right, we didn't really give her a chance. And Wendy made sure we didn't. It might be odd, but I can't vote for anybody else with this guilt hanging over my head."

Most of that is a lie. I don't feel guilty at all. Sure, Triana didn't get a chance with us, but if all goes
well, Wendy's position with us will have won her an extra episode and nothing else. Although it's true that the way Wendy shoved us into voting off Triana made me certain I had to get rid of her when I had the chance.

This is my chance. I just hope the boys can follow up.

I'm the second one at the campfire ceremony. I probably don't have to come, but I admit it: I like hot dogs. And I've found the perfect roasting stick. Hopefully this time Chris will bring enough hot dogs for everyone.

Shortly after I take my seat, Numbuh Two walks up to the campfire and sits down beside me. Marlowe is the next one to arrive, and she takes a seat in front of me. She's followed by Wendy, who sits on the left side of the campfire. Chaz then strolls in, smirking as he sits down. He obviously doesn't think he'll be eliminated.

Hopefully he's right.

Rusty is the last one to arrive. He walks in cockily and sits down, smirking. And who can blame him? He almost won it all and got immunity anyway. He may be my number two target, but today he's untouchable.

After a few more minutes, Chris walks in with a plate of six hot dogs. Yes!

"Campers," he says. "Today, you all took part in a game of luck and skill. And although most of you lost, most of you also won a delicious weiner. Rusty! Numbuh Two! Nazz! Marlowe! Ingrid! Come up and get your sausages!"

We all stand up and get a hot dog. I can't help but smile slightly. Unless Chaz managed to annoy his cabinmates, Wendy is going home.

Oh god Chaz annoyed his cabinmates.

Okay luck I know I've been leaning on you heavily today but I just want one more payoff. Please. Please. Please.

"Both of you got a bunch of votes," Chris says. "It seems you've made some powerful enemies. And I don't think it's revealing too much to say that the margin was one vote."

Please let my vote be the margin. Please let my vote be the margin.

"Now this vote came as quite a surprise, and I bet you'd all like to know who cast it."

Uh-oh. This isn't good.

"And I'd love to tell you...so I will. The decisive vote was cast by..."

No no no no no no no no no no no no no no no no no no no no

"One of your fellow campers!"

Poker face. Poker face. Don't let them see how close you came to being revealed.

"Actually, four of them," Chris continues. "Now one of you is going to get a delicious meaty treat. The other one is going to leave on the Cannon of Sorrow. Who's it gonna be? Well..."
Get on with it. Please.


Is he really doing this?


Pointing at Wendy.

"I asked my mother and she said to me, the person who's leaving is named..."

Pointing at Chaz.

"Charlie was a baker down in Bakersfield, Mary was a nurse who learned to heal! Chaz and Wendy on the edge of their seats, which one's headed for a cannon treat?"

Wow. Chris is really taking forever with this.

"Does anybody want to take a dive for the camper we're getting rid of?"

Nobody moves. Thank god.

"Fine. Just asking. Chaz, go ahead and shove this giant weiner in your mouth."

Chris throws Chaz a hot dog. Wendy freezes in the middle of standing up.

"Wait, WHAT?" she asks, upset.

"Yeah, you got voted off," Chris says. "You're taking a ride on the cannonball express!"

"No way!" she says angrily. "Somebody must've rigged the votes! This is impossible! I can't--I won't--you can't make me--"

Chef grabs Wendy and stuffs her in the cannon. Chris lights the fuse.

"So, Wendy gets voted off in an October surprise!" he says. "Except it's July. But still! Nobody saw that one coming, in the most dramatic campfire ceremony yet! Will the next ceremony top today's? It's tough to see that happening, but tune in anyway, next time on Total! Drama! Cartoon Multiverse!"

My friends and I head back to the cabins. As soon as the door is shut and we're inside, I turn to them.

"So who was it?" I ask.

They stare at me blankly. Nobody's going to lie. Which is just the way I want it.

"Fine." I nod stiffly. "We'll talk in the morning."

Marlowe turns out the lights, and we all head to bed. None of us says goodnight, as worries about a traitor weigh heavily on everyone's mind.

Voting Breakdown:

Nazz Van Bartonschmeer: Wendy Corduroy
Rusty Shackleford: Wendy Corduroy
Chaz Monerainian: Wendy Corduroy
Numbuh Two: Wendy Corduroy
Wendy Corduroy: Chaz Monerainian
Marlowe: Chaz Monerainian
Ingrid Third: Chaz Monerainian

Final tally of votes received:

Wendy Corduroy: 4 (eliminated)
Chaz Monerainian: 3
The camera opened on a shot of a studio audience. The shot was from behind the studio audience, and it panned over their heads as it headed for the stage. Strangely, everyone in the audience was wearing identical gray bowler hats—hats that were also worn by the two people on stage. The two onstage were identical in every respect, from their identical gray suits and red ties to their faces and bodies.

"Well hello people!" the one on the left said. "My name is Dr. Art Wurst, and the man sitting across from me is also Dr. Art Wurst! Anybody care for some candy?" He shook a bag of candy at the camera.

"Too much candy makes you fat and rots your teeth," the other Wurst snapped. "How about a healthy toothbrush instead?" He waggled the dental care product at the camera.

"Or, how about we start the show!" Wurst #1 said. "Welcome to today's Aftermath! We're doing something a little different and a bit more...special." Wurst grinned jaggedly. "You see, we have with us today none other than the author."

"That's right!" Wurst #2 said. "And we're totally spoiling Detentionaire for everyone."

Wurst #1 rolled his eyes. "Oh, please, if you talk about pretty much anything after episode 6 something in the series gets spoiled."

Wurst #2 nodded. "That's true. Episode 5, even. But, how about we get to the main event: the author, who will answer our...questions." This Wurst grinned jaggedly.

Wurst #1 gulped. "Are you sure that's such a good idea?" he asked. "After all, the author is--"

"Oh, don't be such a baby!" Wurst #2 said. "Let's just get to the meat of the meal. Or as you would put it, the candy."

"Are you sure we shouldn't have some candy first?" Wurst #1 asked.

Wurst #2 narrowed his eyes at his twin.

"Fine, fine," Wurst #1 said.

"Welp," Wurst #2 intoned. "Bring out the author."

Wurst #1 looked nervous. "The author's sleeping."

Wurst #2 slapped a hand onto his brother's shoulder. "Then I guess you'll have to go wake him up now, won't you."

The sofas slid to the side of the stage and the curtain behind the talk show set lifted up, revealing an empty backstage area with just a wooden crate sitting in the middle of it. Wurst walked over to the crate and undid the heavy latches that kept the crate shut. The side of the crate that faced the audience fell open, revealing a metal cage. Wurst pulled the cage out, revealing that there was someone inside. He pulled out a key and undid the padlock on the cage. The chain around it fell away. Wurst then reached for the combination lock and dialed in the combination. Finally, Wurst lifted the metal door on top of the cage, unlocked another set of doors, and pulled them open.
"Get up," Wurst #1 said.

The figure inside shambled to its feet. It was a person in a gimp costume, clothed entirely in black leather with studs. Wurst grabbed the chain around the gimp's neck and used it as a leash to lead the gimp to his brother.

"Get down," Wurst #2 said. He forced the gimp to its knees. Wurst #1 grabbed a large yellow hat with several wires and a pair of lightbulbs on it and stuck it on the gimp's head.

"For those of you in the audience who haven't seen the show—and you should definitely see it," Wurst #2 started, "this is one of the world's greatest inventions. A perfect lie detector. And we're going to use it on the author and force the author to answer some...questions."

Both Wursts grinned. Wurst #1 affixed the lie detector to the gimp's head and turned it on. Wurst #2 unzipped the mouthpiece of the hood.

"Now tell me," Wurst #2 said, "are you the author?"

"Yes," the gimp said in a voice more beautiful than a stream of pure clear water attended by cute bunnies and friendly deer, in a voice more pure than Heaven, in a voice that when heard made tears spring to everyone's eyes with its beauty. A green light flashed.

"Do you have a name?" Wurst #1 asked.

"Yes," the gimp said in the same voice. A green light flashed.

"Did Shel Silverstein help name you?" Wurst #2 asked.

The gimp groaned beautifully. "Yes," it said.

"And are you going to answer these questions truthfully?" Wurst #2 asked.

"Yes," the gimp said. A red light went off.

"Ooh, tricky tricky!" Wurst #2 admonished. "You know we know when you're telling the truth and when you're lying. But enough of this. Let's do some questioning." He grinned. "If you would?"

"What kind of steaks were served at the comedy special?" Wurst #1 read off a piece of paper.

"T-bone," the gimp said. A green light blinked.

"Why was Triana's stand-up routine so mean?" Wurst #2 asked.

"She was upset by Chaz's routine and lashed out at the nearest target," the gimp said. Green light.

"Why were Ingrid's jokes so horrible?" Wurst #1 asked.

"Ingrid isn't used to making outright jokes. She's used to snappy comebacks. Also she had a touch of stage fright because of that time she got pelted with balls when she was brought onstage," the gimp said. Green.

"How did Chaz get under Triana's skin?" Wurst #2 asked.

"Chaz is funnier than he seems," the gimp said. The red light went off.

Wurst #1 grinned jaggedly. "Why would you lie about that? And be truthful now."
"Because if I don't lie a few times, the interrogation helmet looks like a huge waste of time and everybody wonders why it was introduced in the first place since they were just waiting for it to be used," the gimp said. Green light.

"Well then why do the whole *Pulp Fiction* thing?" Wurst #1 asked. "That doesn't seem relevant."

"We're getting a bit off into the weeds here," Wurst #2 cautioned.

"The weeds?" Wurst #1 asked dismissively. "What is this, golf?"

"No, it's an interrogation!" Wurst #2 said angrily.

"I thought it was more of a questioning," the gimp interjected beautifully.

"Questionings don't involve the person being questioned being constrained," Wurst #1 pointed out.

"Well, in some jurisdictions they do," Wurst #2 said.

"But we're not law enforcement! Technically," Wurst #1 said.

"Well just because I'm constrained doesn't mean it's not a friendly questioning," the gimp pointed out.

"You're in a gimp suit!" Wurst #1 exclaimed. "That's not friendly at all!"

"Yeah, but who wrote me into the gimp suit?" the gimp asked.

"Oh, why would you hurt that fourth wall?" Wurst #2 asked. "What did it ever do to you?"

"Yes, you have to preserve the fourth wall," Wurst #1 said. "I mean, that's why you haven't put in any author's notes unless it's at the very beginning or very end of the story. And then you remove the ones at the end when a new chapter goes up."

"Seriously, is there any consistency in your writing?" Wurst #2 asked.

"This is the Aftermath!" the gimp complained wonderfully. "There is no fourth wall!"

The green light went off.

"Okay, fine," Wurst #1 conceded after a pause. "But how did Chaz destroy Triana's mental state and or hopes of forming a friendship with Ingrid or any of the other girls?"

"Chaz is really good at reading people," the gimp said. "Especially when it comes to pushing their buttons and causing confrontations and strife. That's evident in several episodes of *Detentionaire* and in the Centipede episode, when he sets up Andy French's downfall. So he was good at reading Triana, pushing her buttons, and doing so in a way that wouldn't look too wicked to outsiders. It's helped by the fact that he happened to blunder into Triana's romantic worries, although those buttons are fairly common, which is why he went after them early on."

The green light went off.

"That's more detailed than usual," Wurst #1 said.

"My turn!" Wurst #2 said happily. "What were the plants that the campers had to identify in the school episode? All of them, not just Wendy's plants."
"I have no idea," the gimp said. Green. "I'm not a botanist. I came up with the challenge, wrote myself into a corner, then decided to just bullshit my way out of it."

The Wursts gasped. "Language!" they admonished.

"I did a Pulp Fiction reference earlier in this chapter, introduced Æon Flux by having her killed in a boat accident—that, incidentally, also killed Kenny McCormick—and you're upset that I said bullshit?" the gimp asked, beautifully shocked. The red light went off.

"Ha! You wrote us that way!" Wurst #2 observed. "So you're lying when you say you're shocked by us being upset!"

"Wait, how did you read that stage direction?" the gimp asked.

"I didn't, I just read your tone of voice," Wurst #2 said.

"Fine, whatever, next question," the gimp said, beautifully put out.

"Why did Marlowe vote off Triana, anyway?" Wurst #1 asked. "She seemed pretty upset with Wendy."

"Nazz convinced her to the previous night," the gimp said. "Nazz can be very persuasive when she wants to be." Green light.

"Why did the guys all get together to vote off Wendy?" Wurst #2 asked.

"Numbuh Two and Rusty teamed up and leaned on Chaz. Chaz agreed when he realized he'd be the obvious candidate to leave if it wasn't Wendy," the gimp said. Green.

"How did everyone learn to play poker?" Wurst #1 asked.

"How long of an answer do you want?" the gimp replied beautifully.

"Take as much time as you need," Wurst #2 said. "After all, this is all the screentime we've had so far."

Wurst #1 looked at his twin oddly.

"What? If there's no fourth wall, I'm not breaking anything!" Wurst #2 complained.

The gimp cleared its throat with the most wonderful sound that anybody had heard apart from the beautiful tones of its speech. "It depends on the person, really," it said. "Ingrid had seen some of her fellow safety patrollers play poker in middle school, and she had seen it played elsewhere, but she never really paid attention, or played, or even knew the rules. She decided to be aggressive from the get-go, and it didn't work out for her. Wendy, meanwhile, has played with her friends and her family. Her brothers and father bet very aggressively, and so Wendy is inclined to bet heavily and to not be scared off by large raises. It didn't work out for her in that game. Chaz is good at reading people, as I mentioned before, and has played poker against various kids; he just wasn't getting the correct cards and ended up busting out early when Rusty got lucky. Marlowe hasn't really played poker; she's played a round or two with her bandmates, but it's not her game and she doesn't really know how to play. Unlike Ingrid, she decided to be cautious and ended up in fourth place. Numbuh Two mainly plays poker online; he likes to raise big, see who calls, and then run from there. He's fairly experienced at poker, but likes to scare off bets. Rusty, or Dale Gribble, has played hands of poker in various places but mostly plays against his friends every once in a while. They know of him as being way too overconfident in his cards; it just happened to work out for him in the poker game, when he
got a couple big wins on the river when he looked like a loser on the turn. Nazz, meanwhile, likes to play poker against the neighborhood kids and has also played against various kids in her high school. She's good at reading people and is a moderate bettor with regards to her cards. She learned from playing against Kevin, Rolf, and Jonny, and later against Edd, Eddy, and Sarah. She's not the best poker player in the cul-de-sac, however; that would have to be Jimmy."

The Wursts waited a few seconds for the gimp to continue.

"Is that all?" Wurst #2 asked.

"Well there were only seven players left," the gimp said.

"Fine," Wurst #2 said. "Next question: did Nazz get rid of Megan?"

"No," the gimp said with a brilliantly intelligent dose of sarcasm. The red light blinked.

"That's a fibarooney!" the Wursts chorused.

"Oh come on, this thing doesn't detect sarcasm?" the gimp beautifully complained. The green light turned on.

"Okay that's true," Wurst #1 said.

"Yes, definitely true," Wurst #2 said.

"Fine," the gimp said. There was a distinct sense that the gimp was rolling its perfectly-sculpted eyeballs behind its mask. "Nazz did get rid of Megan. She did this by suggesting that Marlowe vote off Elise, telling Marlowe she'd tell the others to do so, and then not following through. She did this because she knew if she was called out she could apologize to Ingrid, saying she forgot to tell Ingrid or thought that Megan would do so, and because it wasn't going to make her look like a traitor. A fool, maybe, but not a traitor. In other words, this route minimized the risk to her and got rid of Megan if it went off correctly--which it did."

"Okay, follow up question," Wurst #1 said. "Why did Nazz eliminate Megan?"

"She saw it as a route to power," the gimp said. "Nazz intentionally put herself behind Megan and pushed Megan into a leadership role. The other girls in the cabin viewed Nazz as following Megan, and since they already liked Nazz they also followed Megan. This was Nazz's plan because she figured that if one of the girls was going to get voted out early, it would be the one everybody thought was the leader. And she was right. Also by getting rid of Megan, she accomplished two things. Firstly, she was the natural candidate to ascend to the throne, although she didn't officially claim it; this meant that the girls clustered around her and were willing to follow her 'requests.' Secondly, by portraying it as the work of a traitor, she got Marlowe and Ingrid to cling tightly to her because both would want to prove they weren't traitors. This had the side effect of making them better friends and an actual team, even if they never thought of themselves as such. Long story short, Nazz is good at reading people."

The green light shone.

"Fine. Last question," Wurst #2 said. "Do I have to say it, or do you know what it is?"

The gimp took a deep breath. "Boris met up with Natasha in Montana. Mainly because neither of them want to go back to Pottsylvania, even when they're not on the job. At the moment, they're planning another fiendish scheme, although Boris is having a bit of trouble coming up with a good one. After Byron whisked Triana away, they had dinner together and talked about various stuff.
Triana talked about her magical studies, her dad gave her some advice and talked about having to find a new place to live, and then they both went back to The Outrider's place. Since then, Triana has resumed her magical studies and made out with Raven a few times, and Doctor Orpheus is keeping himself busy with The Order of the Triad. Wendy, meanwhile, went back to Gravity Falls and resumed working for Soos at the Mystery Shack. Her family is still driving her crazy, and upon her return she was immediately struck by how weird Gravity Falls is. Which actually makes Camp Wawanakwa normal by comparison if you think about it.

"Well, I guess that's all the time we have left," Wurst #2 said.

"Hey! How come you get to close the show?" Wurst #1 asked.

"Because I'm not getting fat!" Wurst #2 said.

"I'm not getting fat! I'm just putting on some winter weight!"

"It's March! The winter's over!"

"So it'll drop right off! Just like your hair!"

"If I go bald you go bald! And we're not going bald!"

"I have an shower drain that says otherwise!"

The Wursts continued to argue. The camera zoomed in on the gimp mask, closer, and closer, and closer, until all that could be seen was darkness.
The Dehydration Episode

The sound of Chris yelling wakes me up. I sit up and rub my eyes. When my vision has cleared, I look at the clock. It says 6:30.

"Get up, get up, get up! And get down to the beach! Move it, campers, move it! Walk don't run! And get down here!"

Chris continues yammering in the background. I heave myself out of bed and over to the dresser, where I find my clothes and put them on. As I do this, my head starts to clear, and I remember yesterday.

Wendy's gone.

I blink a few times. When I open them, I see Marlowe and Nazz staring at me suspiciously.

That's probably how it's going to be in our cabin from now on. I thought we had finally gotten over the whole traitor thing—it's been a while since Megan was voted off—but now we've been smacked in the face with evidence that there's actually a traitor in the girls' cabin. And of course, the traitor isn't stepping forward. So we're all going to be suspicious of one another.

I finish getting dressed, apply my lipstick, and head out the door. Nazz and Marlowe follow me, and we walk down to the beach. Numbuh Two and Rusty are already there. Chris is standing on the beach with a hose and a huge tank of water.

"Need a drink?" he asks. I shake my head no. Marlowe declines as well, but Nazz takes him up on his offer. Chris holds out the hose to Nazz and turns it on, and Nazz sips from it like it's a drinking fountain.

A few minutes later, Chaz arrives. The only hint that he's not quite ready this early in the morning are the well-covered bags under his eyes.

"Morning Chaz! Want a drink?" Chris asks. Chaz shakes his head. "Suit yourself!" Chris says.

We fall into a line. Chris looks at us with a big grin on his face.

"Welcome," he grins, "to the Dehydration Marathon!"

Nobody applauds.

"The rules are simple," he says, "Run around the island as many times as you can. Like in a marathon. And do it without any water!"

We gasp. My mind races furiously. I know the symptoms of dehydration and the negative health effects, and as I think about them I start to worry. Sometimes having a photographic memory really bites.

"Now, there's no need to worry," Chris says. "You can drop out any time you like without fear of punishment. Because today, you're not playing for immunity. You're playing for privacy!"

Privacy? On a reality show? Not likely.

"And by that I mean you get the empty room in your cabin," Chris says. "All to yourself. For the rest of the time you're on the show. Doesn't that sound nice?"
That does sound nice. The guys' faces all light up, so they're interested too. Although I'd need a single if I had to share a room with Chaz. Assuming that any of the stories Numbuh Two tells about him are true.

"No way!" Nazz says. "I'm not going to run a marathon without any water just for my own room!"

"Yeah!" Marlowe joins in. "I like Nazz and Ingrid!"

I don't say anything. They look at me.

"Sorry guys," I say apologetically, "but I need my space sometimes. It's not that I don't like you, it's just--"

Nazz smiles. "Yeah, we get it," she says. "Just promise we can come visit?"

"Of course!" I say.

Nazz and Marlowe walk off the beach and presumably back to bed. Although I'm sure that my willingness to run this marathon won't help them be less suspicious about me.

"That's a shame," Chris says. "If she had stayed, Nazz would've learned that she's allowed as much water as she wants because she won the poker game in the last episode. Oh well. Who wants water? It's your last chance before the race begins!"

Chris is swarmed by the four of us.

After we've all drunken our fill, we line up on the beach by Chef. Chef has brought a beach chair with him.

"Now remember, we've got cameras all over the island, so we'll know if you cheat," Chris says. "And this time, cheating is not encouraged. Yeah. It's a surprise to me too. Ready?"

We get ready.

"Get set...and..."

Chris fires a pistol into the air.

"Go!"

We all start jogging. Behind us, something hits the beach hard, but we don't look back to see what it was.

"That's gonna provoke some angry emails," Chris says as we run away from him.

Soon, Chaz has outpaced the rest of us. It's always surprising when he reveals his athletic ability. Sure, I already knew he was a good runner from the water balloon challenge, but I'm still surprised every time I see him actually run.

Maybe it's because he never seems to put any effort into anything besides looking good. Still, it's always a surprise to see him reveal his ability to do, well, anything useful. I will admit that I may be biased by my talks with Numbuh Two, but even so my observations of him suggest that he's generally nothing more than a dandy and a camera hog.
At least it's a marathon and not a sprint. I have a chance. I'm used to chases; some things about Safety Patrol never really leave you. I just have to keep running for longer than Chaz can.

Of course, Chaz did pretty much outrun me the last time something like this happened.

I take a deep breath and continue to run. Beside me, Rusty is panting heavily as he tries to beat me. It seems like all those years of smoking are taking their toll on his lungs. I can't say I'm surprised by his ill health; he's the oldest person still on this island and has been since Boris left. It's fairly easy to predict that he's not going to win.

I do have an ulterior motive for running this race. If I have time to myself I can think through everything and figure out who the traitor is. I just know that there had to have been clues left behind, and if I just have the time and space to analyze them I can figure out who voted Wendy off. The numbers say it had to have been one of us; we all agreed to vote for Chaz, and four of seven is a clear majority. But if one of those votes flips to Wendy it explains how she bit the dust.

That relies on every guy voting the same way. That would be a bit unlikely were it not for the fact that the only available candidates were me, Wendy, Chaz, and Marlowe, and of those four the strongest competitor is probably Wendy. Yes, I'm willing to admit that I'm not the best-equipped to win in this game. But as long as I stay in, I have a shot.

Ugh, quit getting distracted! Okay. So, Wendy left. I know I didn't vote her off. I know that either Nazz or Marlowe did. Although it's hard to believe my friends would turn on somebody in our group so quickly. And then to lie about it? That just seems unlikely. Sure, a good liar would be able to cover up their lies. And maybe it's a more attractive option to get rid of Wendy than it is to get rid of Chaz, even if he is really annoying. But I still find it kind of hard to believe that one of them would just turn on Wendy.

But what if both of them did? What if Marlowe and Nazz got together and decided to vote off Wendy?

Ahead of me, Rusty peels off to the right, falls to his knees, and pukes up phlegmy water. I run past him as he pants and heaves and chokes.

Poor Rusty. In a challenge based on dehydration, he ended up losing because he drank too much water.

I start thinking about last night's results again. If Marlowe and Nazz did get together to betray Wendy, that would explain why they're suspicious of me, or why they're chummy despite the whole traitor thing. Maybe they're both pretending to be wolves in sheep's clothing. But then, that wouldn't explain why they'd feel the need to ask questions about who turned on whom. Are they trying to set me up? Or maybe they didn't get together but both decided to get rid of Wendy independently, and that's why they think they need to keep up the act. After all, Wendy did make Marlowe angry by getting us to vote off Triana. And she did throw off the dynamic of the group when she joined.

Unless Wendy voted herself off. That's always a possibility. But then something would've been said. And Wendy wouldn't have acted so shocked when she was removed.

Occam's Razor. Let's see. All theories require that Wendy was voted off. Okay, that happened. And that a girl voted her off. That happened, unless two people on our side voted for somebody not named Chaz or Wendy. I think that can be discarded, unless those votes were cast against me or Marlowe. That's unlikely though. So at least one girl cast a vote for Wendy. Okay. Let's see, that's two assumptions I can assume are true. What else? I know I didn't vote off Wendy. And I can probably assume Wendy didn't vote herself off. So at least three votes were cast against Wendy. The
only question is who cast them?

Hmm. Numbuh Two's running a bit behind me. Maybe he'll have some insight.

I slow down a little, and soon we're side by side.

"Hey," he pants. "What's up?"

"I just want to know who you voted for yesterday," I say.

"Wendy. Why?" he asks.

"Just wondering," I say.

"What, was she your friend?" he asks. I nod. "Well sorry, but she was like the toughest person still here. Me and the guys knew we had to get rid of her."

Me and the guys. Did that mean...

"So all of you voted for Wendy?" I ask.

"I think so," Numbuh Two says. "It's impossible to be sure, but Rusty said he would and Chaz said Wendy wasn't really that entertaining, whatever that meant, so probably. What's with all the questions?"

I don't say anything for a few seconds so I can formulate my thoughts. "I was shocked when Wendy left," I finally say. "So were Nazz and Marlowe. But one of them had to have voted her off."

"Why?" Numbuh Two asks. "Maybe the vote got split."

"Because we're all friends. I think."

"So? It still could have--"

"Chaz was the only option."

"Oh," he says. He pauses. "Okay yeah, I remember that. Huh. Totally slipped my mind that I had immunity last night. But then that means--"

"Exactly," I say.

"So somebody is lying," he says. "About not voting Wendy off, that is."

"I know," I say. "I just can't figure out who it is."

We run together in silence for a few minutes.

"Well, tell me if you figure it out," Numbuh Two finally says. "I'm uh, I'm giving up. And no offense, but I'd really appreciate it if you let Chaz get his own room, just so we don't have to deal with him anymore."

I smile slightly. "I'll keep that in mind."

Numbuh Two stops running and collapses in the sand.

Huh. That didn't really help me much. Except it confirms that Wendy almost certainly had three votes against her from the start. So who voted against her? I know I voted for Chaz, and Wendy's
reaction pretty much shows that she didn't vote herself off. So that leaves Nazz and Marlowe. Why would they vote her off? There's gotta be a reason. Even if Wendy was the strongest competitor, she'd probably be voted off anyway. I'm pretty sure we all had a stronger relationship with each other than she did with us.

Didn't we? I mean, Marlowe didn't like Wendy because she pushed to have Triana shoved off the show. And Wendy was trying to pretty much lead us all as a single group. Which is odd, since we're not a group. Although we do meet up so we can arrange our votes. And we do work together outside of voting. And...

How did I not see this before? I'm in an alliance. I've been in an alliance. Pretty much since Megan and I discovered Snidely's treachery and told Marlowe and Nazz and we all decided to work together to get rid of Snidely. I mean, sure, it was initially an attempt to get away from Snidely's influence on our team, but after he was gone, there was no reason to work together.

Except for maybe Elise. But Elise didn't really have any friends and didn't really have any allies outside of Snidely. She wasn't a threat once Snidely was gone, was she? Even Elise probably couldn't grab immunity in every challenge.

So we stayed together. Was that friendship, or was it something else? Was it an alliance we formed unconsciously to try and get to the end?

Now that I think about it, it was an alliance. I even thought about it that way, I just didn't use the term alliance.

My mouth is so dry. Should I give up? No, focus. Focus. Privacy might be really important. But if it's an alliance why would one of our members betray it? It doesn't make any sense. Why send Wendy packing now? Why not wait until the final four or at worst final five? Why not just control the game as much as possible? Why get rid of...

Wendy was trying to lead us.

This alliance was based on friendship. It was quasi-democratic. Without Wendy, Triana probably doesn't get voted off because we would have listened to Marlowe's objections. Wendy comes into the cabin, ingratiates herself, and tries to lead us. It all makes sense. She was voted off because she was trying to control the unspoken alliance.

So somebody wanted to get rid of Wendy because Wendy wanted to hold the reins of power. But we were doing fine without somebody guiding us. Weren't we?

I guess I was always the quiet one, but they listened to me. Marlowe and Nazz both seemed to respect my intelligence. And Marlowe may have been the most outspoken, but she didn't always make us do what she wanted. Nazz would argue against Marlowe when they disagreed, but neither girl issued an ultimatum. Wendy pretty much issued an ultimatum on Triana, and Marlowe was angry about that, but she'd go along with Nazz when–

Nazz. She's the one who had us start meeting on the beach. She pretty much kept us on the same page after Megan was eliminated.

After Megan was eliminated.

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*Flashback*

Marlowe and I were walking towards the cabin after the eating contest.
"I, am stuffed," I said.

"I know," Marlowe groaned. "That was definitely too much food."

"Sucks that we lost," I said. "Who do you think we should vote off?"

"I dunno," she said. "How about you?"

"I think we should get rid of Elise," I told her.

"I dunno, she's been doing a lot for the team," she said. "You know, Nazz once told me that she thought Elise was a bigger threat than Snidely."

"Really?" I asked.

"Yeah, too bad we didn't manage to vote her off and Megan went home instead."

---

Megan went home instead.

That was the water challenge. I was completely spent after that, but I remember voting for Snidely. Megan probably voted for Snidely too. If Nazz and Marlowe voted for Elise, that explains why Megan got sent home even though with four votes and eight players we should have at least forced a tie.

And Nazz told us that someone was a traitor after that vote happened.

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Flashback

"It's the only way," Nazz said.

"Are you sure?" Marlowe asked. "I mean, Elise did side with Snidely. Are you sure we shouldn't vote her off instead?"

"We can do that after the merge," Nazz said.

"But that could be tomorrow," I argued. "And Steve is a good guy. He just has a stomach bug or something."

"But what if it's not tomorrow?" Nazz asked. "Then we've gotten rid of our strongest competitor. Look, I don't like Elise any more than you do. But we need her up until the merge. After that, she's gone. But she's super useful right now."

"Name me one challenge she's won," I said.

"I hate to agree with Nazz–not because I don't like agreeing with you, although I–Let me start over," Marlowe said. "Nazz is right. Steve may have helped us with the musical episode, but Elise is probably the only thing that's kept us all from being eliminated pre-merge. Even if she did join up with Snedly and try to take us all down, we need her. We need her more than Steve."

"Yeah, but–" I started to say.

"Thanks, Marlowe," Nazz said. "And I like Steve too, but Elise at this moment is better for the team."
"Yeah, I don't like it any more than you do, but we have to keep Elise on," Marlowe said.

"It's him or us," Nazz added.

"Fine," I said. "We'll take down Steve."

Nazz led the charge to get rid of Steve. Because she thought it would be more pragmatic to keep Elise on. Even though Steve was our friend. And she split the votes to get rid of Megan. But how did she know Megan would be the one eliminated? Why not her?

Because Megan was the one who told us about Snidely's alliance at the dinner table.

At dinner. Where anybody could have listened in. Like Snidely, or Elise. Of course they would've blamed Megan. And of course Nazz would be safe. Especially when she publicly expressed doubt about Snidely really doing an alliance—doubt that vanished the next day and united us all in trying to get rid of Snidely.

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**Flashback**

Snidely was being carried towards the cannon by Chef.

"Nazz did it on purpose!" he screamed. "Nazz let go of the rope on purpose! She threw the game!"

Chef stuffed Snidely in the cannon, but he kept screaming as Chris lit the fuse. He's so loud that Chris couldn't talk over him.

"Nazz threw the game! She made us lose! It's all her fault! Nazz is a lying sneak!"

The cannon fired.

"DON'T TRUST HER!"

Did Nazz actually throw the game? I did see her lose her grip on the rope, but was it intentional?

---

**Flashback**

Triana turned back to us.

"Don't trust her," she said.

---

Triana was right.

But why didn't she tell us who not to trust? If she knew we shouldn't trust Nazz, then why not tell us about Nazz? Why not tell us that Nazz would—

She didn't mind if Wendy got voted off. She didn't like Wendy. She wanted Wendy to go down. And if she told us about Nazz, Nazz wouldn't be able to get rid of Wendy. Unless Nazz got us all to turn on Wendy.

But that's not what Nazz does. She's been leading us subtly. She's never told us what to do, it's always been phrased as suggestions. And we've just gone along because they're good ideas. But all
along she's been manipulating us. Getting us to do what she wants. And she wouldn't suggest that we vote against a friend because that would open her up as a target.

Wait. Nazz has gotten rid of the would-be leaders. Anybody who tries to pull us, she's had them eliminated. She split the votes against Megan, and I'm pretty sure she outright voted off Wendy. Maybe she did vote off Megan. She could always say she voted for Elise. That conversation with Marlowe gave her cover to do that.

So what now?

I force my eyes to focus. Chaz is long gone, my mouth is dry, my legs ache, and my entire body is screaming at me.

I slow to a stop and sit down.

"Congratulations, Chaz, you win!" Chris declares over the public address. "Chef will be coming by with a golf cart to pick everyone up. Except for Nazz and Marlowe. I'll see you all in the middle of camp!"

Great. That gives me time to think of what to say to Nazz and Marlowe.
A golf cart pulls up next to me. Numbuh Two is already on board.

"Hop in," Chef growls. "And make it snappy."

I heave myself to my feet and stumble over to the golf cart. I fall into the backseat next to Numbuh Two, and Chef stomps on the accelerator. We take off, and I grab on to Numbuh Two with my right arm while I fumble for the seatbelt with my left. Once I find it, I strap myself in and sit up straight.

I looked over at Numbuh Two. He's blushing, although it may just be residual effects of overexertion. I look around. No Nazz, no Marlowe, no Rusty, no Chaz. This is the best chance to run my theory by him.

"I think it's Nazz," I say.

"What?" he mutters distractedly. He shakes his head to clear it. "Nazz? Who uh, voted against Wendy?"

"Yeah," I tell him. "I think Nazz has been playing us."

"Whoa, hold on," he says. "Nazz didn't tell me to vote off Wendy. I mean, I've talked to her and stuff, but she hasn't really ever done anything to try and convince me to vote off anybody. Except after the merge, when she told me that we should get rid of Elise as soon as possible."

"I know," I say. I shake my head. "Well, I don't know, and I didn't know about the Elise thing, but I mean, this whole game."

"What?" he asks.

"She's been setting everybody up," I say. "Like you know, how Snidely was doing an alliance?"

"Sure," Numbuh Two says.

I frown. I'm gonna have to tell him.

"I think I was in an alliance and didn't know it."

Numbuh Two's jaw drops. "You?" he asks, bewildered. "You were--but you--but we--"

"Look, I didn't realize it until just now," I say, trying to soften the blow. "But basically since Megan got voted off--maybe a bit before then, but definitely after that--me, and Marlowe, and Nazz, have basically been voting in lockstep. And I probably should have caught on to it earlier, but nobody ever actually said the word 'alliance,' and I just, I just didn't realize that I was pretty much in an alliance until I thought over everything today and I figured out that I was shocked that Wendy had gotten voted off because like I said, the girls have pretty much been voting together and Wendy getting voted out would require somebody to break that chain." I take a deep breath. "I'm sorry, I'm not doing a very good job of explaining, but Nazz and Marlowe and I have been getting together to coordinate our votes, and I didn't realize it was an alliance until I really thought about it today."

Numbuh Two rubs his cheek as he ponders my confession.

"Okay," he finally says. "Well, I mean, it was pretty obvious to everyone that you all were friends, and I wasn't really expecting Wendy to get voted off either. Even if the guys all got together and
decided to vote her off."

Numbuh Two sneezes.

"Bless you," I say.

"Thanks," he says, sniffling. "But tell me about this whole, uh, Nazz controlling everyone?"

"It's not control," I tell him. He sneezes again. "Bless you."

"Geez, my allergies are acting up," he says.

"I'm sorry," I say. "But I mean, like you know when I discovered Snidely's alliance?"

"Yeah, after the pirate challenge."

"Pirates?" I figure out what he's referring to. "Actually, it was after the tunnels, I just didn't get an opportunity to tell you until then. But yeah. Megan found out with me and told Marlowe and Nazz and basically rallied the troops to try and vote off Snidely. The next day, she gets voted off."

"So?"

"So, there were four votes. That should've forced a tie, at worst. Instead, Megan gets sent home, and Nazz tells us that she thinks one of us must be a traitor. But Marlowe mentioned that Nazz told her Elise was the more dangerous person after that challenge, so there's a good chance the votes were split."

"That's not necessarily evidence of foul play," Numbuh Two says, frowning. "I mean, it's bad communication, but--"

"I know," I say, cutting him off. "I'm just providing all the evidence I have. But with Megan gone and us thinking there's a traitor, we spent more time together to try and find the mole until Snidely was gone. And by that time, we'd coalesced into a single voting unit."

"Alright," Numbuh Two says. "So you think that Nazz knew that would happen?"

"She's pretty socially adept," I tell him. "But when Snidely got voted off, he spent his trip to the cannon screaming that Nazz threw the challenge. And I did see Nazz let go of the rope, although I thought it was to reset herself, but now I don't know. But we're talking about Wendy?"

The cart pulls up next to Rusty. He climbs into the front seat.

"What about Wendy?" Rusty asks.

Numbuh Two and I exchange a look. "Should I tell him?" Numbuh Two asks.

"Probably," I say.

"So, Nazz has been manipulating votes," Numbuh Two says.

Rusty strokes his chin. "You mean, she's been replacing the real ballots with false ones?" he suggests.

"No," we say.

"She's been hypnotizing people before they vote?" he asks.
"No," we say.

"She's good at using her charms to manipulate people?" he asks.

"Yeah, that's the one," Numbuh Two says.

"Also she's good at reading people and how they'll react," I tell him. "And she's been riding that ability through the game."

"Hmm," Rusty says. He looks back at us. "Okay, which of you is her new worst enemy? Because this story doesn't add up unless one of you has suddenly become her worst nightmare. Or she's become yours."

Numbuh Two sighs. "Look, we'll explain later, but we can't really talk in front of Marlowe and Nazz, and it'll take more time than we have to explain now. Can you wait that long?"

Rusty taps his chin. After a few seconds, he speaks. "Meet me down by the dock in an hour. And bring your fishing rods."

"I don't have a fishing rod," I say.

"Me neither," Numbuh Two says.

Behind his sunglasses I get the sense that Rusty is rolling his eyes. "Meet me there anyway," he says. Under his breath, he mumbles something about kids and fishing.

The cart pulls to a stop in the center of camp. Nazz and Marlowe are standing there, waiting, and Chaz is sitting in a lawn chair with a tall glass of lemonade. I unbuckle my seatbelt and step out. Numbuh Two and Rusty do the same thing.

"So, Chaz ended up winning when Ingrid finally dropped out," Chris says. "Honestly, this episode was less dramatic than I expected. And, as you have probably all figured out by now, there's no elimination tonight." He pauses. "BUT, we do have a special reward for all you losers: you're going camping!"

Wait, what?

"That's right, you're spending tonight in the woods. Consider it a warm-up for tomorrow's challenge. And no, you can not go take a nap in your beds. Everyone has to stay awake until after dinner, at which point you're all going to head to somewhere marked on this map." He unfurls a map. "Sweet dreams. You're gonna need all the rest you can get for tomorrow."

Chris cackles evilly and walks away. Marlowe and Nazz come over to me.

"So, want to hang out?" Nazz asks.

"Sorry, I'm just too bushed," I lie. "I'm gonna make my way to the mess hall and drink a bunch of fluids."

"We'll come with," Marlowe offers.

"Sorry ladies, she's with me," Numbuh Two says. He grabs my hand and leads me away.

"What are you doing?" I hiss at him through gritted teeth.
"Look, they're not going to intervene if they think we're going out or something," he says quietly.

"But we're not!" I complain softly.

"Yeah, but they tease you about that, don't they?" he asks.

"No!" I tell him quietly. "Who does that?"

Numbuh Two looks guilty. "Uh, Rusty? He thinks we're, uh, dating?"

I cast him a slight glare. "Why?"

"Probably because we hang out sometimes," he says nervously.

I heave a heavy sigh. "Fine."

Soon, we're in the mess hall. I've downed a few tall glasses of water and am working on another.

"So, you were talking about some connection between Wendy and Megan or something?" Numbuh Two asks. "And uh, who was Megan again?"


"Was she eliminated early?" Numbuh Two asks.

"Yeah," I say. "She was out like, fourth."

"Okay," he says. "I don't think we met."

"Right, well, anyway, she was kind of trying to lead an alliance of girls against Snidely," I say.

"You had told me that part."

"Just recapping. So you know she split the votes, right?"

"Right."

"But Megan was the one leading us in that charge."

"You said so."

"Well, Megan takes on a leadership role, and suddenly she's out. Nazz then proceeds to basically be the leader except she never actually steps forward and says she is. Then Wendy comes into our cabin, makes friends with all of us, and kind of tries to take charge and tell us who to vote out."

"Really?"

"She was the one who really wanted to push Triana out. I did too, kind of, I mean, I didn't argue when Wendy wanted to get rid of Triana because I didn't like her but Nazz and Marlowe both wanted to get rid of Rusty but Wendy effectively pushed them into voting off Triana."

"So, you're saying..."

"Anybody who tried to take on the role of leader, who tried to make the alliance more than informal—"
"Wait," Numbuh Two says. I stop talking. "I still don't get how you didn't realize you were in an alliance."

"I thought we were just good friends!" I say. "I mean, sure, it seems obvious now, but I just didn't think about it until today!"

"Okay, okay," he says, holding his hands up in surrender. "So, Nazz has been pushing out anybody who looks like they might, uh, take her place?"

"Yeah," I tell him. "We look leaderless but I think we've been unconsciously doing what Nazz wants more than anything else."

"The power behind the throne," Numbuh Two muses. He looks into my eyes. "So what are you going to do now?"

"I know who the traitor is."

Nazz and Marlowe snap their heads around to face me. Both look a bit worried.

Huh. Maybe Marlowe also voted Wendy off.

A little voice in my head says that I don't have to do this. I could just lie and say we all voted Wendy off. Even if Marlowe didn't, Nazz did, and I could pretend I did too. But I know I can't do that. The truth should be revealed. And if that means I lose the friends I've made here, well, I've got friends at home.

"Really?" Marlowe asks. Her voice is high-pitched.

"It's Nazz," I say. Marlowe relaxes, but tenses up again as the implications sink in.

"Really?" Nazz asks. Her voice is like a liquid knife. "Me?"

"Yes," I say. I keep myself from showing how scared I am.

"Why do you think it's me?" she asks. And there's kindness behind the words. A sense that she wants me to know it's all a big misunderstanding, that I don't have to do this. But when I look her in the eyes, I can see that she's lying.

"Because you've been doing this stuff all along," I say. I try to keep my voice measured. "Like with Steve. You had him voted off even though he was our friend."

"Look, I messed up," Nazz says. "I didn't know it was merger time. And yes, we should have gotten rid of Elise. But what's your point?"

"My point is that according to Marlowe, you also said that Elise was our biggest threat earlier on and got the votes to split!" I exclaim.

"What?" Nazz sputters. "I told you that I thought Elise was our biggest threat! And you agreed!"

My eyes widen.

"And you said you'd tell Megan! Are you seriously telling me you voted for Snidely after you said you'd vote for Elise?" she says angrily.

My mind whirs. I have a photographic memory, and I know for a fact nothing like this ever
"Wait, what?" Marlowe asks. "You mean Ingrid didn't vote Elise when we all agreed to do that?"

"Obviously," Nazz says, irritated.

"You never told me to vote off Elise," I say nervously.

"Yes, I totally did!" Nazz says. "And lemme guess, you never told Megan and tried to vote off Snidely instead. Good job splitting the vote, Ingrid!"

"Wow," Marlowe says. "Geez, Ingrid, that's—"

Marlowe's eyes widen.

"She didn't tell Megan on purpose!" Marlowe exclaims to Nazz. Nazz looks at her, feigning confusion. "Ingrid's been the traitor all along!"

Crackers.

"What?" Nazz says, pretending to be shocked. She looks at me. "Ingrid, I—I can't believe this. I thought we were friends."

"So did I," Marlowe says. "I guess—I guess I was wrong."

Nazz shuts her eyes. "I'm sorry, Ingrid. I need some time to, some time to sort through things."

"But it's not me!" I try to tell Marlowe. "I'm not making anything up! Nazz did it!

Marlowe holds her hand up. "Stop," she tells me. "Just turn around now."

"But—"

"No. Just go. Leave."

"Please," Nazz adds softly. And she genuinely sounds betrayed.

I turn around and walk towards the docks, away from the porch of our cabin where we'd all gathered. I know that Nazz was lying about having told me about Elise, and all the evidence suggests that Nazz is actually the traitor. But still, I feel like I messed up by telling the truth. I feel like I've lost a couple of friends.

This bites.

I meet Rusty at the docks. Numbuh Two still hasn't arrived.

"Hello, Ingrid," he says, not taking his eyes off the water.

"Hey," I say, sitting down next to him. "Are the fish biting?"

Rusty shakes his head. "They're biting, but they're also pretty brutal. I had my line snap four times in twenty minutes, so I've quit baiting my hook since we're just using it as a cover to talk."

"Don't bother using a cover," I say. "I confronted Nazz."

"Didn't go well?" he asks.
"It didn't go well," I confirm.

"So what's your story, anyway?"

"Well..."

I pause. How am I going to get this to sound coherent?

I start from the beginning. How I got sorted onto the same team as Marlowe, Nazz, and Megan. How Nazz brought Megan over to Marlowe and I. How we became a group of friends. How I figured out that Numbuh Two was into solving mysteries. Why I followed Snidely into the woods and uncovered his alliance. How Megan told everybody about it and got booted out the very next day. How I now know Nazz got Marlowe to vote for Elise, splitting the votes so Megan could be voted off. How this bound us together to get rid of Snidely. How Wendy became part of our group. How Wendy got us to vote off Triana despite our reservations. How Nazz got rid of Wendy when she saw Wendy as a threat. How I figured it all out today. And why I'm now persona non grata with my roommates, because I confronted them with what I know.

When I finish, Rusty keeps staring out at the water.

"Huh," he says. "It all adds up. And it makes sense that this is what's going on. I mean, I'm not sure how it plays into the overarching plot of the overlords to pull our strings and make us dance for their amusement, but it makes sense that Nazz would do this."

He shook his head. "It's always the ones you don't suspect. And sometimes the ones you suspect the most. Anyway, sure, I'll help you. Except...what's in it for me?"

"You do realize that Nazz has been calling you her biggest threat, right?" I asked him.

"Sure, but now that's you," he said. "So I'm in the clear."

"Only as long as I'm around. And which would you rather do: be safe from a threat for a limited amount of time, or get rid of that threat?"

Rusty's lips turned up in a smile. "Good point. I'll help."

That night after dinner Chris gathers us up and hands us a map. Numbuh Two takes charge as navigator, and we head for the woods in silence. I walk with Rusty, and Marlowe and Nazz walk together. Nobody says anything for fear it might be used against us later on.

When we arrive at the campsite, we see five identical sleeping bags laid out on the ground. There is no tent and no campfire. I look over to Nazz, and she looks back at me.

Marlowe climbs into a sleeping bag and lies down. Nazz takes the bag next to her. I try to take the bag next to them, but they glare at me, so I move over. Rusty shuffles his way into the bag, and I end up between him and Numbuh Two.

All is quiet except for the sounds of sleeping bags rustling as we toss and turn. The sun goes down, and the island is bathed in darkness. One by one, we fall asleep. Eventually, I feel that I'm the last one still awake, and I stare at the stars in the moonless sky and think about tomorrow. Despite my body's weariness, my brain can't stop turning over everything I've figured out, trying to discern a way to make sure Nazz gets her comeuppance.

Perhaps tomorrow will provide the answer. And perhaps I can convince Marlowe to be my friend.
And perhaps everything will work out okay.

But until then I need sleep.

I shut my eyes and roll over. Who knows? Tomorrow might be an automatic elimination for Nazz.
"ATTENTION MAGGOTS! GET YOUR BUTTS UP AND GET BACK TO CAMP! NOW NOW NOW!"

"Hey, I didn't even get time to do my hair!" I heard a voice complain in the background.

"I DON'T CARE, MAGGOT! STAND UP STRAIGHT, SOLDIER!"

"Ow!"

Aw, great. Numbuh 60 is here.

Wait, that makes no sense. What would Numbuh 60 be doing at Wawanakwa?

For that matter what the heck am I doing at Wawanakwa? I have vague memories but they seem to slip away when I reach for them...

Man, I hate sleeping on the ground. I never get a good night's sleep, and I'm always fuzzy when I wake up. And I had to sleep in my clothes. Really uncomfortable.

I wormed my way out of the sleeping bag and pulled out the map. Camp lies to the southwest of us. And since the sun rises in the east and it's behind us...

I pointed slightly to my left. "That way," I told everyone.

"Hold on, just let me pack up my sleeping bag," Nazz said.

Rusty looked at her oddly. "Why are you doing that?" he asked.

Nazz shrugged. "It might come in handy. That sounded a lot like Chef on the intercom."

Rusty thought about it and then joined Nazz in packing up his sleeping bag. Marlowe got to work on hers, too.

"Oh come on! This is delaying us!" I complained. I then thought of something. I turned and saw that Ingrid was still fast asleep, worn out from yesterday's marathon. I knelt down and shook her shoulder. She groaned.

"C'mon, it's time to get up," I said gently. Ingrid shut her eyes tighter and tried to roll over.

"We gotta get to camp," I told her. "C'mon."

I shook her again. Ingrid's eyes opened, and she frowned.

"Already?" she asked. I nodded.

Slowly, Ingrid sat up and rubbed the rheum from her eyes. She blinked and looked around.

"So...what's all this?" she asked.

I shrugged. "Chef wants us to get back to camp."

"And everyone's taking sleeping bags because?"
"Nazz thinks it might come in handy," I told her.

"Did Chef say anything about it?" she asked.

"Nope," I said.

"Okay," she said. Ingrid climbed out of her sleeping bag and stood up, stretching. By this time, almost everyone had finished disassembling their sleeping bags.

"Everybody ready?" I asked.

Rusty finished with his sleeping bag. "Ready!" he said.

"Yeah, we are," Nazz said.

"Then let's go," I said. "Camp's to the southwest, so it's this way. Follow me."

I took off jogging. Everybody else followed me, although I'm certain I heard Ingrid mutter something under her breath as she jogged with the rest of the group. After about a ten-minute jog, we were in camp.

"GET DOWN TO THE BEACH, MAGGOTS!" blared from the loudspeakers. "MOVE IT, DOUBLE-TIME!"

A few minutes later we were there. Chef was waiting for us with Chaz, who looked cowed but had perfect posture as always.

"GET IN A SINGLE-FILE LINE, MAGGOTS! ARE YOU COMPLETELY SENSELESS?" Chef screamed. We hurried to obey, and soon there was a line of six standing side-by-side in front of Chef. Chef paced in front of us.

"PROPER FORMATION! AT ATTENTION! HANDS DOWN! EYES FORWARD! HEAD UP!" Chef yelled at us while pointing out our faults with a baton. Once our posture met his approval, he looked at us from behind mirrored shades.

"WHY ARE YOU LATE?" he screamed at us.

"We um, we—" Marlowe began to say.

"DID I SAY YOU COULD SPEAK?"

Marlowe's mouth snapped shut.

"Good! From now on, you will address me as Master Chief," Chef said. "Is that clear?"

"Yes, Master Chief!" we chorused.

"THAT'S YES, MASTER CHIEF, SIR!" Chef barked.

"Yes, Master Chief, sir!" we replied.

"Good." Chef paused. "NOW WHY ARE YOU ALL LATE?"

"Permission to speak, Master Chief, sir?" Rusty asked.

"Permission granted, maggot!" Chef said.
"We're late because we had to delay to pack up our sleeping bags, Master Chief, sir," Rusty told Chef.

Chef shook his head. "Did anybody tell you to bring your sleeping bags, maggot?"

"Well no, Ma--"

"YOU'RE DARN RIGHT NOBODY DID! AND YOU TWO!" He pointed at me and Ingrid. "WHERE ARE YOUR SLEEPING BAGS?"

"We left them behind, sir," Ingrid said.

"THAT'S MASTER CHIEF, MAGGOT! AND DID ANYBODY TELL YOU TO LEAVE THEM BEHIND? NO! NOBODY DID! YOU NEVER LEAVE YOUR GEAR BEHIND UNLESS IT'S AN EMERGENCY!"

Chef shook his head. "Sloppy. You maggots are just sloppy. I suppose you're wondering what your challenge is today."

"Yes, act--"

"DID I SAY YOU COULD SPEAK!" Chef asked. Nazz shut up. Chef grinned evilly.

"Today, maggots, we're going to bring back one of my personal favorite challenges: boot camp. Today, you'll have to survive all of the trials the original competitors went through when I took charge of camp for two days. Anybody who does so, wins immunity. Anybody who does not..." Chef chuckled. "Over there on the beach you'll see six canoes. Each of you is going to hold a canoe over your head until one of you gives up. And nobody eats until somebody gives up. DO I MAKE MYSELF CLEAR?"

"Yes, Master Chief!" we chorused.

"THAT'S MASTER CHIEF, SIR! NOW GET MOVING, MAGGOTS! NOW NOW NOW!"

We all ran over to the canoes. Everybody picked one up and we began holding them over our heads.

After a few minutes, my arms began to ache. Looking around, I could see that several other people were having trouble; Rusty's arms were quivering, as were Marlowe's. Nazz looked comfortable by comparison, but even she seemed to be straining, and Chaz was quite obviously unhappy about his situation. Ingrid, however, was in the worst shape. She was barely staying on her feet and rocked from side to side. As the seconds passed, she became more unbalanced, and soon she toppled over. Chef blew his whistle.

"WELL, LOOKS LIKE WE HAVE OURSELVES A QUITTER!" Chef yelled. "SOLDIER, YOU HAVE EVERYTHING TO BE ASHAMED OF! GO GET SOME REST AND THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU'VE DONE!"

Ingrid picked herself off of the ground and headed towards the cabins.

"BREAKFAST TIME, MAGGOTS!" Chef yelled.

Chef marched us to the mess hall. Inside, three full cans of garbage were waiting for us.

"Uh, Master Chief, sir, where's the food?" I asked.

"You're looking at it," he said. He laughed evilly. "You have ten minutes to eat. Then your next
challenge begins."

Nazz groaned. "Of course. Just like in Island."

"DID I SAY YOU COULD SPEAK?" Chef yelled. Nazz mimed zipping her lip. "GOOD! NOW EAT UP!"

We all looked at the garbage. None of us chose to eat.

"ALRIGHT, MAGGOTS!" Chef yelled after ten minutes. "WE'VE DECIDED TO MIX THINGS UP! YOUR FIRST TEST IS OUTSIDE! FORWARD...MARCH!"

We followed Chef and marched to a spot just outside camp, where a full-fledged obstacle course had been set up. The course consisted of a bunch of mud. On top of the mud was a wooden wall, climbing tires, a rope swing, a series of interlaced tires, and swinging axes.

"Okay, maggots. Complete this obstacle course, and you will not be completely incompetent in a combat situation. UNDERSTAND?" Chef said.

"Yes, Master Chief, sir!" we all replied.

"GOOD! GET GOING! NOW, MAGGOTS, NOW!"

I took a deep breath and entered the course after Nazz. She took the right side of the wooden wall, and I took the left. I jumped and managed to get my forearms over. I used them to pull myself partway up and managed to get my arms completely over. From this point, it was a lot easier to pull the rest of my body to the top of the wall. I climbed to my feet, sat down, and then pushed myself off. For not the first time, I was grateful for my KND training.

By now, Nazz was well ahead of me. I ran towards the tires and high-stepped through them, doing my best to ignore the mud that sucked at the soles of my shoes when they hit the ground. I got through the tires without tripping, ran up the ramp, and jumped towards a rope. I grabbed it, and my momentum swung me over to the descending ramp on the other side. I let go of the rope, landed on the ramp, and ran at the climbing wall. I put my arms through a tire and used it as leverage to put myself over the top. I managed to get over, but lost my balance and toppled ungracefully into the mud. Squinting, I wiped the mud from my brow and looked at the axes ahead. I took a deep breath and crawled underneath them. I kept crawling until I reached the end of the mud, at which point I stood up and surveyed the rest of the course.

Rusty and Marlowe were going under the axes, and looked like they'd make it past easily. Chaz was in last, but even he was climbing the tires. As soon as he got past, he looked at the mud distastefully but chose to crawl anyway. As soon as he was clear of the axes, he stood up again and walked towards the finish line.


We looked at each other, confused.

"THAT'S IN THIRTEEN MINUTES, MAGGOTS! GET YOUR BUTTS TO THE MESS HALL BY THEN, OR ELSE!"

Chef stormed off.
Thirteen minutes later, we were all seated in the mess hall. Several sheets of paper and a pen were in front of each one of us.

"LISTEN UP, MAGGOTS!" Chef barked. "Your next challenge is going to stretch your creative muscles. That's right, you must use the next two hours to adequately express in writing how much you love me, Master Chief Chef. Is that clear?"

"Yes, Master Chief, sir!" we all said.

"Good. I want a three hundred word essay by oh-one-thousand. AND NO PADDING IT WITH VERIES! OR WITH ANYTHING ELSE! UNDERSTOOD?"

"Yes, Master Chief, sir!" we all said.

"Good. I'll see you all in two hours," Chef said. He left the mess hall.

I stared at my paper. This was going to be hard to write.

Still, I had to admit, having Chef as a drill sergeant was better than having Chris as pretty much anything else.

I love and adore Master Chief Chef. Why do I love and adore Master Chief Chef? There are many reasons. I admire his toughness, his commitment to fairness, his devotion to his soldiers, and his dedication to proper military training.

Master Chief Chef is one of the toughest men I have ever met. If you told me that Master Chief Chef eats a bowl of nails without milk for breakfast every day, I would not be surprised. Such a feat would be run-of-the-mill for Master Chief Chef. In fact, I believe that eating a bowl of nails without milk would not only be normal for him, it would be beneath a man of his caliber of toughness. Master Chief Chef easily outclasses everyone else at this camp in terms of toughness. His toughness is only comparable to his commitment to fairness, his devotion to his soldiers, and his dedication to proper military training.

Master Chief Chef is committed to fairness. He never allows one of his soldiers to step out of line or to harm the others. While Master Chief Chef encourages individual accomplishment, Master Chief Chef also works hard to make sure that his soldiers have a strong sense of team spirit and do not undercut each other when seeking to succeed. In fact, Master Chief Chef works to make sure that his soldiers understand that they are all part of a team, and that when one of them fails, they all fail. Master Chief Chef never punishes without reason, and never punishes somebody that doesn't deserve it.

The commitment to fairness that Master Chief Chef shows is only one of the ways in which Master Chief Chef is devoted to his soldiers. Although Master Chief Chef does not always openly display his devotion, from watching his actions it is clear that Master Chief Chef is truly a father to his men. Like all good fathers, Master Chief Chef knows when to show his soldiers kindness and when to punish them, and he uses these tools well. Master Chief Chef is a shining beacon of what good leadership should be, and he especially demonstrates this through his devotion to his soldiers.

Finally, Master Chief Chef in his efforts today is seeking to teach us proper military discipline. While this means that he must take on the unenviable position of drill sergeant, his willingness to do so only shows his dedication to training soldiers properly. I personally admire his dedication to proper military training, and although I am sure that my fellow campers will complain in private about the
harsh discipline and large amount of effort demanded, they will agree that Master Chief Chef's dedication to proper military training only serves to make us better soldiers and better people.

For all of these reasons, and more besides, I love and adore Master Chief Chef. He is truly a man among men. If I had to choose one person who is more overlooked and less appreciated on this island than anyone else, I would choose Master Chief Chef. Thank you, Master Chief Chef, for all of the hard work you put in.

I looked at the clock. It read 9:55. I had gotten my essay done just in time. It was over five hundred words long, and it would hopefully be good enough to satisfy Chef.

A few minutes later, Chef threw the doors open and strolled in. "Well," he said. "Do you all have your essays ready for me?"

Everyone handed him an essay.

"Good!" Chef said. "Now you're all going to stand at attention, in a straight line, while I read these essays to you. And anytime I come across a line I particularly hate—or, if you maggots are smarter than you look, one I like—I'm gonna point it out so you can all roll in it. Understood?"

"Yes, Master Chief, sir!" we all said.

Chef finally finished reading over an hour later. He smiled at us.

"I never knew you all had such warm feelings towards me," he said. "It almost makes me feel bad about this next part of your training." He grinned wickedly. "Almost."

Chef led us to the woods. I wasn't sure what to expect. Gravedigging? Hand-to-hand combat? Bear wrestling? Honestly, it was all up in the air. And the fact that everyone was mad at me because I flattered Chef so much that he commented on every sentence I wrote wasn't making me feel any better.

Chef stopped by a large tree. He pointed to it.

"Climb up, and hang upside down by your knees," he commanded. We all climbed to the sturdy lowest branch, which sat about fifteen feet off the ground, and began hanging.

"Now this challenge is very simple," Chef told us. "You just have to stay up there for ten minutes."

We hung there in silence as Chef paced below us. After a few minutes, Chef spoke again. By this time, I was starting to feel dizzy.

"What you are experiencing, is an ancient form of torture. By now the blood has begun rushing to your head. The next stage is nausea, followed by dizziness and a flushed appearance, as the blood begins to pool in your eyes."

I swiveled my head from side to side to look at everyone. It was hard to move with all the blood in my brain.

"You may experience fainting spells," Chef said. Nazz grabbed the branch with her hands to steady herself. Everyone else did the same. Chef fell silent once again but continued to pace.

Suddenly, Rusty fell to the ground and landed with a thud. He was unconscious.
A few seconds later, Chef yelled "Okay maggots, that's ten minutes! You can come down now!"

Everyone dismounted. Chef felt Rusty's pulse.

"He's alright, uninjured, just unable to handle the stress." Chef shook his head sympathetically.
"Well, back to camp. The next segment of your training starts at oh-twelve-hundred hours. TO THE MESS HALL, MARCH, DOUBLE-TIME!"

"But Master Chief, sir, what about–" I started to protest.

"DID I SAY YOU COULD SPEAK?" he yelled.

We all jogged back to the mess hall.

Chef arrived in the mess hall a few minutes after we did to find us all sitting down.

"DID I SAY YOU COULD SIT?" he barked. We all got up and stood at attention quickly.

"Good, maggots," he said. "Maybe you're actually starting to learn something. BUT I DOUBT IT!"

Chef smiled at us wickedly. "Your next assignment will test your abilities in the art of subterfuge. You just have to steal a food item from the craft services tent without me or Chris finding out. It starts in ten minutes. From that point, you have half an hour to get your food. And NO WORKING TOGETHER! DISMISSED!"

We all exited the mess hall. We were followed out by Chef, who headed towards the craft services tent on the west side of camp. As soon as he was gone, Nazz clapped her hands to get our attention.

"Okay, everyone, we need to decide on an order to go in," she told us.

"But Chef said we couldn't work as a team," I said.

"How's it feel being such a suck-up?" Chaz asked.

"It's not, like, working together," Nazz said. "We just need to go one at a time to increase our likelihood of success."

I nodded. I could see her point.

"The Chaz is going first," Chaz said.

Nazz shrugged. "Okay. We'll call it then--"

"Second!" Marlowe said.

"Second!" I said, a bit too late. "I mean, third!"

Nazz frowned. "Fine. I'll go last."

A few minutes later, we all waited outside the tent as Chaz snuck in. After a couple of minutes, he came back out with a plate full of ham. Marlowe was the next one in; it took her longer to come out, but when she did she was carrying a wedge of cheese.

I took a deep breath. I had plenty of time. I peeked into the tent and realized I'd have to crawl under a
table to avoid being seen by Chef or Chris. Strangely, Chris had a tablet resting on his lap.

I stayed low to the ground so they couldn't sniff me out and kept my head down as I headed for the fridge. Once there, I glanced out from under the tablecloth to make sure Chef wasn't looking in my direction and opened the fridge door. I smiled as I spotted my target, a jar of dill pickles, and grabbed it. I then thought about it and grabbed a bottle of mustard too. I turned around, heading for the exit, and got there without any trouble. After taking one last look to make sure Chef wasn't aware of me, I left the tent with a huge grin on my face and condiments in my hands.

As soon as I exited, Nazz entered the tent. I thought about making some noise so that Chef would notice Nazz but decided against it. If this game was worth winning, it was worth winning fairly.

After a few minutes, Nazz came back with a loaf of bread. We took our food and headed for the mess hall.

Chef threw open the doors to the mess hall a few minutes after we got there.

"Well, MAGGOTS, Chris tells me none of you cheated," he said. "Except for deciding to go one-by-one. And although I find the fact that you all chose the ingredients for a good sandwich suspicious, I guess you all pass. BUT YOU DON'T GET TO EAT! EVERYONE, GET DOWN TO THE BEACH! NOW NOW NOW!"

We all got to the beach quickly. Once there, we found a boombox sitting on a stool. Chef smiled as he stood in front of us and instructed us to arrange ourselves in a square formation.

"Welcome to the last part of your training, maggots," he said. "This is the most important lesson you will ever learn. The lesson...of dance!"

We all looked at him, surprised, confused, and slightly disturbed.

"Um, Master Chief, sir?" Marlowe asked.

"What is it, soldier?" Chef asked.

"Permission to speak freely, Master Chief, sir?" she asked.

"Permission granted, soldier," he said.

"What will we be dancing to, Master Chief, sir?" she asked.

"I'm glad you asked!" Chef said. "Today, we'll be dancing to one of my favorite songs, Michael Jackson's Thriller."

"Master Chief, sir?" Marlowe asked.

"Yes, soldier?"

"Permission to speak freely, Master Chief, sir?"

"Permission granted, soldier."

"How did you afford the rights?"

"DID I SAY YOU COULD SPEAK?" Chef yelled.
Marlowe stood her ground. "Yes, sir, Master Chief, sir."

"Oh," Chef said, taken aback. "That's right. But that's not important right now! What is important is that I am going to dance, and you are going to follow my moves precisely, or you will LOSE THE CHALLENGE! DO YOU UNDERSTAND, MAGGOTS?"

"Yes, Master Chief, sir!" we all yelled.

"GOOD!" Chef yelled. He pressed play and began to dance.

Thriller: music and lyrics by Rod Temperton
The Army Campfire Ceremony

Somehow I got through *Thriller* without screwing up.

Somehow *everyone* got through *Thriller* without screwing up.

It's gonna take me a while to like Michael Jackson again. All the shimmy and shaking and dancing and quivering has left me completely discombobulated. As soon as we were done and Chef declared the entire challenge over, I stumbled off the dance floor. It didn't help that Chef decided there wouldn't be any lunch *or* dinner. I could really use something to eat. I can't think straight.

So. Everybody passed. That's good. Except for Ingrid and Rusty. That's bad. And one of them is going home.

Wait.

CRUD!

I ran towards the boys side of the cabin. Ignoring the obvious evidence that Chaz had moved to the other side of our cabin, I threw open the door. There, I found Rusty playing golf with Ernest Borgnine.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

Rusty quickly covered himself. "Uh...nothing?"

"Right, whatever, I'm just–I'm just gonna step out for a minute," I said. I exited the cabin, waited a bit, and came back in. Rusty was standing around awkwardly, now fully dressed.

"So, you ready?" I asked.

"Ready for what?" Rusty asked. "Did you win?"

"Yes," I said.

"Well hot dog! Let's vote off Nazz!" Rusty said happily.

"That's the problem," I told him. "Nazz won too."

Rusty looked at me, stunned. "What?"

"Nazz won, and Marlowe won, and Chaz won, and I won. Boot camp is over."

"So..."

"So you and Ingrid–"

"Oh, God!"

Rusty began pacing. "Okay, this is bad, this is bad, this is bad..." he muttered. He looked at me. "Lemme guess. You're gonna vote me off instead of your girlfriend."

"Well–" I started to say.
"Don't worry, I understand," he said. "I'd do the same thing for Nancy. Hell, I gave up on seventy-five thousand dollars for the love of that woman, and I'm probably not going to get a million so it might as well go to your girlfriend. But you'd better tell Ingrid."

I headed over to the girls' cabin and knocked on the door. Marlowe opened it.

"What do you want?" she asked.

"Is Ingrid in?" I asked.

Marlowe looked at me suspiciously, but Ingrid came up behind her. Marlowe looked back and forth between us, but stepped out of the way and let Ingrid leave. Ingrid walked over to me, and she led me away from the cabin.

"So why do you want to see me?" she asked. "Because I'm pretty sure I'm the one leaving camp today. So is this goodbye?"

I shook my head. "No. This is us needing to meet with Rusty."

She looked at me. "Why?" she asked. "He's not going to sacrifice himself."

I nodded. "Yeah, but we still should talk things out. Figure out our strategy. And maybe figure out a way to get rid of Nazz."

Ingrid smiled slightly. "Okay. I'm in."

The three of us sat on the front porch of the boys' cabin.

"So why are we here?" Rusty asked.

"We're all on the same page, right?" I asked. "We all think Nazz is the biggest threat?"

"Yes," Ingrid said. "But so what? Nazz and Marlowe both have immunity."

"Look," I said. "I have an idea for how we can all stay on the island for another challenge."

Rusty's jaw dropped. "What?" he asked. He shook his head. "No. One of us is going home."

"Trust me," I said. "Some hope is better than none, right?"

Ingrid crossed her arms. "We're listening."

"What happens in the event of a tie?" I asked.

Rusty and Ingrid looked at each other.

"I don't know..." Rusty said contemplatively.

"I do," Ingrid said. "It's happened three times, all in World Tour. Chris had the tied parties do a tie-breaker challenge twice and did a double elimination once."

Well. That throws a wrench into my plans.

"Crud," I said.
"Well what was your idea?" Rusty asked.

"To force a tie in the hopes that Chris would keep both of you on," I said.

"That's actually not a bad idea," Ingrid said.

We looked at her, surprised.

"Really?" Rusty asked. "Even though it might mean both of us get eliminated?"

Ingrid stared us down. "Chris loves to mix it up. Like I said, once it was a double elimination, but twice it was a tie-breaker. All of this happened over the course of the same season. He might just decide to not eliminate anyone. Especially if he thinks it'll be more dramatic. And throwing a wrench into Nazz's plans would definitely be dramatic."

"Okay then," I said. "So do we want to do this?"

Rusty stared out into the distance as he thought about it. Eventually he exhaled heavily.

"Sure, why not," Rusty said.

"Good, then we just need to figure out our voting strategy," Ingrid said. "Rusty can't vote himself off, so Rusty, you're voting for me." Rusty nodded. "And I'm voting for Rusty for the same reason. That takes two votes out of commission, four in play. We need two on each side, and we know that Nazz and Marlowe are going to vote in tandem."

"So it comes down to me and Chaz?" I asked.

"Yeah. You need to vote the same way."

I groaned. "I hate dealing with Chaz."

"But now we need his help," Rusty said. He frowned.

"I don't like it either," Ingrid said. "But if Chaz votes with Nazz and Marlowe..."

"Yeah, I get it," I said.

"I just don't like it," Rusty added. We looked at him. "What? Everybody else was thinking it."

"Okay, but first let's figure out how we need Chaz to vote," I said. "Who are Nazz and Marlowe voting for?"

"I don't know," Ingrid said. "They haven't been speaking to me since, well, since yesterday. You both saw."

We nodded.

"So is it you they're voting for?" Rusty asked. "Because it sure seems like it."

"It could be," Ingrid said. "You were on top of their list—"

"List?" Rusty asked.

"...look I know it seems obvious in retrospect but I really didn't know, okay?" Ingrid defended herself.
"Uh-huh," Rusty said.

"Anyway, they thought that Rusty was the toughest guy here–sorry Numbuh Two–"

"Wait, me? But I'm weak! Ask my wife! Ask anybody!" Rusty said.

"Could I please finish a sentence?" Ingrid asked.

"Sorry," Rusty said sheepishly.

"Rusty was going to be voted out last week until you two won immunity. Then it was going to be Chaz, but Nazz broke rank–I think, it still might've been Marlowe–and voted out Wendy. Point is, Rusty was target number one until I defected."

"And now?" I asked.

"And now I don't know, because they're not talking around me," she said.

"Well then, how about we settle this the old-fashioned way," Rusty said. "Rock, paper, scissors."

"And the winner gets?" Ingrid asked.

"Numbuh Two votes against the loser and tries to get Chaz to vote with him," Rusty said.

Ingrid tilted her head. "Well, it's not any worse than randomly guessing, I guess."

"Wait," I said. "Rusty, are you sure you won't help me with Chaz?"

Rusty wrinkled his nose. "Do I have to?" he asked.

"Yes," Ingrid said.

Rusty heaved a sigh. "Fine," he said.

Rusty and Ingrid got into position and stared at each other. They put their fists out and started pounding them against their palms.

"Wait!" Ingrid said. "Are we going on scissors, or shoot?"

"Scissors!" Rusty said. "Who goes on shoot?"

"I dunno, Tehama always wants to go on shoot."

"Who?"

"Somebody from scho–look, we're going on scissors?"

"Yes!"

"Not go?"

"Go?"

"So it's rock, paper, scissors, then we go?"

"Yes, that's how we're doing it, now let's just play!"
They slammed their fists against their palms and chanted "Rock, paper, scissors!"

Ingrid threw scissors. Rusty threw paper.

Rusty frowned. "Fine," he said. "I guess it'll either be five-one against me or a three-three tie."

"Or you could only have two votes against you," Ingrid said.

I shook my head. "No, we'll convince Chaz. We have to."

Rusty walked over to Chaz's door and knocked.

"Who is it?" Chaz called from inside.

"It's Rusty!" Rusty called back.

"Who cares?" Chaz asked. "The Chaz is trying to relax in here!"

"We need your help," I said.

"So what? The Chaz doesn't help anybody. Unless he wants to. But you two are so unfashionable that the Chaz can't really do anything to fix you."

I sighed. "Okay, Chaz. Let's cut a deal."

The door swung open.

"What kind of a deal?" Chaz asked.

That night, all six of us sat by the campfire as Chris walked up with a platter containing five sausages.

"Let's get this out of the way," Chris said. "Not much drama at this ceremony, so Numbuh Two, Nazz, Marlowe, Chaz." He tosses us all hot dogs. "Here are your weenies. Enjoy. And now, there are two. Rusty, and Ingrid. You two have started to become friends, or at least allies. And now, you'll have to say goodbye."

Chris paused.

"Or not!" he exclaimed. "The votes were tied this week, so both of you will stay on."

Rusty, Ingrid, and I cheered.

"Except for one minor thing."

Uh-oh.

"Rusty, remember back at the start of camp when I told you if you smoked the parental organizations would be on us?" Chris said sweetly. "Well, you've been smoking your whole time at camp--by the way, I still can't believe you packed that many cigarettes--and now seems like the right time to punish you for it."

Chris grinned. "Your bags are packed and you're heading home!" he told Rusty.

"Yes," Chris said.

"This is insane! This is an outrage! This--"

"Oh, shut up, Dale."

Rusty's mouth snapped shut.

"Wait!" Chaz exclaimed. "I had a deal with them!"

"You know, usually I wouldn't allow this," Chris said. "But since you held up your end of the bargain and this would just humiliate them further, go ahead."

Oh come on, really?

"Go on," Chris coaxed. "Do it."

Rusty and I both stood up and cheered.

"Chaz, Chaz, he's our man! He can do it, 'cause he's the Chaz! Up with Chaz, up with Chaz, rah, rah! Chaz is great, yay for Chaz, Chaz, Chaz, Chaz!"

"Alright, now get in the cannon, Dale," Chris said. Rusty began walking towards the cannon. He paused before climbing in.

"How did you know my real name?" he asked.

Chris grinned. "Wouldn't you like to know."

Chris lit the fuse and turned back to us. "We're down to the final five," he said. "Numbuh Two and Ingrid have teamed up, but so have Nazz and Marlowe. And of course, there's one wild card: Chaz. Who goes down next? Who stays in the fight? We'll find out, next time, on Total Drama: Cartoon Multiverse!"

Voting Breakdown:

Rusty Shackleford: Ingrid Third  
Nazz Van Bartonschmeer: Ingrid Third  
Marlowe: Ingrid Third  
Numbuh Two: Rusty Shackleford  
Chaz Monerainian: Rusty Shackleford  
Ingrid Third: Rusty Shackleford

Final tally of votes received:

Ingrid Third: 3  
Rusty Shackleford: 3 (eliminated)
"Hey there," Chris grinned. "I'm Chris McLean, and last time on Total Drama: Cartoon Multiverse, we sent our players to boot camp! They had to go through all of the trials our original set of campers went through, but this time they did it by themselves instead of on teams. And surprisingly enough, at the end of the day, a majority were still standing! We really need to up the difficulty level of these challenges. But two players ended up on the chopping block, and thanks to Numbuh Two, we ended up with a tie between Ingrid and Rusty. So I sent Rusty Shackleford, whose real name is Dale Gribble, back to Arlen, Texas. Now we're down to five contestants, and since the show is running a little low on money we've decided to sell out like Adam Sandler! The price was not wrong, so if you're in the audience and love the show, everyone here at Total Drama: Cartoon Multiverse encourages you to go out and buy all of the wonderful games you'll see our campers play today! It's the board game episode, sponsored by Hasbro!"

I woke up at 6 A.M. and went for a walk on the beach. By now, it's become part of my daily routine, along with not getting to practice my bass until the afternoon, if ever, and worry about being backstabbed. Actually, you can scratch that last part, because I wasn't really worried about that after Snidely left until Wendy got voted off by none other than Ingrid. I didn't want to believe it was true that one of us was a traitor, but when she called Nazz the traitor the writing was on the wall. Ingrid was obviously trying to frame Nazz, and when that didn't work she ran to the boys for help. Naturally, Nazz and I tried to vote her off, but Chris stopped that from happening by kicking off Rusty for smoking in the confessional. Which does explain why there was always a lingering scent of cigarette smoke in there. Anyway, Ingrid is a traitor, Numbuh Two is her accomplice, Chaz is probably working with them, and Nazz is the only friend I have on this island.

Unless Ingrid was telling the truth.

No. No. Ignore that thought. You can't afford to lose your only friend on this island. Ingrid was just trying to frame Nazz so that she could get away with being a traitor. Maybe if she had continued to stay quiet she wouldn't be our prime target.

Ugh, this sucks! Last night was so muggy I just tossed and turned. Sleeping next to that traitor didn't help. But I just kept tossing and turning this way and that and didn't get to sleep until super late. Still woke up with my alarm, which Nazz and Ingrid thankfully slept through, but it's hot out today, and it's only dawn.

Whatever. I need a shower. Might as well freshen up.

I climbed into the shower and shivered. I turned up the hot water, and a few seconds later, I was rewarded with warm water cascading down on me.

Okay. This feels good. I can feel my mood improving already. Hey, I'm in the final five. I've gotten farther than I ever expected. I have a reasonable shot of winning. At least, I do if Nazz and I can survive this episode. Then it'll be final four, and we'll be a team of two. It'll be even better if we can get rid of Ingrid. That'll give us the cabin all to ourselves, and we won't have to worry about Ingrid any more.

I still can't believe how quickly she turned on us. She votes off Wendy, tries to frame Nazz, then gets in good with the guys. I admit that I'm kind of impressed. Granted, it's overshadowed by all this unyielding rage, but Ingrid almost managed to play us all off against each other.
I should've known there was something wrong with how she was always hanging out with Numbuh Two. I figured they were dating, but the fact that they were planning to sell us out? I never would have seen that coming. Unless Numbuh Two's a pawn as well. I wouldn't put it past Ingrid.

My stomach rumbled. I need something to eat. Last night's hot dog was good, but it only left me wanting more. I seriously can't believe that we didn't get to eat anything yesterday except for a hot dog. Well, I suppose we could have eaten garbage. But it's was garbage from Chef's cooking. That's probably best classified as hazardous waste, since Chef's cooking is basically garbage already.

Ugh. I need breakfast and I need to practice my bass. And I need to stay away from Ingrid.

But first, I need to relax in this shower for just a little longer.

After I toweled off, I headed over to the mess hall, just in case it was open. It wasn't, so I headed back to the cabin. Nazz was still asleep, but Ingrid had left. I don't know where she went, but the fact that she's no longer here worries me. Not as much as if she was awake and still there while Nazz was asleep; that's a scary scenario on its own. But Ingrid possibly plotting something somewhere else...that isn't a comfortable thing to think about.

Should I stay here? Ingrid might come back. But then I'll just be sitting in this cabin, doing nothing. And after yesterday, I'm sure Nazz can use all the sleep she can get. Plus I do want to practice my bass. And let's face it, there's really not a lot to do at this camp. Especially with nearly everyone gone.

Really, that's one of the downsides to getting this far. We started off with twenty people, even if some of them were super weird and annoying, and now there are only five left. And all things considered, I'm only on good terms with one of them. Admittedly that's not my fault, but still. It's just kind of weird to think that most of the people here would be willing to kick me off of this island. Even if that's part of the game. And even if I'd be willing to kick them off too.

Oh, great. Now I'm thinking about the morality of reality TV. It's just a game, Marlowe. And one you're not really enjoying at the moment.

I deserve a bit of fun. It's bass time.

I headed out to the campfire pit with my bass. Once there, I tuned up and then set to working through chord patterns. Major seventh up, minor seventh up. Step up, minor seventh up, major seventh down. Step up, seventh up...

Soon I lost myself in the notes as I worked through scales and chords. Eventually, I shifted to songs, and I was midway through *Rain King* when I realized I wasn't alone.

I stopped the song and looked up. Ingrid was watching me.

Shit.

"What do you want?" I snapped. Was that too harsh? No, who cares. Ingrid doesn't deserve nice.

"To be friends," Ingrid said. She wasn't angry. She wasn't sad. She's just Ingrid, as she always is. Whenever she says something, it's true.

No. It's not. I just thought that's how she was.
"Really?" I asked sharply. "Don't you have enough."

Ingrid looked right at me. "I thought you were my friend," she said.

"So did I," I said.

Silence fell between us.

Eventually, Ingrid spoke up. "Why can't we be friends?"

"I dunno, Ingrid," I said. "Why'd you have to betray us?"

"I didn't," she said. "I swear."

I sighed and turned away from her. "Just go away," I said.

Ingrid stood there for a minute or so, but I eventually heard her walk away.

I put my head down and attacked my bass. Sometimes you just need to play some Slayer.

After about an hour of playing the bass, my fingers were throbbing with the feel of a good practice. For once, I had been able to get up and practice. And by now, the mess hall was probably open.

I headed for the cafeteria. The doors were shut, and a sign on them read 'Closed until 10 A.M.'

What time is it? I know I got back to the cabin at about 7 after I gave up on the walk and took a shower. And that was maybe an hour of the bass. So another two hours or so. And I've got nothing to do.

More bass? Yeah, why not. I can catch up some.

I leaned against the side of the mess hall and began playing. A few minutes later, Chef walked up to the mess hall. He saw me and stopped.

"Is there a reason you're here?" he asked.

I shrugged.

"Didn't think so. Go somewhere else," Chef said.

I pushed off of the wall and headed towards the docks. Today is looking like an endless sequence of hurry up and wait.

A while later, I headed back to the cabin. Nazz might not be awake, but I was sick of practicing. It's not much fun playing by yourself, especially on an instrument with such a low register.

I miss home again. Wendy may be right about how so many of my stories take place in the mall, but c'mon. The Galleria Mall. Several hundred stores. And most everyone hangs out there. There are more teenagers there on the average weekday than there are at my high school, and I don't exactly go to a tiny school. And I'd like to practice with Pete and Connie and Wyatt and whoever the heck the keyboardist is, I can't remember his name right now.

Let's face it. I'm bored. I'm actually waiting for the challenge to start.
That's probably the definition of insanity. Or one of them, at least. Wanting to start one of Chris's challenges. Nobody ever wants to do that. And yet, here I am. Waiting for today's challenge to start.

I walked into the cabin. Ingrid was still gone and Nazz was still asleep. I stowed my bass under my bed and sighed. 9:25. I'm hungry, I'm bored, I'm sleep-deprived, I'm stressed. It's like finals week but there's nothing to study.

I actually wish I had a study guide. Not for school or anything, but for this game. It'd be really helpful to know what's gonna happen next. My older brother likes this show, and I called him for advice before I came here, but he wasn't much help. All he could tell me was to watch out for Chris, because Chris is nuts.

Well, my brother was right on that count. Chris is certifiably insane. The whole idea that the world is a fanfiction is weird, too. There would probably be a lot more guys making out if that were the case.

Maybe Wyatt's friend Jude would have been helpful. He knows what it's like to deal with Chef.

I blinked. Where did that thought come from? As far as I knew, Jude and Chef had never met. How could they have? When would they have? Although now that I think about it, I seem to remember Jude sounding a lot like Chris. Maybe that's it. I just mixed up their voices in my memory and that's how I assumed Jude knew Chef. Just a weird coincidence.

"WAKE UP, WAKE UP, WAKE UP!" Chris's voice ripped through the air. Nazz's eyes snapped open. "Today, we're dipping into our bag of corporate sponsors and pulling out Hasbro! So get your game faces on, and get down here by ten o'clock, for the greatest night of board games you'll ever have! Or afternoon, actually. Because we're doing this in the middle of the day, since it's apparently unethical to refuse to feed you for more than a couple of days. Which means you need to get fed. Today. Oh, and you won't be getting fed until after you complete the games."

Nazz pulled herself out of bed and looked at me.

"Hey," she said. "Where's Ingrid?"

"I don't know," I told her.

Nazz began getting dressed.

"She talked to me," I said. Nazz paused in the middle of pulling on her pants.

"What did she want?" Nazz asked. Her tone is measured.

"She said she wants to be friends," I said. "She's still trying to mess with our heads."

Nazz nodded and continued getting dressed.

"Well, she was our friend," Nazz said. "We can't trust her, but--"

"But what?" I asked. "She turned on Wendy, she lied to us, she even tried to frame you!"

"I know," Nazz said. "Still, I, like, I don't think she was always lying. Maybe she just wanted friends."

"Maybe she just wanted money," I said bitterly.

Nazz finished getting dressed. "Still, we have to room together. We might as well be civil."
I nodded. Nazz had a point.

The doors to the mess hall swung open. The five of us entered. Chris grinned as he greeted us.

"Welcome, my friends, to the most fun you'll ever have! Chef has created his own board game for Hasbro, and it allows you to play SEVERAL other board games at the same time! The rules, are simple. The first one to get to the final square is the winner, and the winner gets immunity."

I looked at the board. There were eight spaces on it in a straight line.

"So what's the trick?" Chris asked. "Well, it's simple. Whenever you land on a space, you have to play a round of whatever game it claims you have to play. And the next person gets to roll immediately afterwards. As soon as you finish your round, you can move on, but while you're playing, everybody else is playing their games too. So speed is required to play this game. If you overshoot the final space, you loop around to the start. And, because Chef can't run six games at once—well he could, but he'd probably kill me if I made him do that—we have these interns from Hasbro to help!" He gestured to five people in suits. "Chef's gonna run Yahtzee. Is everyone ready?"

None of us replied.

"Too bad! Our first player is Numbuh Two." He pressed a die into Numbuh Two's palm. "Go ahead. Roll it."

Numbuh Two gulped and rolled the die. It came up as a five. Chris moved a tiny statue of Numbuh Two five spaces on the game board.

"Free," he read. "Huh. Guess you don't have to play anything. The next player is...Marlowe!"

I took the die and rolled. Four. Chris moved a statue of me forward.

"Hard Monopoly," he read. He looked at me, grinning. "Well, Marlowe, you're going to play a super hard game of Monopoly! Your opponent has bought everything on the board and has a hotel on every piece of property! Good luck not losing everything! And oh, I should warn you. If you lose in this game, you lose the challenge. And you can't eat until everyone else has finished. But no pressure."

Great. I walked over to table four. The dealer handed me a pair of dice.

"Thanks," I said. I rolled. Four and six makes ten, and I visited jail. The dealer picked up the dice and handed them back. I rolled again. Community chest.

I picked up a card and read it. It said that the bank had made an error and I'd been given $200. I showed the card to the dealer, and she smiled and handed me a pair of hundred-dollar bills and the dice. I dropped the bills onto my stack and rolled again. A pair of fives.

I ended up on Ventnor Avenue. I sighed.

"How much?" I asked.

"One thousand, one hundred and fifty dollars," she told me. I shuffled through my money, pulled out the bills, and handed them over. She handed me my dice and I rolled again. It was a 9, and I landed on Chance. I picked up my card and smiled. Get out of jail free. That's probably gonna be useful. The dealer handed me my dice again, and I took another roll. Two and six, and I landed on the Income Tax square.
The dealer looked me in the eyes. "I can hand you two hundred dollars and then take them back, or you can just walk away. Up to you."

"Thanks," I told her. "I'll just walk. Is there something I do here, or what?"

"Just leave your money at the table for the next competitor," she said.

I walked away. I noticed that Nazz was at a separate Monopoly board. She didn't look very happy as Chris finished explaining what she had to do and moved over to Ingrid with the die clutched in his hand.

"Okay, Ingrid," Chris said. "It's your turn to roll. Are you ready?"

Ingrid shrugged. "I guess so," she said. She grabbed the die and rolled it down the table. It finished rolling on a five.

Chris rolled his eyes. "Geez, another free play? I'd like to see some action here, thanks. But it looks like it's your turn, Numbuh Two."

Chris picked up the die and handed it to Numbuh Two. Numbuh Two brought the die up to his face.

"C'mon, baby," Numbuh Two told the dice softly. "Papa needs a brand new treehouse."

Numbuh Two rolled the die. It clattered to a stop as a two. Chris moved Numbuh Two's piece forward.

"What game is it? Yahtzee!" Chris proclaimed. Numbuh Two gulped as Chef grinned wickedly, but approached the dice game.

"Marlowe, it's your turn." Chris handed me the die. I took a deep breath and rolled. It landed on one. My statue moved to the free play square, and Chris frowned.

"Oh well," he said. "Ingrid, you roll again."

Ingrid took the die, took a deep breath, and rolled a six.

"The Game of Life! Ooh, good roll!" Chris said. "And for those of you watching at home, we encourage you to buy the game for yourself and experience the pure fun of the Game...of Life!"

"How much are you getting paid for this?" I asked.

"Enough," Chris said. "And speaking of getting paid, Chaz, it looks like you finished your turn at the easy Monopoly table. Go ahead and roll."

Chris tossed the die to Chaz. It hit Chaz in the eye.

"Ow!" Chaz complained. "No wonder Cam always whines about that. Okay, here goes."

Chaz rolled the die. It came up as a six. Chris walked the Chaz statue to the end of the board.

"Well whaddya know, Chaz wins!" Chris declared.

"So are we done now?" I asked.

"He is, you aren't. Chaz, go ahead and get yourself some food, and enjoy the knowledge that you're immune from elimination! The rest of you don't get to eat until you've all lost or won. Whichever.
Oh, and losers don't get to eat until everyone else has finished. And, speaking of losers, Marlowe! It's your roll!"

I frowned and took the die from Chris. Okay. Just need to get a three and I can go eat. Not that hard. C'mon. Three.

I rolled a two.

Chris shook his head, pretending to pity me. "Too bad," he said. "You'll be playing Yahtzee...and you'll have to wait for Numbuh Two and Chef to finish before you can! Feel free to check out the other games while you're waiting, but be ready to play whenever those two finish."

"Is this going to have any payoff at all?" I asked.

"It might!" he said. "So those of you who are watching at home, stay tuned for more lovely Hasbro action and more Total Drama: Cartoon Multiverse!"

Chris held his grin for a few more seconds before turning back to me.

"Nope. No payoff. It's just a big waste of time to demonstrate some board games," he said.

"What?" I asked, surprised by his honesty.

"Yeah, but if you don't play them legitimately, you get kicked off," he said. "But no. The next few hours are just gonna be a big waste of time for everyone involved. Mostly for you, but also for the readers. But then, the readers can skip it, and you can't. So yeah. Get playing."

Chris walked off, whistling a jaunty tune to taunt me.

Great. So now I've got to wait while these two play through a game of Yahtzee.

Chef scribbled something on his scorecard and pushed the cup of dice to Numbuh Two. He began shaking the cup. I decided to move on to something else.

Hmm. Ingrid is totally focused on her game. And Nazz looks frustrated. Maybe I should go over and give her some support.

I walked over to Nazz and stood behind her.

"So what's this?" I asked.

Nazz rolled the dice and moved her hat to Pennsylvania Railroad. The dealer handed over the deed and then gave Nazz her dice back.

"Apparently, I have to land on every space on the board," she said. She rolled the dice.

"Every space?" I asked. Nazz moved to B&O.

"Until I have every piece of property in the game," she said, taking the B&O deed. "Chris did mention that this was designed to be the most time-consuming game."

I rolled my eyes. "Why not just make us all play Monopoly?" I asked.

"Probably because everybody getting into a fight over Park Place wouldn't help sell the game," Nazz said. She rolled the dice again. "Also, it might take longer."
I winced. "I'm holding you up, aren't I."

"Well I'm not going to win, right?" she asked as she moved to Pennsylvania Avenue. "I heard Chris announce that Chaz won."

I nodded. The dealer handed over the deed to Pennsylvania Avenue.

"Yes! Monopoly on greens!" Nazz cheered. "But yeah, don't you have a game to play?"

"Not until Numbuh Two finishes, and that could be a while," I said. Nazz rolled again. Six and one. She moved her hat to Mediterranean.

"So how's Ingrid doing?" she asked as the dealer handed over the deed.

"Dunno," I said. "She's currently working on the Game of Life." Nazz rolled. Ten. "She did leap a win, and the game could take a while, but then so could everything else."

Nazz moved to St. Charles. "Does it matter, though?" she asked. "I didn't hear if there was a punishment for losing."

"I don't know," I said. Nazz took her deed. "I wouldn't put it past Chris. And we can't really just give up and walk out."

Nazz rolled again. "That's true. Can't say I'm happy about today's challenge, though," she said as she moved to Indiana. She grimaced, and the dealer handed over her dice. "It's just a bunch of individual challenges packaged as us competing against each other."

Nazz rolled a seven and went to jail.

"Okay, I should warn you that the rules for jail are different," the dealer said. "To get out, you have to roll doubles. Anything else, you're still trapped."

"Can I use my get out of jail free card?" Nazz asked.

"Okay yeah, that one works," he admitted. Nazz handed over the card, and the dealer handed her the dice.

"At least Ingrid didn't win," I said. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Ingrid's head snap towards us.

"That's true. If we're lucky, we can vote her out," Nazz said. She rolled an 11.

"Yeah," I said.

Nazz moved her hat to Kentucky Avenue and collected a third red card.

I had been watching Nazz move around the board for a while, picking up fewer and fewer properties with each go-round when I noticed Numbuh Two standing up. I hustled over to Chef's table.

"Good luck," Numbuh Two told me. He headed towards the main board and Chris. I sat down across from Chef. Chef stared at me.

"Your turn," he said.

I grabbed the cup, shook it, and spilled it into the box.
A pair of twos, a three, a five, and a six. I closed my eyes and tried to remember game nights with my parents. They seem so far away. But my dad was always the best of us at Yahtzee. What'd he say about it, anyway?

He said to focus on the upper section.

I pulled the twos out and rolled again. Another pair of twos and a one. I grabbed the twos and put the final die in the cup. I shook it.

Let's see if there's a yahtzee in here right off the bat.

Nope. It's a four. But I can still mark 8 off in the twos section.

I passed the cup to Chef. He rolled a pair of fives, a pair of fours, and a snake eye. He grabbed the fives, rolled again, and came up with another pair of fives and a six. Like me, he tried for the yahtzee, and like me, he didn't get it. But he did get four fives.

My turn. I rolled a small straight right off the bat. I grabbed the unaffiliated die and rolled it. It came up as a two and gave me a two-six large straight. I marked it for forty.

Chef scowled and took the cup. He rolled pairs of twos and threes and a six and took the threes. His next roll was a pair of fours and a three. He marked the full house.

My turn again. Five, four, two, five, six. I dropped the fives and rolled the three remaining dice. Five, six, one. I took the five and rolled again. Pair of fives. Yahtzee.

Chef's face curled into an angry grimace. I passed the cup to him, and he shook it viciously before spilling out a small straight. His next two rolls didn't add to it, but he still marked what he could before giving the cup back to me. I rolled a trio of fours, added another on the next roll, and then ended up only able to mark four fours. I gave the cup to Chef, and he rolled twos and threes and a six and then took his threes and rolled two-five-six twice in a row. A vein in his forehead throbbed as he wrote something down in a square on his scorecard. He practically flung the cup at me, and I rolled absolutely nothing; close to a straight but not good enough. I shrugged, took the six, and rolled again. I got a pair of threes and a pair of sixes and marked the full house. I then slid the cup over to Chef, who rolled a large straight.

Okay. Five rounds in, I have a yahtzee and a large straight. I'm doing all right. I just need to keep it up.

I took a deep breath and grabbed the cup. It was then that I realized Numbuh Two was peering over my shoulder.

"Um, what are you doing?" I asked him.

"I've got the next game," he said. "And this is the only thing close to a competition. Especially since Nazz finished her Sisyphean task."

"Her what?" I asked.

"Her—look, it's a pointless, arduous task. And she just finished it," Numbuh Two said.

I looked around. He was right. Nazz had moved on to another table.

"She didn't get a win," Numbuh Two says, pointing out the obvious. "Anyway, I'd rather watch you play this."
"What about your girlfriend?" I asked. Numbuh Two flushed. "Wouldn't you like to watch her?"

"Can we get back to the game?" Chef complained. "It's just about time for my big comeback!"

I turned back to the table and picked up the cup. I shook it and the dice tumbled into the box.

"She's not my girlfriend," Numbuh Two muttered.

I rolled my eyes even though he couldn't see it. "Whatever," I said. I had a pair of ones, and I decided to work with those. My next two rolls didn't give me anything else, though, and I ended up marking down a two in the ones row. Chef took over, and after rolling a pair of fours, he rolled another pair. He ended up short of a yahtzee on the third roll, but he grinned as he wrote down a score of thirty-five. I took the cup and rolled a one, a two, a three, and a pair of fives. I took the fives, rolled again, and got a pair of fives and a three. I took my fives, hoping for another yahtzee, but ended up sticking with the fives. I wrote them down in the fives row because I figured I could use the points for the bonus and passed the cup back to Chef. He rolled a pair of sixes on his first roll but didn't get anything to add to them before passing the cup back to me. I rolled a one, a pair of threes, and a pair of sixes. I stuck with the sixes and first rolled a pair of ones and a two and then a pair of fives and a four. I pursed my lips and then decided to put it down as chance. After all, twenty-six points is a pretty good score for five dice. I then gave it back to Chef. He rolled a pair of fours and a pair of sixes, kept the sixes, rolled three ones, took the ones and pushed the sixes back out, and then got a fourth and final one. He wrote it down and grinned at me.

"I think I have myself a bonus," he said. "How about you?"

I frowned. I took the cup. Pair of threes, pair of ones. And a six. My threes and sixes are open. I'm going with sixes.

Pair of threes and a five.

Pair of sixes and a four. Well that's not what I wanted. Writing a six next to my threes. Oh well. I'm just eleven points away from the bonus. I just need a pair of sixes.

I gave the cup back to Chef. He rolled a one, a two, a pair of threes, and a six. He grabbed the six and rolled the other four dice. Another six appeared, and he rolled the remaining three. Pair of fours and a six. He smiled and wrote something down. I took the cup and rolled. A pair of sixes. That's what I need. I hunted for more and didn't get any, but wrote down my twelve. I tallied up my score. Sixty-four and thirty-five.


Chef gritted his teeth and rolled. A pair of sixes, a pair of twos, and a one. He took the sixes and rolled again. A two, a three, a four. He grabbed the dice, held them for a moment, then dropped them into the cup and rolled again. They came out as eighteen. Yahtzee on sixes. That's not good. Chef grinned evilly and handed the cup to me. I took a deep breath and rolled.

Two, three, three, four, five. Small straight.

I put it down and passed the dice to Chef. He rolled. Five, six, pair of twos, and a snake eye. He grabbed the twos and rolled again. Pair of threes and a one. He picked up the last three dice, held them for a bit, then popped them back into the cup, shook well, and rolled.
Five, six, six. Chef rolled his eyes and wrote something down. He slid the cup over to me. I grabbed it, shook it, and rolled six two four six one. I took the sixes and rolled again. Pair of sixes and a five. Okay, this'll fill four of a kind. I rolled one last time, hoping for a yahtzee, and got a one.

Twenty-five points, four of a kind. Chef's turn. He rolled a pair of fives and a pair of sixes and a three. He dropped the sixes and rolled again. Four five six. He rolled one last time for a two and a five. He wrote down his score.

Okay. Last play. Only the three of a kind is open.

I rolled a three, a three, a four, a five, and a two. Might as well go with my strongest one, so I took the threes out of commission and rolled again. This time, I got a two, a three, and a four. That's three threes. But I think I can do better. I rolled the two and the four and changed them into a five and a four. Eighteen points.

I handed the cup to Chef. He gulped and slowly shook it. He tipped it out, and the dice spilled into the box. Three, five, six, one, one. Chef took the six and rolled again. Two, four, four, five. He grimaced, picked up the dice, and rolled one last time.

Two, three, four, six.

Chef scowled and wrote something down on his scorecard. He began to tally up the final score, and so did I. As I did, I glanced around the room. Ingrid had quit playing, and Nazz was standing behind me.

"What's going on?" I asked.

"Ingrid lost, and I'm going to be playing this after Numbuh Two," she said.

"Oh," I said. The line was getting long. "Well, good luck with Chef."

"Thanks," Nazz said. "Did you win?"

I turned back to my card and finished adding up my score. "I think so," I said. "I got three hundred and thirteen points."

"Two hundred and ninety-nine," Chef said. "Next!"

As soon as I left my seat, Numbuh Two swooped in and took a seat across from Chef.

"So, Chef, what's on the menu tonight?" he asked.

I headed for the center of the room. Chris looked up and handed me the die. I rolled it. Six.

Chris moved my piece off the end of the board and back to the start. It landed on a space that read "Life."

"The Game of Life!" Chris proclaimed. "It's simple, all you have to do is finish the game with over a million dollars. If you fail to do this, you lose. Now get to it!"

I headed over to the board he indicated and sat down across from the dealer. He handed me a green van with a tiny pink person inside.

"This is my game piece?" I asked.

He nodded. "Do you want to go to college or start your career?" he asked.
"What are you, my father?" I joked. "I guess I'll take college."

"Okay then." He handed me five pieces of paper. All of them had 'bank loan' written on them. "Pay off your student loans as soon as possible. When you're ready to start, just use the spinner."

I grabbed the spinner and spun it. The numbers ticked by. When they stopped, the indicator pointed to six.

I moved the car six spaces.

"Spring break in Florida," the dealer said. "You'll need to pay five thousand dollars for that. Which means you'll need to borrow another twenty thousand." He slipped me a loan, a five thousand dollar bill, and a ten thousand dollar bill.

"Great," I said. "Am I gonna end up completely broke?"

"You probably won't," he said. "But don't be surprised if you don't make a million."

I groaned and spun again. Three. I moved my car.

"Graduation day!" the dealer exclaimed. "Take a LIFE tile."

I picked up one of the tiles and stared at it. It read '$10,000."

"It says I get ten thousand dollars," I said.

"Okay," the dealer said. He handed over a bill. "By the way, that lets you pay off one of your loans. Since you're still in college, I can't make you pay back the money. Yet."

I handed over all my money and one of the loans and spun again. Five. I started to move.

"WHOA!" he yelled. Startled, I looked up at him. He pointed to the board. "See the stop sign?"

I looked down. There was a stop sign printed on the board. "Choose a career?"

I asked.

He held out two handfuls of cards. "You have three options," he said. "College careers usually pay more than non-college careers."

I picked out two college careers and one non-college career and flipped the cards over. Police Officer, Lawyer, and Veterinarian. Lawyer paid the most so I chose that one and pushed the other two cards back to the dealer.

"I'll be a lawyer," I said. "Now what?"

"Go ahead and spin again," he said. "Any time you pass a pay day, you'll get paid whatever your salary is. Whenever you get a raise, I'll give you a pay stub showing your salary has increased."

I spun. Seven.

"Here's your money," he said, handing over some bills. "You volunteered at a soup kitchen. Take a LIFE tile."

I picked one up. $10,000.
I showed him the card.

"Good. Now you can use that money to pay off four of your loans," he said. I rolled my eyes but handed my money and four loans to him. I spun again. Three.

"You won a race," he said. "You get ten thousand, and since you also got paid, I'm just going to hand you this hundred."

I handed it back to him alongside my last loan. "I'll need my change," I told him. "By the way, do you have a name?"

"Ian," he said, handing me back $75,000. I spun again. Six. But there was a stop sign in my way telling me to get married.

"Do I have to get married?" I asked.

"Yes," he said. "You have to do a lot of things in Life."

"Pun intentional?" I asked. He nodded. "Okay, I'll take a husband."

He handed me a piece and I put it in my car.

"You get a LIFE tile too," he told me. I picked it up. $30,000. I showed it to him and he handed over the money. I spun again. 4.

"Car accident, pay ten thousand," he said. I handed over the bill and spun again. Ten. I passed a payday with a pay raise and ran into a stop sign telling me to buy a house.

"You get a hundred thousand and have to buy a starter home," he said. He showed me some cards, all of them facedown. "Pick your home."

I chose a card from the middle of the deck. It was a hundred and forty thousand dollar ranch house. I wrinkled my nose but handed back my new paycheck and a couple of twenties. I spun again. Seven.

"Here's your salary, and here's your baby girl," Ian said. He gave me the bill and the piece. "Also, you get a LIFE tile."

"I can see that," I told him. I grabbed the tile and showed it to him. He gave me $20,000. I spun again and landed on nine. I passed another payday.

"You learned sign language," Ian told me as he gave me my salary. "You get another LIFE tile."

I took the tile. It had $10,000 written on it. I turned the tile in, and Ian gave me another bill. I spun again for seven and stopped.

"You can go to college or continue on your current path," Ian said. "It's up to you."

I scanned the board. After college I could change careers or I could get a $20,000 raise. I could do with the money from a raise.

"I'm going back to school," I said. Ian held out his hand. "What?"

"It'll cost you fifty thousand dollars," he said.

I handed over the money and spun. Four.
"You upgraded your computer. It cost you ten thousand dollars."

My eyes bugged. "What'd I do, buy a supercomputer?"

"Hey, I don't make the rules," Ian said.

I gave him the money and spun again. Six, but I had to stop to choose what to do.

"I'll take the raise," I said. Ian nodded. I spun and got a seven.

"You won a hundred thousand dollars on a TV game show," Ian said. "So I'm just going to give you the two hundred and twenty as a lump sum. That okay?"

I nodded. "Just peachy."

I took the money and spun again. Two.

"Art auction, pay twenty thousand," he said. I handed over the money and spun. Five.

"You got a pay raise, a hundred and thirty thousand dollars, and you donated forty thousand dollars to African orphans! Also you got a LIFE tile; would you mind turning it over so I can just pay quickly and take the money out of your paycheck?" he asked.

"Sure," I said. I reached for the LIFE tiles. $20,000. Ian handed me $110,000.

"Thanks," I told him. "How much are you getting paid, anyway?"

Ian looked slightly uncomfortable. "It's an unpaid internship," he said.

"Ouch," I said. "I've heard about what they do with interns on this show. I'm sorry."

"Thanks," he said. I spun. 3.

"You bought an SUV," he said.

"What? Why?" I asked.

"Because you hate the environment. I don't know," he said. "But you're gonna have to spend forty thousand dollars. Now hand it over."

"Wait, I got in a car accident and only just now replaced my car?" I asked.

"I don't even know," he said. "It's only a game, you should really just relax."


"Since this is a single-player version, you're going to have to pay a hundred thousand dollars in lawyer's fees," he said.

"But I'm a lawyer," I said.

"Fine. It's not your speciality. That okay with you?" he asked.

"I'm not getting out of this, am I?" I asked.

"Nope." He handed me $30,000. I spun again. 7.
"The path splits here," he said. "You can choose the family path or the Path of Life. Which will it be?"

"I'll take the family path," I said. He nodded. I spun for 10 and landed on a payday, passing over one as I went. Ian handed me $260,000. I spun and got 4.

"You won the Nobel Prize," Ian said. "You get a hundred thousand dollars."

Ian handed me the bill, and I spun again. Five. Stop sign so I could buy a new house. Ian held out the cards, and I grabbed one.

Executive Cape. $400,000. I handed over the money.

"Um, you also sell your old house and use that to help pay for the new one," he said. I handed over my old deed and got $160,000 in return. I spun, went past payday, and landed on a lawsuit. Ian handed me $30,000, and I spun again. This time I got a one.

"You bought a sailboat for thirty thousand dollars," Ian told me. I rolled my eyes but handed him the money and spun again. I passed a pay raise and came to a fork in the road.

"Choose either the risky road or the safe road," he said. I took the safe choice.

"You visited the Egyptian pyramids," Ian told me. "Take a LIFE tile."

I took the one on the top. It said $50,000. I handed it over and got $190,000. I spun again. Four.

"Congratulations, you're a grandparent," Ian said. "Take a LIFE tile."

I did. $40,000. Ian gave me $180,000. I spun and moved three spaces, passing over a payday.

"You sponsored a public arts event," he said. "That cost you a hundred and twenty-five grand. I'm just going to take that out of your paycheck." He handed me fifteen thousand. I spun again and got a five. I moved forward and landed on a payday and a pay raise. Ian gave me $150,000, and I spun again. 10. I was able to retire.

"Well, you get a hundred and fifty thousand for your last pay day, and you get ten thousand dollars for your child...can I count up the total?" he asked.

"Sure," I said. I pushed my money across the table to him. He spent the next minute sorting it into piles and counting it out. He looked up.

"One million, three hundred and forty thousand dollars," he said. "You win."

"Thanks," I said. I smiled at him and walked over to Chris.

"Congratulations!" Chris said. "You could be as little as one dice roll away from finishing this game! And wouldn't it be a shame if that happened? After all, we're having so much fun playing with Hasbro's quality products!" He grinned at the camera.

"Stow it, Chris," I said. "I just want to eat."

"Roll the die," he said, handing it to me. I rolled. Six.

"Candy Land!" Chris proclaimed. I groaned and turned towards the game. I saw that Nazz was still waiting for Numbuh Two to finish and sat down at the table. The dealer smiled at me.
"So what do I have to do?" I asked.

"Follow the path and move your piece to the appropriate space after each card," she said. "Once you're there, I'll deal a new one."

"Okay..." I said. "How do I lose?"

"You can't," she said. "Ready?"

I nodded, and she started dealing cards. The first card was purple, and I moved forward two spaces. As soon as I got there, she dealt the next card. Mr. Mint. I followed the path, and as soon as I reached the Peppermint Forest she put another card down, orange. I continued to move, and she continued to put cards in front of me. Blue, purple, double green, blue, green, green, orange, orange, orange, blue, and I was almost to Gramma Nut's house. Yellow, green, purple, red, blue, and suddenly she stopped putting down cards.

"What's going on?" I asked.

"You're lost in Lollipop Woods," she said.

I looked down. She was right.

"You have to wait ten minutes," she told me. "And you can't leave this table."

I rolled my eyes and looked around the room. Nazz still hadn't started playing Chef at Yahtzee. She was watching the game intently, however. I called out to her.

"Hey! Nazz!"

"What?" she called back.

"How's the game going?" I asked.

"It's close, I think!" she said. "I can't really see the scorecards, but it looks close."

"Tell me who wins?" I asked.

"Sure!" she called back.

I turned back to the dealer. "So what's your name?" I asked.

"Maddie," she replied.

"And how'd you get into this?" I asked.

"Why do you want to know?" she asked. She looked at me suspiciously, but a smile tugged at the corner of her mouth.

"Just making small talk," I said.

"Well that's too bad," she said, "because there's nothing small about the way I talk."

"So how do you talk?" I asked.

She smiled at me. "With my mouth."

"Is there a reason you're being so vague?" I asked.
She continued to smile. "It amuses me," she said.

I sighed. This was going to be a long ten minutes.

A few minutes later, I heard a commotion behind me and turned to look at the Yahtzee table.

"That's right, I won!" Chef said. "Take your butt, and leave the table! Bye bye!"

Numbuh Two frowned as he stood up. "Do I at least get to eat now?" he asked.

"NO!" Chef yelled. "NEXT!"

Nazz sat down. Chris walked over to Numbuh Two.

"We have our fourth place!" he announced. "Now it comes down to Marlowe and Nazz. Whichever one of them wins first gets second place and bragging rights and absolutely nothing else. Unless one of them loses first, in which case the loser ends up in third place. Anyway! The tension just keeps rising!"

Oh yeah. The tension was definitely rising. I was sitting at a table waiting to get out of the Lollipop Woods and Nazz was playing an endless game of Yahtzee with Chef. And there was no reason to even try to win apart from Chris's threat. He would follow through on it, that was true, but this was still a huge waste of time. And I would really like to have something to eat.

I turned back to the dealer. "How much longer?" I asked.

"Another minute or so," she said.

I looked back towards Chef and Nazz. I really hope she wins. Or loses. Whichever one gets us fed faster.

A few seconds later, Maddie said "Okay, you got out of the woods."

I turned back to the board and saw a yellow card lying in front of me. I moved my player to the correct spot and got another yellow card. Then red, then purple, then red, yellow, yellow, purple, blue, and then I got Jolly. I groaned and moved back to the Gumdrops Mountains. As soon as I got there, Maddie began putting cards in front of me again. Double blue, yellow, orange, blue, blue, yellow, red, yellow, orange, purple, double green, double orange. By this time I was past the Ice Cream Sea and headed for the Molasses Swamp. Orange. Yellow. Green. Yellow. And another yellow put me in the Candy Castle.

"Congratulations, you win," Maddie told me.

"Thanks," I said.

I got up and walked over to the board in the middle of the room. Great. I'm seven spaces away from a win and I get a six-sided die. I'm gonna have to play another game.

I took the die Chris offered me and rolled it. Two. Chris moved my piece forward.

"The Game of Life!" he announced.

I walked over to the table and sat down across from Ian.

"Ah. Hello again," he said. "Come to play another game?"
I frowned at him. "You know why I'm here."

"Of course, of course," he said. He handed me the same green van with the same pink person as before. "Your chariot, milady."

I put it on the board. "College," I said before he could ask. He nodded and handed me five loans.

"When you're ready," he said. I grabbed the spinner and spun. Four.

I moved my van forward four spaces. Ian read the space I landed on.

"Part-time job," he said. "Collect ten thousand dollars."

Ian handed me the money, and I spun again. Four.

"Tests and term paper. Miss next turn."

I spun again. Eight. It didn't count. Another spin, this time for nine. I stopped to choose a career. Ian held the cards out towards me, and I chose two college careers and one non-college career.

Hmm. Let's see. Teacher, paying forty thousand dollars at the start and a maximum of seventy thousand dollars; computer designer, paying fifty thousand dollars at the start and a maximum of seventy thousand dollars; or entertainer, paying fifty thousand dollars at the start with no maximum.

Well, I did always want to be a famous musician.

"I'll be an entertainer," I said, and slid the rest of the cards back to Ian. He nodded, and I spun again. One. I landed on a payday, and Ian handed me fifty thousand dollars. I used it to pay off two of my loans and rolled again. Six.

"You volunteer at a soup kitchen!" Ian said. "Take a LIFE tile."

I picked it up. $10,000. I showed it to Ian and he handed over the money. I spun again for eight. I got paid but had to stop to get married.

"Time to get married," Ian said. He put a blue piece in my car. "Take a LIFE tile."

I took one and showed it to him. Ten thousand. He handed over sixty thousand, and I used my eighty thousand to pay off all of my debts. He handed me back five thousand dollars, and I spun again. Six. I landed on a pay day that gave me a raise. Ian handed me an indicator of my raise and sixty thousand dollars. I spun again. Four. I had to stop to purchase a starter home.

Okay. Something small that I can afford. Please. I only have sixty-five thousand dollars.

Tudor Style. $180,000. Great.

I shrugged. "I guess I have to get a mortgage?"

Ian nodded. "One hundred and twenty thousand dollars, at least."

I sighed. "Show me the money."

Ian handed me six loans, took all but five thousand dollars from me, and handed over the deed to my new house. Things were not looking good. I spun again. Seven. I got paid and landed on a tile for a baby girl.
"Congratulations, you got a baby girl," Ian told me. He put the girl in my van. "Take a LIFE tile."

I picked it up and looked at it. Twenty thousand. I showed it to Ian, and he gave me eighty thousand dollars, most of which I used to pay off half of my loans. I had ten thousand dollars left. I spun again. Two.

"You won Ultimate Idol and one hundred thousand dollars," Ian said.

I smiled. "I'll pay off my debts now," I said. I handed over the loan papers, and Ian shrugged. He handed me twenty-five thousand dollars back. I reached out and spun. Six. Payday. Sixty thousand dollars. I spun again. Ten, but I had to stop to decide whether to continue on or go back to college.

"So, you know the drill," he said. "Which'll it be?"

"College," I said, and spun. One.

"Double course load for extra credit," Ian said. "Free spin, which means you get to take two spins and choose the one you like more."

I spun. Three. I spun again. Six. I went with the second spin. That took me to the stop sign at the end of college.

"So would you rather have the money or a new job?" Ian asked.

I thought about it. A new job might pay me better. But it would have to pay better than eighty thousand dollars. Could I count on getting that?

"I'll take the pay raise," I told him.

"Not sure how a degree makes you a better entertainer, but okay," Ian said.

"My dad says it worked for Steve Miller," I said. "Anyway..."

I spun. Nine. I passed a payday on my way to landing on an art auction.

"Art auction, pay twenty thousand dollars," Ian said. He handed me sixty thousand, and I spun again. Three. I passed a pay raise and landed on taxes due.

"Tax time," he said. "What's your tax rate?"


Ian handed me seventy thousand and I spun again. Nine and another payday.

"TV dance show winner," Ian declared.

"But I can't dance," I said.

"The audience voted for you as a joke," he said. "They're all gonna laugh, Carrie. They're all gonna laugh."

"My name's Marlowe," I told him. He looked at me oddly.

"You've never heard of that?" he asked. I shook my head.

"Okay. Well. Anyway, you got a hundred thousand from winning the dance show, so here." He
handed me one hundred and ninety thousand dollars. I spun again. One. I landed on a lawsuit.

"I guess that dance money's going to legal fees," he quipped. I rolled my eyes but handed over a hundred thousand and spun again for four. I stopped where the path split.

"Path of Life or Family Path?" Ian asked.

"Path of Life," I told him. I needed all the money I could make. I spun again. Eight. I passed a pay raise and landed on another payday. Ian handed me two hundred thousand dollars and I spun for ten and hit a stop sign.

"Time to buy a new house," Ian told me. He held out the deeds. I gulped.

Okay. A small house, please. Something where I can live within my means. I don't need a mansion.

I got a penthouse. $700,000. I grimaced and handed over my Tudor for two hundred thousand and then handed over enough money to cover the rest. My stack had grown a lot smaller.

I spun again. Five. I passed a payday.

"Send children to college, fifty thousand dollars per child," Ian said. "Wow, cheap college." He scanned my van. "Okay, one child." He handed me fifty thousand dollars and I spun again. I landed on a payday that would give me a pay raise, and Ian handed over the money. I spun. Four. I decided to go down the safe path.

"You visited the Egyptian Pyramids," Ian said. "Take a LIFE tile."

Big money if you please.

30 thousand. Not insignificant but not really enough. Ian handed over the money.

Ten. I passed two paydays.

"You host a family reunion," Ian told me. "Take a LIFE tile."

I reached out and grabbed one. I looked at it and noticed Nazz walking towards me. I showed the tile to Ian, and he handed me two hundred and thirty thousand dollars.

"So what are you doing here?" I asked Nazz.

"I rolled to come here after beating Chef," she said. "How much longer? Not that I'm rushing you or anything, I'd just really like to eat."

"I hear you," I said. "And it shouldn't be long." I spun again. Six. "I'm just a few spaces away from finishing this round."

I moved my car forward, passing a pay day and a pay raise.

"You visited the Great Wall of China," Ian said. "Take a LIFE tile."

I did as commanded. $10,000. I showed it to him, and he handed me $130,000. Another spin. Four.

"You became a grandparent. Take a LIFE tile," he said. I took another tile. This one had forty thousand dollars on it.

I spun again. Three. I passed a payday.
"Your pension vested. Spin and collect ten thousand dollars times the total number."

I spun. Four. Ian handed me a hundred and sixty thousand dollars.

One more space and I'm retired. I hope this is enough.

I spun. One.

"You retire. Collect ten thousand from each child as a retirement present, because what says good parenting more than robbing the young to pay the old?" Ian asked. He handed me ten thousand dollars, and I handed my stack over to him. While he counted it, I turned to Nazz.

"Well, good luck," I said.

"Thanks," Nazz said, "but I kinda want to lose. Just so long as we can get fed."

"Eight hundred and twenty-five thousand," Ian said. "That's less than a million. You lose."

"And we have our third place!" Chris announced. "That puts Nazz in second, and more importantly, ends the game for everyone! Go get some grub and get ready for tonight's dramatic, decisive, some other d-word, campfire ceremony!"

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Rain King: music and lyrics by Steve Bowman, David Bryson, Adam Duritz, Charlie Gillingham, and Matt Malley
The Hasbro Campfire Ceremony

Lunch was horrible as usual. I still ate all of it, and was hungry for more. Going a day and a half without food makes even Chef's slop seem acceptable. One of the few things I can say about Camp Wawanakwa is that it might make a decent weight-loss camp. I'm sure I've gained more muscles and lost some weight in the two and a half weeks I've been here than I would have pretty much anywhere else short of Parris Island.

I ate with Nazz. We ate in silence because Ingrid and Numbuh Two were sitting at a nearby table. They were also silent. We were obviously watching each other.

As soon as we finished lunch, we headed off together for the cabin. Ingrid didn't follow us, so we'd have some privacy. Once we got there, we looked around and then entered the cabin.

Once the door shut Nazz turned to me. She said "I'm sorry."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because I think Ingrid and Numbuh Two are going to vote one of us off. Probably me. And I'm sorry that I let Ingrid play us for fools," she told me.

"Are you sure?" I asked.

"Well, we both voted off Ingrid last time, right?" Nazz asked.

"Yeah," I said. I knew that Nazz was going to go into an explanation of why we were sunk. I didn't want to hear it, but I knew it would be true.

"And Rusty didn't vote himself off or else he would have left without much fanfare," she said.

"Okay..." I said. I wasn't sure where Nazz was going with this.

"That means that Rusty voted with us, which means Chaz voted off Rusty. So he's probably allied with Ingrid and Numbuh Two," she said.

My eyes widened. "So it's three on two."

"Right," she said. She smiled at me sadly. "It was nice meeting you, Marlowe." She moved forward and hugged me.

"I liked meeting you too, Nazz," I told her. "Friends?"

"Yeah," she said. "And hey. Maybe see if you can get back in Ingrid's good graces when I'm gone?"

I looked at her questioningly. "Why?" I asked. "She doesn't deserve either of us as a friend."

"If you're lucky she'll buy it, and then you can stab her in the back for betraying us," she said. "You know, an eye for an eye?"

"I dunno," I said hesitantly. "That doesn't seem right."

"Maybe not," she said. "But if I can't win, I want you to win. Please?"

I exhaled heavily. "I'll do my best."
She hugged me again. Suddenly, there was a knock on the door.

"Who is it?" Nazz called.

"It's your favorite person in the whole wide world, the Chaz baby!" the person outside said.

I could feel Nazz roll her eyes. "What do you want?" she asked.

"I want to make you a deal," Chaz said. "You gonna let me in?"

"No, this is the girls cabin!" Nazz said. "We'll meet you outside."

"Oh, no can do!" Chaz said. "I want to do this in private. So how about we meet..."

"By the campfire pit?" I suggested.

Chaz hesitated for a few seconds. "Yeah, sure," he finally said. "The campfire pit. In twenty. See you there!"

When we got to the campfire pit, Chaz was nowhere to be found. I scowled.

"Great," I said. "He wastes our time."

Nazz gasped. "You don't think this was a ruse to get Ingrid in the cabin alone, do you?"

"I doubt it," I said. "She's been alone in the cabin before. And she could always meet Numbuh Two and Chaz in the guys' cabin if she wanted to."

"Okay," Nazz said worriedly. "I just hope she isn't rooting through our stuff."

"I don't know if she is," Chaz said, striding in from the woods, "but I am dismayed by your lack of faith in me. Marlowe, Nazz, where is the trust?"

"What trust?" Nazz asked. "You just, like, asked us to meet here."

"That I did, that I did," Chaz said. "See, I've got an idea that you're just gonna love."

Chaz paused for several seconds.

"Well aren't you going to ask me what it is?" he asked.

"What is it?" I asked flatly.

"C'mon, put some emotion into it!" he said. "Say it like you mean it!"

"What's your plan?" Nazz asked, genuinely curious.

Chaz grinned. "I'm glad you asked," he said. "Because tonight, you're going to vote with me."

We looked at him, surprised.

"Aren't you working with Ingrid?" I asked.

"The Chaz works with the Chaz," he said. "And the Chaz thinks that you should team up with him."

"So you'll vote with us to get rid of Ingrid?" Nazz asked.
Chaz shook his head. "Oh, no no no," he said. "No. Ingrid has too many interesting plotlines with you two. No, I was thinking Number Two."

"Are you sure?" I asked. "Because--"

"We're voting off Number Two," he said. "Unless you want me to give my vote to him and Ingrid?"

Nazz and I looked at each other. We turned back to him.

"We're in," Nazz said. "Numbuh Two goes down tonight."

"Good," Chaz said, smiling. "Care to shake on it?"

We walked over to him and shook hands.

"Just one question," Nazz said. "Why?"

"Because then I'll have a room in the cabin all to myself, and another room just for making myself beautiful!" Chaz said. "Isn't that fantastic? No, it's Chaztastic! But I need Number Two to move out for that to happen."

Nazz nodded. "Okay. I promise we'll vote for Numbuh Two."

I sat down behind Nazz. Chaz sat next to me, and on his right were Ingrid and Numbuh Two. I had voted for Numbuh Two, but I was feeling like doing that was wrong. After all, Numbuh Two hadn't done anything wrong. He'd just gotten suckered by Ingrid. Like we had been.

But we needed to. It was him or us.

Still, maybe if I had talked to Numbuh Two I could have convinced him that Ingrid was just messing with him. Maybe I could have showed him that Ingrid wasn't really in love with him. That she was using him as a tool.

She tried to use me too today. She wanted me to think she wanted to be my friend.

Maybe she did.

No, no, that's not true. She just wanted a guarantee that I wouldn't vote her off.

I stared at Ingrid. My eyes bored into the back of her head. Soon, Ingrid, soon. Soon you'll leave. You can't betray people and not suffer the consequences. You're going to find out if you haven't already.

Although it starts with Numbuh Two tonight, it won't be long now. You'll say goodbye soon enough. What you've done I can't accept. And I'm not going to forgive you.

Chris finally walked up. He had four hot dogs on a plate.

"Well, wasn't today fun?" he asked.

"Yeah!" Chaz cheered. "Because I won!"

"That you did, Chaz," Chris said. "So here's your weiner." He tossed a hot dog to Chaz. "Now who's next? I'm going to give this to someone who didn't get any votes...Marlowe!"
He threw the hot dog to me. I caught it and looked around. Everyone looked worried. Not only that, but they were all staring at Chaz. Chaz just sat there with a self-assured grin on his face.

Did he betray us?

"Ingrid!" Chris yelled. A hot dog bounced off of Ingrid's chest as a bunch of tension left her body in a huge breath. Ingrid smiled and began breathing again. Soon she looked worried, though, and looked towards Numbuh Two.

I hope Chaz kept his part of the deal.

"And now it's down to two," Chris said. "You two were the only ones to receive any votes from your fellow campers. But, as it turned out, Chaz's vote made all the difference. So who did he vote for?"

Chris paused. I hate when he does this. It just makes everything more tense.

"Numbuh Two!" Chris said. "Here you go Nazz." He lofted the hot dog to her. "Numbuh Two, get your butt over to the Cannon of Sorrow."

Numbuh Two stood up and turned to Ingrid.

"So I guess this is goodbye," he said.

"I guess," Ingrid said. She smiled a bittersweet smile at him. "It was nice meeting you."

"Yeah," Numbuh Two said. He paused. "I had fun."

"Me too," Ingrid said. "Me too."

"Hey, take down Nazz for me, okay?" he asked.

"I'll try," she told him. "And, uh..."

Ingrid stepped forward and hugged him for a few seconds. When she released him, Numbuh Two was blushing.

"Thanks for everything," she said.

Chef grabbed Numbuh Two and dragged his limp body away. He stuffed it into the cannon, and Chris lit the fuse.

"And then there were four," Chris said. "Ingrid! Nazz! Marlowe! Chaz! One of these four will be walking away with the money. But which one? It's tough to say, but tune in next time to find out who our final three will be! And be sure to buy Hasbro board games!"

The cannon fired and Numbuh Two shot through the sky. Suddenly, he turned in midair and started moving slower.

"Bye, Ingrid!" Numbuh Two yelled.

He flew away.

Voting Breakdown:
Numbuh Two: Nazz Van Bartonschmeer
Ingrid Third: Nazz Van Bartonschmeer
Chaz Monerainian: Numbuh Two
Nazz Van Bartonschmeer: Numbuh Two
Marlowe: Numbuh Two

Final tally of votes received:

Numbuh Two: 3 (eliminated)
Nazz Van Bartonschmeer: 2
The Fair Episode

When we got back to the cabin, Nazz plopped into her bed and fell asleep quickly. I couldn't fault her for that. She always did fall asleep quickly. And rest was probably going to be important for tomorrow's challenge.

About the time that Nazz started snoring, Ingrid came in. She looked sad. I didn't say anything, but she lay down in her bunk and faced the wall. I got the sense that she wasn't sleeping, but it looked like she didn't want to be disturbed.

I turned out the light and went to bed. Sleep wouldn't come, though. I tossed and turned, flipped my pillow, stared at the ceilings and walls, and tried everything I could to get to sleep, but it didn't work. Occasionally I looked at the clock on the table near my bunk and then turned away. Watching the minutes flip past slowly wouldn't help anything. But every time I looked back, less time had passed than I had thought.

It was going to be one of those nights. A night where no matter how I tried, I couldn't sleep. I couldn't relax. I couldn't just let weariness take over and bring me down. I hate it when this happens. Usually when I'm unable to sleep at home, I pick up my bass and play for a little bit and then try to sleep again, but I can't very well do that here.

Wait. Why not? I can just go outside and practice there. I won't disturb anybody. My brother did say that Chris likes to mess with people when they're alone, but at this point I don't really care. At worst I'll get to play my bass some.

Wait, is that tempting fate? Crap.

I looked at the clock. 12:09. Whatever, I might as well try it.

I climbed down from my bunk and pulled my bass out from under the bed. Silently, I got up and walked to the door. I opened it, and it creaked a bit. I winced and looked around the room. Nobody stirred. I made my way out of the cabin and gently shut the door. I then set off with my bass.

Well, I'm outside. Where should I practice?

I felt a sharp pain in my right foot and jolted back. Great, I forgot to put on my shoes. I reached down to my foot and felt around. One of the pointy bits from a dandelion leaf had gotten stuck in there. I pulled it out.

The beach didn't have any thorny plants growing on it. I could probably just sit on the beach.

I walked towards the shoreline using the light of the moon to guide me. I didn't step on any more dandelions, but I had the strange sensation that somebody was watching me. It is a reality show, though. There are cameras on me all the time. But still, it felt like something else was going on.

I reached the beach, set my bass down, and looked out on the water. The waves gently rolled onto the shore before receding again. I sniffed the humid air and smiled. I do love the beach.

I sat down and thought. Something was bothering me, but I wasn't sure what it was. And I didn't want to take out my bass just yet. I stared into the distance at nothing, letting my mind wander and hoping it would figure out what was wrong.

I heard footsteps behind me and snapped my head around. It was Ingrid.
"What do you want?" I snapped. I tried to seem threatening. Really, though, I was scared. I'm all alone, nobody knows where I am—well, not at the moment—and here's my biggest enemy following me around in the middle of the night. This isn't a good situation.

"Can't sleep?" Ingrid asked. She stopped walking towards me.

"Well—why are you here?" I asked. She was dodging the question.

Ingrid stayed silent for a few seconds. "I don't know," she admitted.

I kept my eyes on her but slowly rolled onto all fours. "So do you want something?" I asked.

"Wait, don't go," she said. I pushed myself to my feet and felt around for my case with my left hand, not taking my eyes off of her.

"I just wanted to ask you to listen," she said. "I know you think I'm a traitor and a liar, but I swear I didn't vote for Wendy and that Nazz is really the one who's been manipulating things."

I found the handle and pulled the case off of the ground. I just had to get past Ingrid.

"And I wanted to say that even if you don't believe me I still want to be friends," she continued. "I don't care if you vote me off, I just don't want to lose you as a friend."

Ingrid began to approach me. Crap.

"I'm sorry things got bad between us," she said. "And I know you don't believe me about Nazz, but she's seriously bad news. Just watch yourself is all I'm saying, okay?"

Ingrid got within a few feet of me. Thinking quickly, I swung the case at her, and she fell back, shocked. She stumbled and landed on her butt, and I took off, my bass case thumping against my leg as I ran.

"She'll stab you in the back!" Ingrid called after me. "When it's convenient, she'll stab you in the back!"

I ran back to the cabin and looked behind me. Ingrid was nowhere to be found. I opened the door quietly and looked around. All seemed to be still inside. I shut the door, exhaled heavily, and walked back to my bunk. I stowed my bass underneath the lower bunk and climbed to the top bunk. Adrenaline ran through my veins, and I knew it would be a while before I'd be able to sleep.

My alarm went off at 6 A.M. My eyes snapped open and I regretted not turning it off. I had only gotten a few hours of sleep. At least, I think I got a few hours of sleep; the last time I could remember seeing on the clock was 2:13. Ingrid had gotten back after me and gone to bed quietly, but the tension in the room had somehow gotten even thicker because of what she had done last night.

I turned off the alarm. Forget it. I need more sleep.

"YEE-HAW, Y'ALL!" Chris yelled over the intercom. I jolted out of sleep and looked at the clock. 6:30 exactly.

"TODAY'S GONNA BE A GOOD DAY FOR Y'ALL! GIT YER BUTTS OUTTA BED, GIT SOME GRUB, AND GIT READY FOR THE MOST FUN DAY OF THE SUMMER!" Chris drawled. "THAT'S RIGHT, TODAY'S THE DAY WE BRING YOU THE COUNTY FAIR!"
What the heck is a county fair?

I climbed out of bed and started to pull my clothes on. Ingrid and Nazz were doing the same thing. We got dressed in silence and exited our cabin. Outside, we saw a food truck manned by Chris and Chef.

"Well hello there, y'all!" Chris said. "Welcome to the Wawanakwa county fair! We've got all your county fair favorites, here at Chef's Truck! We've got hot dogs, corn dogs, burgers, ice cream, doughnuts, doughnut burgers, fried ice cream, deep-fried doughnut burgers, funnel cakes, turkey legs, fried chicken, cotton candy, milkshakes, and of course, churros! Step right up and order as much greasy fat as you can stuff down your throat. You've got a long day at the fair, and you're gonna need energy. Also it's a requirement that everyone eat at least three different items of food."

"Really?" Chaz asked. "This is going to be so unhealthy and so bad for my complexion."

"I only made up that requirement just now," Chris said. "So yes, really."

Chaz groaned, but we formed a line. Nazz was in front, followed by Chaz, followed by me, with the rear being brought up by Ingrid. I cringed. Hopefully Ingrid wouldn't try anything weird with everyone else around.

She tapped me on the shoulder.

"What?" I hissed.

"Sorry for scaring you last night," she whispered to me. "I didn't mean to seem creepy."

I frowned. Yeah, sure she didn't.

The line moved forward as Nazz walked away with a turkey leg, a milkshake, and a corn dog. Chaz stepped up to the window.

"Yeah, so can you tell me which of these has the least fat?" he asked.

Chris snickered. "It's fair food, dude. There's no such thing as 'least fat.'"

Chaz let out an overexaggerated sigh. "Fine. Give me a corn dog, a funnel cake, and a milkshake."

Chef handed over Chaz's food, and I stepped forward.

"Uh, cotton candy, doughnut, and ice cream?" I asked. Chef handed me the doughnut and cotton candy, then stuck the ice cream cone through the doughnut's hole.

"Thanks," I muttered. I walked away and began eating.

Everyone had finished up about fifteen minutes later. It was then that Chris pulled a cover off of a giant carnival wheel with four options on it.

"This is the fun part," he said. "Today, you're going to the fair, and each of you gets either a ride, a sideshow, a game, or a fun competition. Just like a real county fair, only less lame! So here are the rules. Chef spins this wheel. Whatever he lands on, one of you does. If you successfully complete the challenge, you get immunity tonight. If you fail, you're on the chopping block. So! Who's first?"

Nobody stood up for a while until Ingrid rose. "I guess I'll go," she said.
Chef spun the wheel. It whirled around and around and around until it landed on a picture of a hand mirror.

"The Hall of Mirrors!" Chris announced.

Chris walked away, and we followed. He led us past a roofless carousel and an empty dunk tank to a huge tent.

"This is the Hall of Mirrors," Chris said. "Your mission? To get out in ten minutes. Good luck. Clock starts now."

Ingrid walked into the hall of mirrors and disappeared from view.

Ingrid walked out of the hall a while later.

"Well, that was about eight minutes," Chris said. "You won immunity. What are you going to do with it?"

Ingrid shrugged. "Not get voted off," she said.

"Fair enough," Chris said. "Chef?"

Chef came back with the giant wheel.

"Now who's next?" Chris asked.

Nobody stood up.

"Chef?" Chris asked.

"Pretty boy! You're up!" Chef yelled. He spun the wheel, and it landed on the mirror again.

"Ooh, the Chaz is going to destroy this challenge," Chaz said, preening. "No mirror can ever properly replicate the beauty of the Chaz."

"Sorry, Chaz, but we're spinning again," Chris said. "We don't want any of this stuff to go to waste, you know. Chef?"

Chef spun again. This time, the wheel landed on a picture of a pig. Chris rubbed his hands together evilly.

"Oh, this'll be fun," he said. "Campers, follow me to the livestock section!"

Chris took us behind the hall of mirrors. There, a big mud pit with a bunch of pigs in it had appeared overnight.

"So, Chaz, you see all these pigs?" Chris asked.

"Yes?" Chaz said hesitantly.

"You're gonna have to lick each and every one of them!" Chris said.

The color ran out of Chaz's face. "You can't be serious," he said.

"Oh, I am," Chris told him. "Now hop the fence and get to licking!"
Chaz grimaced but climbed over the fence. At the top, he paused.

"How many do I have to lick?" he asked.

"All eighteen of them," Chris said. "One for each of the eliminated campers. Now...go!"

Chris started a stopwatch. Chaz hopped in, approached a pig, knelt down beside it, and licked it. The pig's eyes popped open and it ran away from Chaz, squealing. Chaz got up spitting.

"That's Megan!" Chef announced. "You got seventeen more!"

Megan. Ingrid got rid of her early on. By refusing to vote for Elise.

Chaz continued to wander around the yard and licked two more pigs. One of them ignored him while the other squealed indignantly.

"Pick up the pace!" Chris yelled. "You're not going to win at this rate!"

Chaz broke into a jog and started running faster. Soon, he had licked five more pigs. He headed for another and licked it.

"You already licked that one!" Chef yelled.

"Oh, come on!" Chaz complained. "Can you tell me which ones I haven't licked?"

"I could," Chef said. "But I won't! Eat that, pretty boy!"

Chaz groaned and began running after more pigs.

I still can't believe Ingrid followed me last night. She must be getting desperate. I'm glad Chaz chose to betray her and Numbuh Two. Even if it was so that he could have an entire cabin to himself. That puts us in the driver's seat.

"One more left!" Chef yelled. Spitting, Chaz ran towards a pig and licked it.

"That one was Voltar! You already licked him!" Chef said. Chaz spat again, ran towards another pig, and licked it.

"Steve!" Chef yelled. "That's every pig!"

"And with two minutes left, too!" Chris said. "Impressive. I bet you want to eat some bacon now, right?"

Chaz glared at Chris.

"New rule, you can't puke," Chris said. "So yeah. But you got immunity. Isn't that great?"

Chaz perked up. He asked, "Does the Chaz have to share immunity?"

"Yep!" Chris said. Chaz frowned. "So let's see...Marlowe?"

Chris looked at Chef. Chef shrugged.

"Well, isn't it spinning time?" Chris asked.

"I left the wheel back at the Hall of Mirrors," Chef said.
Chris rolled his eyes. "Fine. We'll go back there," he said.

"So, Chef?" Chris asked once we got back.

Chef rolled his eyes but spun the wheel. It landed on a mirror.

"Spin again," Chris said.

Chef spun again. It landed on the mirror again. Chris frowned, and Chef spun again. Mirror.

"Is something wrong with that thing?" Chris asked, peeved. Chef grunted and spun the wheel again. This time, it landed on a picture of a horse. Chris grinned. That's never a good sign.

"Time for you to ride, the carousel!" Chris said happily. He led us all back to the ride at the start.

I took a closer look at the ride. It had a bunch of horses with poles through them attached to the floor of a ride. But the floor looked unsteady and there was no roof on the ride.

"So, here are the rules," Chris said. My attention snapped back to him. "Since the author is a big weirdo, we were able to secure the rights to use a certain song by a certain musical group named after a certain character in certain children's educational films."

We stared at him blankly.

"It's Mr. Bungle, okay?" Chris snapped.

We continued our blank stares.

"You know, Pink Cigarette? Retrovertigo? Stubb A Dub? Platypus? Love Is A Fist?"

Nobody reacted.

"Fine," Chris said flatly. "Anyway, Marlowe, you just have to hold on until the end of the song. And don't puke. Now get on the carousel and ride!"

Seeing no other option, I stepped onto the ride and sat down on one of the horses. Chef grinned sinisterly and pulled a lever. The plank of wood the horse's pole was on lifted off of the ground and went ten feet into the air.

"Whoa, what is this?" I asked.

"This is the carousel," Chris said, still smiling.

I grabbed the handles on the side of the horse's head tightly. An acoustic guitar started to play, and the horse started to turn to the side.

\textit{hurry hurry, step right up}

The drums kicked in and the carousel began to turn as my horse tilted until I was horizontal with the ground. And then the horse tilted so that I was \textit{more} than horizontal with the ground. At this point, the carousel's axis began to tilt as it lifted higher into the air and my angle shifted even more.

\textit{a carnival for the human race}
\textit{cotton candy happy face}
child talking with his mouth full
girlfriend gets stuffed animal

Eventually I was horizontal and so was the axis. At that point, the gears holding my horse in place seemed to snap and I pendulumed back and forth, swinging until I settled straight out.

*afestive mood is all around
another world is what we've found
step right up let's make a deal
ride the Ferris wheel*

Suddenly, the ride stopped completely, and I nearly got whiplash. It then began to spin in the opposite direction. I was speeding backwards, and it felt like I was going faster than when I was facing in the direction I was going.

*you know there's something lurking underneath the shape
with the mask over his head and the makeup on his face
will Warner Bros. put our record on the shelf
take a look in the mirror and see the clown in yourself*

The axis of the ride soon began to settle back into its horizontal position, but at this point I was going so fast that I was being pulled sideways on the ride. Suddenly, the ride stopped completely, and I hung upside down and completely still, gripping the handlebars with my fists and the horse itself between my knees and praying I wouldn't fall.

*if you want to know what's behind the show you ride my carousel pleading with yourself love and blood begin to meld you've lost the self that you once held merry go around your head awake asleep alive or*

**DEAD**

The ride took off again spinning madly and wickedly and so fast that gravity, the gravity of earth and not of the ride, seemed to be completely lost and I was spinning around and around, whirling and twirling and being torn apart by conflicting forces backwards and forwards shifting direction faster than I ever thought I'd go so fast that I thought I'd break the speed of sound but the madhouse music was still there both in the background and throbbing pounding forcing itself into my head and I wanted to grab my ears but didn't dare let go of the handlebars and my legs gripped the horse tightly tightly tightly tighter than they'd ever gripped anything before for fear that if they let go I would go flying and be set free of this earth or worse land directly in it an embed myself in the ground, fearful that letting go would mean an instant fatality.

Suddenly the ride slowed and began acting like an actual carousel.

*running it's so fun
round and round we go*

I willed myself to open my eyes and finally got them to open. I looked down. The ground was twenty feet away, but the ride was now just a fast-paced carousel and the music was just fast-paced circus music. A jaunty tune for an actual carousel.

Suddenly the music slowed even more and became sad, and the ride itself stopped completely.

*roly poly
topsy turvy
hang upside down*
Suddenly, the bottom dropped out and I dropped. I screamed and felt the roughness of my throat. It was a strange thing to fixate on, but I realized that I'd been screaming this whole time and hadn't even noticed.

The top of the pole caught on the edge of the plank it was attached to, and I swung gently back and forth.

_i-i-i i think i-i'm gonna gonna be sick_

I heard people puking and suddenly the carousel began vibrating. As soon as the puking stopped, it took off again along with the music, and this time it was a wilder ride than it had ever been. I clung to the ride for dear life. I heard mad laughter and then an even jauntier circus tune, but the ride kept speeding up and attempting to tear me apart. I struggled to keep down my breakfast. The music started to fade, and suddenly I heard the victory tune from some video game.

The ride stopped. It dropped. And it landed on the ground. I opened my eyes and looked around, scared.

"It's over," Chris said. "You can climb off now."

I shook my head. I wasn't going to fall for one of Chris's tricks.

Chef sighed. "It's actually over, girl," he said. "Now get off the ride!"

I climbed off on shaking legs and fell to the ground. I crawled on all fours off of the ride and sat on the ground willing the world to stop spinning around me.

Chris laughed. "Well, if you keep it down, you have immunity. That leaves just one camper. Nazz?"

I shut my eyes.

"Since there's only one option left, it's the dunk tank. You're gonna dunk Chef!"

I heard people leaving. One of them stopped.

"Marlowe? Are you coming?" Ingrid asked.

I didn't respond.

"Okay, I'll just give you some time to recover," she said.

I heard Ingrid leave.

I hope Nazz wins. If she loses she'll have to leave the island. And I don't know if I'm good enough to beat Ingrid. Sure, Chaz should be easy to get past, but the final two will come down to me and Ingrid if Nazz isn't here.

I seriously don't get it. Was Ingrid just trying to mess with my head? If so, mission accomplished. I can't help but wonder about that. Why would she do that? It was just weird. Did she really think that midnight would be her only chance to talk to me alone?

I heard a splash.

"Yes! I won!" Nazz shouted.
"Everyone! Front and center!" Chris yelled. I groaned, stood up, and opened my eyes. The world was no longer blurry. That's a good sign. My legs were still wobbling. That's a bad sign.

I made my way over to everyone else.

"Since everybody passed their challenge, and everybody got immunity, I've decided to give you a reward," Chris said. "The reward is...that you're all eligible for elimination tonight. Okay bye!"

Our jaws dropped open as Chris walked away. Chef pulled himself out of the dunk tank and stormed off angrily.

"Aw, man!" Chaz complained. "All that pig licking for nothing!"

Carousel: music and lyrics by Trevor Dunn, Danny Heifetz, Mike Patton, and Trey Spruance
Well, that's just great.

I'm sick, unsteady, and have echoes of a very strange song--what was with the weird laughter anyway--in my head. And now I can be voted out.

Ingrid's being creepy. Hopefully we can get rid of her. If Chaz agrees.

I don't know. There's something about Chaz that I don't quite trust. He's a bit too slimy. I don't really want to see him in the final three.

But he's not Ingrid. And that's important.

Don't trust her, she said. Where have I heard that before?

 Eventually I got to my feet. The sun was high in the sky, but I wasn't hungry, so I headed back to the cabin. Chaz was waiting there for me.

"What are you doing here?" I asked.

Chaz smiled that Cheshire grin at me. "Waiting for Nazz," he said. "After all, we need to figure out who to get rid of, don't we."

"Isn't it obvious?" I asked.

Chaz smirked. "Yeah, but she might want to vote off Ingrid instead of you. Boom! The Chaz is on fire! Up top!" He hi-fived himself. "Seriously, though, you want my help, don't you?"

"Yes," I said reluctantly. Chaz was starting to annoy me.

"So that's why I'm here," he said. "To make sure you still want me to help you get rid of your enemies."

"You know you could have just assumed?" I suggested.

"I could also not look this perfect. Ha, just joking, the Chaz always looks perfect, but seriously. Meticulousness is a necessary part of any beauty regimen," he said. "So of course I'm going to meet with you and Nazz. Just to make sure."

"Fine," I said. "So where is she?"

Chaz shrugged. "Beats me."

We sat in silence for a few minutes. Nazz wandered up then, clad in her red-and-white bikini.

"Hey Chaz. Hey Marlowe," she said. She smiled at us. "Can I get by?"

Chaz rolled his eyes but slid over. "Fine," he said.

Nazz entered the cabin, and I could hear her getting dressed from outside. She exited a couple minutes later, wearing her usual clothes.
"So what's up, guys?" she asked.

"Just wanted to make sure we know who we're voting for," Chaz said. "Ingrid, correct?"

"Yes," Nazz said. "Why didn't you know that already?"

Chaz smirked. "I don't know what your priorities are. Maybe you want to keep your enemies close and get rid of Marlowe. Or maybe you want to increase the dramatic potential for the next round and get rid of Marlowe. Not my problem."

Chaz got up and walked away. Nazz grabbed my shoulder.

"We need to talk," she whispered.

After Chaz had left, Nazz led me into the cabin.

She said "I think we should vote off Chaz."

My jaw dropped. "Why?" I asked.

"Because he has a point," she said. "Plus, he's too smarmy. I don't really trust him."

"I don't either, but are you sure we should vote him off?" I asked. "It seems like betrayal."

"Maybe," she said. "But he's been disturbingly lucky these past few games. Winning immunity on a board game, being saved by Ingrid, doing a good session of stand-up...there's more skill to him than there appears. And I just can't see myself trusting him."

Confessional

"I don't think this is the right choice," I told the camera. "I think we should get rid of Ingrid as soon as possible."

I made my way down to the beach with my bass. I looked around to make sure Ingrid wasn't following me again and took out my bass so I could play. For some reason I have an easier time getting my mind straight when I'm playing music. And I definitely need to get my mind straight.

I began playing. As my fingers ran over the notes and chord progressions, my mind continued to drift and unwind. The stresses of the day were really starting to mess with my head. First Ingrid messes with my head. Then I get barely any sleep and have to get up super early. Then I get thrown onto a carousel, if you could call it that, and finally Chaz suggests that I should be voted off. Oh, and Nazz wants to get rid of Chaz, which I'm not totally opposed to, but Ingrid betraying us and messing with my mind? She should really be the number one priority.

Why does Ingrid think that would work, anyway? Nazz is too sweet to betray anybody.

Wait a second...

Flashback

"Don't trust her," Triana said. She and her father disappeared in a cloud of smoky skulls.
Was Triana talking about Nazz? No, it couldn't be. Triana had to be referring to Ingrid. Nazz wouldn't hurt anybody. She'd never turn her back on a friend.

But Nazz was trying to get rid of Chaz. Although he wasn't a friend. He was an ally.

But then again Wendy wasn't our friend. I mean, maybe she was. She was trying to be. But I didn't like her much. Maybe Nazz didn't either.

Come to think of it, Nazz's argument hinges on Ingrid never telling Megan to vote off Elise. Maybe Nazz never told Ingrid to vote off Elise.

No. No. This is nuts. Ingrid is obviously the traitor.

Although she hasn't done anything suspicious besides try to convince me she's innocent.

Come on, really?

Am I really going to start believing that Nazz, my best friend on this island Nazz, Nazz who knows that Ingrid is a traitor, is actually lying to me and Ingrid is telling the truth? She teamed up with the others to get us voted off!

But we tried to get her voted off too. We put her back to the wall.

No, this is crazy. Nazz is my friend. And I'm going to vote for Chaz. Because I trust her.

Because Nazz would never betray me.

Night rolled around. I had cast my vote, and was ready for Chris to make the call. He strolled up with three hot dogs on a plate.

"Well, did y'all have a good time at the fair?" he asked.

"NO." Chaz complained. "I had to lick pigs."

"I still feel sick!" I added.

Ingrid shrugged. "I enjoyed the Hall of Mirrors."

"And Chef ended up all wet," Nazz added.

"A good summary of the day's events," Chris said. "But tonight, we're gonna do a little something different. For the drama. We're gonna show you the votes!"

We all gasped. This isn't good.

"Now, since it was a tie in the challenge, it would be pretty hilarious if it was a tie in the voting, right?" Chris asked. "That's foreshadowing, by the way. Roll it!"

Confessional

"Chaz," Nazz said. "He's helped Marlowe and me, but I get a definite snake vibe from him. I get the sense he's just like, using us to get ahead, and that he'll like, stab us in the back when it's convenient. I'd rather see Ingrid win than Chaz. Ingrid's more of a friend. Even if she's, like, a false friend."
Chris grinned and turned to Chaz. "Anything you wanna say about that?" he asked.

Chaz smirked. "Just roll my vote next."

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Confessional

"Hey there peeps, it's the Chaz, hey, hi," Chaz told the camera. "Now, I know I'm rocking this look, but I'm also rocking this game. I mean, Nazz thinks she's gonna backstab me? Seriously, I saw that one coming from a mile away. Now, I can't get rid of Nazz because she's got that whole 'interesting' thing going on, and I can't get rid of Ingrid because that would play right into Nazz's hands, so I'm gonna vote for Marlowe. That's right, boring bass girl! Seriously she plays bass, the one instrument in a rock band that everyone ignores. Anyway, bye bye Marlowe!"

"Marlowe?" Chris prodded me.

I looked over at Chaz, shocked. "I can't believe you'd betray us," I said. "I mean, I can believe it, but–really?"

"Please," Chaz said, smirking. "You totally betrayed me."

"Or did she? Dum dum daaaaahhhhh!" Chris said. "Roll Marlowe's clip!"

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Confessional

I stared at the camera. "I can't believe I'm saying this, but I don't know who to trust any more. I'm sorry. Nazz, I just don't think I can trust you. I--I guess it's because you're voting off Chaz. I hope I'm right about this."

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"Nazz?" Chris asked.

I turned to look at Nazz. She was staring at me, shocked.

"You--you voted me off?" she asked.

"I'm sorry!" I said. "I just, Ingrid, and--I'm sorry. I thought you were the traitor. I--I just didn't know what to do. I still don't."

"I thought you were my friend," Nazz said quietly.

"I am!" I said. "I just--I-I'm sorry."

Chris grinned. "There's one vote left. And since Ingrid didn't vote herself off..."

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Confessional

"I'm sorry, Marlowe," Ingrid said. "Marlowe, I like you. I really do. And I'd like for us to be friends again. But Chaz told me that you and Nazz were planning to vote me off, and if I voted for you he'd vote with me and force a tie. Marlowe, I'm really sorry, but...I'm gonna vote for you to leave the island."
"And there you have it!" Chris said. Chef took my hand and pulled me towards the cannon. "Marlowe loses when seemingly everybody turns traitor! And who will be the next one to go down in our big game of musical chairs? That's tough to say!" Chef stuffed me into the cannon, and Chris lit the fuse. "It could be Ingrid. It could be Nazz. It could be Chaz. One thing's for sure, though. I'm gonna get paid, and it's gonna be entertaining. So be sure to tune in next time, on Total! Drama! Cartoon Multiverse!"

The cannon went off and I flew through the air. I shut my eyes.

Even though I knew it was gonna hurt when I landed, this still wasn't the worst ride I'd taken today.

Voting Breakdown:

Marlowe: Nazz Van Bartonschmeer
Chaz Monerainian: Marlowe
Ingrid Third: Marlowe
Nazz Van Bartonschmeer: Chaz Monerainian

Final tally of votes received:

Marlowe: 2 (eliminated)
Chaz Monerainian: 1
Nazz Van Bartonschmeer: 1
"Last time, on Total Drama: Cartoon Multiverse," Chris began, "we decided to make the campers play fair. County fair, that is! We put them to the test with your standard county fair attractions: fair food, the hall of mirrors, the dunk tank, the barf-tastic ride, and of course, licking pigs! And these sickos managed to pass every single one of the challenges. Since we couldn't have them all get immunity, we decided that none of them would get immunity. And guess what? The knives came out! Nazz betrayed Chaz by voting against him, but Chaz betrayed Nazz by voting against her friend Marlowe. Well played, Chaz. That leaves us with the final three: Nazz, Chaz, and Ingrid. And what's going to happen? Well, if the last challenge was all about fairness, this challenge is about what happens when you aren't fair." Chris laughed. "I jest, I got out of prison after only a year despite causing a massive, massive, tremendous, gigantic environmental disaster. I also put these kids in life-threatening situations regularly. And this show's intern body count is starting to rival certain third-world dictatorships. So the moral of this show totally isn't 'play fair.' But hey, it's just fiction! Don't feel bad."

Chris paused for a few seconds before continuing somberly.

"All this reminiscing has made me decide to give you some advice I should really give the campers. During today's challenge?"

Chris's face cracked into a strained grin.

"Don't drop the soap."

"WAKE UP!"

Chef's voice reverberates around the room, waking me up. I rub my eyes, still sleep deprived. Marlowe voting for Nazz–does that mean she believes me? I pondered that all night until I finally fell asleep. It was weird. If I had voted for Nazz, she would be gone right now. But since I voted with Chaz, Marlowe is gone. And now I'm on the island with a liar who pretended to be my friend and a narcissistic wild card.

I yawn as I stretch and look around the room for the first time. My breath catches in my throat, and I break into a coughing fit. As soon as I stop, I look around again. No way around it. I'm definitely in a jail cell.

It's weird. I haven't been in one of these for over four years. Yet I still remember the feeling of being in jail. The claustrophobia. The fear. The creeping realization that this is where they put you when you're too scary for the outside world. And the knowledge that I always had, that I'm not scary enough for this place.

I'm lucky. I never realized it until after I met Fillmore, but my dad always came and picked me up. Even though he was busy, he'd always bail me out. And he never made me feel like a failure. I was the one who did that, really. I felt like a failure because I didn't fit in. And I fought the kids who didn't accept me. I hated moving places all the time. So I guess it's a good thing that my dad ended up settling down in the same place where I finally found some friends.
The jangling of keys draws my attention. Chris walks by, whistling a jaunty tune and jangling a key ring with three keys on it. He passes my cell and keeps going. After maybe a minute, a television descends from the ceiling in front of my cell. Chris is on the screen.

"Morning, prisoners!" Chris says. "This one's pretty simple. You're all in jail, and you have to escape. So what's the catch?" He snickered. "I don't know if you've ever heard of the concept of a pan ope tyke on--"

"Panopticon," I correct him.

"Whatever," Chris says. "Brainiac knows what it is. For the rest of you, it's a prison with a central tower that keeps watch over the prisoners. Who's watching from the tower, you ask? Why, it's Chef! If he catches you, you lose and can be voted out. But anybody who makes it out of prison alive wins immunity." He shrugged. "Actually, anybody who makes it out of prison–dead or alive–wins immunity. Granted, it won't be much use if you're dead, but hey! Who says we can't do a finale with a dead body as one of the contestants? It sure isn't me!"

The television switches off. I crane my head and look up. The windows of the tower are darkened so that I can't see where Chef is or what he's doing. I withdraw back to my bunk to think.

Let's see. Panopticons. I'd read about these. The idea was that the prisoners would never know if they were being watched or not because the tower windows were darkened and so it was impossible to tell if the guard was staring at them. Apparently there had never been a true version built because of the difficulty of getting the sight lines correct. The advent of cameras had made it possible to watch prisoners at all times, though. And this is a reality show, so...

Crackers. If Chris is sticking to the idea, Chef may not have access to the cameras. And the back wall of the cell is curved, and the cell isn't a square, so obviously these cells are in a half-circle. That's probably the trick.

I look up. The tower windows aren't visible from the back of the cell. I step forward until I can see them. Chef is only able to see about halfway into the cell.

Hmm. That must mean that my escape route is somewhere in the back of the cell. Unless Chris wanted to mess with us some more.

Forget it. I'm searching the back of the cell for something. At worst, I don't find anything and have to step into Chef's view.

After a while, I find some loose bricks in the back wall. The problem is, they start about three feet off of the ground and continue until they're well over my head. More importantly, I don't have any tools with which to pull them out.

I grit my teeth. Nobody ever said breaking out of prison was easy.

I grab the brick on the bottom with my fingernails. Although they scrape against the brick and I regret that I didn't bring nail clippers, I manage to nudge it forward a bit. I try again, and again, and several more times until I can finally get my fingertips on the brick. Once I've gotten that far, I'm able to make more progress until with a sharp tug the brick comes free of the wall.

I breathe deeply and bend down to look into the new hole. Everything inside is dark. A cockroach suddenly crawls out, and I leap backwards, shocked. I take a few deep breaths to calm my racing heart. I hate creepy crawlies.
I swallow in an attempt to quell my nausea. I just have to get the bricks free. Then I can worry about the rest of the challenge. But I have to get rid of the bricks first.

I swallow again and grab one of the loose bricks from below. I pull it loose. I grab the next brick and yank it free. A bunch of bricks on top come tumbling down, and I jump back. A huge heap of collapsed bricks are now piled on the floor in front of me. I climb up onto them. The hole is now big enough to squeeze through.

I grab the sides of the hole and use them as leverage to stick my legs through. Almost as soon as I get my legs through, I lose my balance. My lower back hits the lower edge of the hole, and I fall in. It's a short drop, but I scrape my legs on the bricks that fell inside the cavern.

I climb to my feet and shut my eyes in the hopes that this will help them adjust. I start feeling my way along the walls as I walk forward blindly. Occasionally, I hear crunching underneath my feet, and I will myself not to think about what I'm probably stepping on. Suddenly, I hit a dead end and open my eyes. Darkness still surrounds me, so I feel along the wall and realize that it's a right turn.

I keep feeling about as I make my way down the corridor. At one point, my hand lands directly on a cockroach, and I leap away and bash the back of my head against another wall. I shut my eyes tightly and wait for the pain to subside. Once it does, I move on until I run into another dead end and an electrical switch.

I turn the switch on, and a dim lightbulb flickers on above me. The light is a shock after these corridors of darkness, and even though it's dim my eyes react to it. When my vision clears, I notice a piece of paper and a flashlight on the ground. I pick up the paper and realize it's a note.

The note says "Congratulations, you found the flashlight. It will help you to get through the maze." I pick up the flashlight, turn it on, and shine it around the room. Although the flashlight is dim, it's very helpful, and it makes navigating the place easier. For instance, I'm able to see turns more clearly.

And then the path splits.

Well, the note did say this was a maze. I guess it's time to use the right-hand rule.

After several dead ends, attempts at backtracking, and usage of several split paths, I finally find my way to a green exit sign. The sign itself is perched over a bunch of stairs.

I swallow heavily. I've seen more cockroaches in the past hour than I ever wanted to see in my life. And this says it's the exit, but knowing Chris...

Whatever. I have to leave the maze sometime. And there probably won't be as many bugs in the next part. Probably.

I step forward and walk down the stairs. They double back at the end, and I follow them down. This one leads into a clean white corridor that stretches out a long way before me.

I look around. No sign of any traps, but I can't be too careful. I slowly make my way down the hall. Nothing happens, and when I reach the end, I ascend the steps. As I reach the top, I realize that I'm walking into sunlight. I look around as I climb and realize that I'm next to the guard tower. On this side, the windows are not darkened. Instead, they're clear.

I look forward again. The exit isn't that far away. It's a gap in the fence. There are probably some doors that'll shut the gap, but all I have to do is make it outside. That should end the challenge.
I look up again. Chef is talking on his phone and not paying any attention to me.

Slowly, I walk towards the doors. I keep looking between Chef and the exit. I'm about halfway there when Chef suddenly stiffens. His head turns in my direction.

Crackers.

I take off running. I risk a glance back and see Chef pull a lever on the walls. I don't stop. I just pour on the speed as two doors come out from the walls and head for each other.

Okay. It's not that far away. I can do this. I just have to shoot the gap between the doors. I can make it.

The doors come closer and closer together. I sprint towards them.

They're just a few feet apart and I'm just a few feet away.

I run as fast as I can. I'm going to have to leap through if I want to make it.

The doors are about to shut.

I shut my eyes.
Ingrid dug in her heels just as the gate closed and skidded to a stop. She fell against the gate awkwardly, but quickly pushed herself into standing position, completely uninjured. Chris walked out of the tower and over to Ingrid.

"Well," he said, "I guess that concludes the game, doesn't it? Ingrid, you failed to escape at the gates. Chaz, you didn't even attempt to leave your cell. And Nazz is stuck in her maze. None of you won immunity, and all of you are on the chopping block tonight. Chef, turn on the lights and let Nazz out."

"I'm afraid I can't do that, Chris," Chef said from the tower.

"What? Why not?" Chris asked.

"Because we didn't install any lights in the maze," Chef said.

"Oh yeah," Chris said. "Those budget issues. Well, we can't really let her escape...and we can't get her out...enh, just open the cell doors, and when Nazz finally finds her way out we'll tell her she lost and then let everyone prepare for the campfire ceremony."

"Problem is it's lunchtime," Chef said. "I gotta give everyone lunch. Prison rules."

"Oh yeah," Chris mused, stroking his chin. "Well, give Ingrid and Chaz their lunches, and Nazz will just have to skip."

"Fine," Chef said. "I'll go get their lunches."

---

**Ingrid**

About twenty minutes after the doors shut, Chaz and I are sitting next to each other, chowing down on roast beef sandwiches and milk.

"You know, this is way above Chef's usual standards," Chaz says.

"It's prison fare!" Chef barks. "It's legally mandated to have a certain amount of nutritional value!"

"Why does that not surprise me?" I say. Honestly, I know that prison fare isn't *completely* horrible, but the fact that Chef's version of it is better than his normal cooking disturbs me. Granted, from what I've heard, Chef intentionally cooks the worst food he can as part of the show, but it's still odd to have Chef serve us food that's competently prepared.

"So tell me, Ingrid," Chaz says. "How's it feel, knowing you betrayed Nazz?"

I bite into my sandwich with more force than is strictly necessary. I contemplate my answer as I chew.

"I don't know what you mean," I tell him.

"Oh, you know," he says. "Sometime after the poker game, you and Nazz and Marlowe got into a fight. Me-ow! What was it about? Inquiring minds want to know."

"You know you're not a reporter, right?" I say. I take another bite of my sandwich.
"Shows what you know," he says. "C'mon, give us the scoop. Why did you betray Nazz?"

"I didn't betray Nazz! She betrayed me!"

Telling him that was probably a mistake.

"Oh really? And how'd she do that?" Chaz asks. "After all, you were the one who started hanging out with Numbuh Two and Rusty. And you did vote off Marlowe."

---

**Chaz**

Ingrid is looking pretty riled up. Reminding her that she voted off Marlowe? Good move, me! Now I'll finally find out what's going on between her and Nazz. Not a fan of that tight-lipped act Nazz and Marlowe were putting on. If they had been a little more honest...but then again, they were going to try and get rid of me anyway, so no harm, no foul to waving goodbye to boring bassist Marlowe. Seriously, everyone knows that Goob is the least interesting member of the DoD, and whatever lame band Marlowe is in, there's no way it's as good as the Dudes. But now the Chaz is gonna find out what's going on with Ingrid and Nazz, and I'm gonna see who matches up best with me. Ingrid seems more boring, but Nazz seems nicer. I just have to figure out which one is more interesting, and then I'll vote off the boring one and crank up the interest and the ratings for the grand finale. The best part is that since we're voting each other off tonight, I'm guaranteed a place in the finale, since Ingrid and Nazz will vote against each other.

And they're also gonna try and win my vote! Go Chaz! You're just rocking this game!

"You told me to vote off Marlowe," Ingrid finally spits out.

I hold my hands up submissively. "I know," I say. "I just wanted to know why you and Nazz turned on each other. I mean, Marlowe siding with Nazz, and against Nazz, and with Nazz–I want to hear about that too. But let's start with you and Nazz."

Ingrid bites into her sandwich ferociously. Wow, girl, no need to eat like a tazelwurm. Your food can get chewed just as well without as much violence. Save the violence for the catfight our viewers would love to see.

Ingrid finishes and breathes out heavily. She then turns to me. Time to put on the interested, open, sympathetic face. And action!

"It started a while back," she tells me. "Of course, like you said, I didn't figure it out until the day of the marathon. But this is something that had been going on for a long time."

"Give me the juicy parts," I say. Ingrid looks at me sharply but continues to speak.

"So, you know how Wendy was voted off?" she asks.

"Oh yeah, the Chaz voted for her!" I say. It's true. The Chaz was the one who got rid of Wendy when it was time for her to go.

"Well, one of us voted her off," she says. "Specifically, Nazz. We had a, the girls had a deal, it was an alliance–I don't like to talk about it because I'm uncomfortable with how long it took for me to realize that I was in an alliance, but basically we'd had an alliance, and Wendy had just joined. But Nazz betrayed Wendy and got her voted off. That shocked Marlowe and me, and Nazz pretended to be shocked, and then the next day I figured that Nazz had to be the one who'd done it. Remember how Triana told us not to trust her after that day we had school?"
For some reason, whatever Ingrid is rambling on about has completely slipped my mind.

"Well, anyway, before that Snidely--"

"Oh yeah, the Chaz was the one who broke that story wide open!" I say. It's true. The Chaz revealing Andy's traitorism to everyone else on the show? Shining moment. Totally won the Chaz some fans who weren't convinced about the Chaz's awesomeness.

"Right," Ingrid says. She rolls her eyes. Geez, why'd the show decide to cast a slightly more stylish Tina? It doesn't make any sense.

"Anyway, Snidely kept complaining that Nazz intentionally threw a game when he was voted off," Ingrid continues. "And Marlowe revealed that Nazz had suggested Elise was the primary target the day that Megan got eliminated, splitting the votes and allowing Snidely to get rid of her. Nazz has been playing a lot of people in this game."

"Thanks, Ingrid," I say. "Thanks for telling me all about Nazz."

Now I just have to get Nazz's side of the story.

---

**Nazz**

Bugs. Bugs everywhere. Roaches. This is major so gross.

Why did I ever enter this tunnel? I don't think immunity is worth this.

Maybe it is. Maybe Chaz would vote me off. He's done it before.

Oh god I think there's one crawling on my arm.

I hate how dark it is in here. Would it have killed Chris to give us some lighting?

Great. Another dead end. Wait, no. That's a left turn.

What's that in the distance? It looks vaguely green.

Is it a giant roach with one of those light things sticking out of its head? No, that's fish. Except maybe this show gave that power to a giant bug.

I hate Chris.

---

**Ingrid**

We've been finished with our sandwiches for a while when Nazz finally stumbles out of the staircase. Her time in the tunnels has not served her well. She's dirty, disheveled, and I'm not sure but I think she has the remnants of some dead roaches on her.

"Welcome back to the surface world, Nazz!" Chris tells her.

"I lost, didn't I?" she asks.

"Yes," Chris says. He waits a few seconds. "But so did everybody else! So, voting happens after dinner. Have fun!"
The gates open, and we all leave.

Chaz

Nazz is obviously worked up over whatever she went through during today's challenge. It just proves the Chaz was right when he stayed in his cell and waited for the challenge to end. Go Chaz!

The good news is, she's walking slowly. As soon as Ingrid has left, I slow down and wait until she's out of sight. I then mosey over to Nazz.

"So, tell me about Ingrid," I say.

"Why?" Nazz asks.

"Because inquiring minds want to know why you two have been fighting," I tell her. "C'mon. Fess up. You know you want to."

Nazz

Great. I thought I was done with roaches when I exited the tunnel. But now here's a walking, talking, six-foot-tall cockroach, trying to get me to tell him a story.

I need a shower. I need a nap. I need the big cash prize. But instead, I have a wannabe gossip columnist trying to get me to talk about Ingrid and why we're not friends.

Of course, we're not friends for a fairly simple reason: Ingrid figured out that I was the one who voted off Wendy. I'd be proud of her detective skills if they weren't throwing a wrench into my plans and if they hadn't gotten Marlowe kicked off. Also, I don't like the fact that apparently, just because I voted off Wendy, we can't be friends anymore. Although that's my fault as much as hers, I still couldn't admit I did it and expect to keep Marlowe as my friend. Or, for that matter, my ally.

Why'd Marlowe have to vote against me? She said she was still my friend, but if that's the case, why would she try and vote me off? Did she see me as the biggest obstacle to the money? Did she think this would make Ingrid her friend again? For that matter, why did Chaz and Ingrid get rid of Marlowe? I know Chaz told Ingrid that they could vote together and force a tie where Ingrid wouldn't be in any trouble, but it still doesn't explain why Chaz would choose Marlowe as his victim instead of me.

Right. Chaz. He's waiting for me to say something.

I look over at him. Chaz is still waiting for me to answer his question.

"So you know how Wendy got voted out?" I ask.

"Yeah, the Chaz did that," Chaz says proudly.

"Right," I say. I resist the urge to roll my eyes. "Well, like, it had to have been one of the girls who voted her off. Since it wasn't Wendy, it had to have been me, or Marlowe, or Ingrid. Then the next day Ingrid bursts in and accuses me of voting off Wendy and getting rid of Megan early on. But I totally didn't do that! And Ingrid, like, says that I told Marlowe to vote off Elise, but I also told Ingrid and asked her to tell Megan! Which means that Ingrid must have done sabotage. I think. Anyway Ingrid totally tried to wreck my reputation, but Marlowe believed me. Until yesterday, at least. And now...I just wish we were friends again. That's all. But Ingrid like, totally hates me now. Or
something."

There's a little bit of truth in every lie. And there were enough lies and truth mixed together in that story for Chaz to believe it.

He nods. "Thanks, Nazz," he says.

And Chaz walks away.

I really need a shower.

---

**Chaz**

So, the Chaz got a scoop from the super-gross Tina wannabe and the bug-covered cheerleader. One of them was lying. Or perhaps they both were. Whatever, the Chaz doesn't care.

But let's work it out anyway. So both of them agree that the vote was split over somebody called Megan, and they blame the other one for doing it. And they blame the other one for voting off Wendy, but they both agree that Wendy got voted off by one of them. And the Chaz.

So the Chaz just has to figure out one thing: which of them is more interesting? After all, two interesting players are a better bet than one interesting player and one boring player. So who will the Chaz vote off? I know that Nazz is voting against Ingrid and Ingrid is voting against Nazz.

Nazz is physically stronger than Ingrid. But Ingrid is smarter than Nazz. But Nazz is a pretty cheerleader, and Ingrid is basically better-fashion-sense Tina.

So obviously the best finale is going to be Nazz versus the Chaz. Bye bye, Ingrid!

---

**Nazz**

That conversation with Chaz was strange. I'm pretty sure he didn't really want to know all about me and Ingrid. And he's probably not going to ask only me about it. He'll probably talk to Ingrid too, if he hasn't already. After all, I was in the tunnels for a long time.

That's exactly what happened, isn't it. He gathered information on me and Ingrid and why we're fighting. And now, he's probably figuring who to vote off. If I had to place a bet, he's going to vote against me. Ingrid will obviously vote me off too.

I hate how Chaz stabbed us in the back. I didn't trust him, and neither did Marlowe, which is why I wanted to get rid of him. At least with Ingrid it's possible to know where she stands. But now? Now I'm on the way out, and the final matchup is going to be Ingrid and Chaz.

I did well, all things considered. I just didn't do well enough. I didn't count on Marlowe believing Ingrid at the most inopportune time. I didn't count on Chaz realizing he would be voted off by us, although I was expecting him to get there sooner or later. And I didn't count on him deciding to vote out Marlowe instead of me. I was playing for a tie vote and hoping to win a tiebreaker or be kept on or somehow stay in. I knew the last game was the turning point. It just turned out wrong.

Whatever. I'm going to cast my vote against Chaz. At least Ingrid was my friend. And I would like her to be my friend again. And I hate how Chaz played me.
Ingrid

It's academic, really.

Tonight's vote is pure game theory. There are three players. Each of them wants to get rid of the other two and can get rid of one of them. The question is obviously who will get rid of who. Since I'm one of the players and I'm trying to figure out who will vote for whom, I could disappear down the recursive rabbit hole that is trying to figure out who votes for whom in every situation, but that would quickly become overly complex, especially as each new level reveals another level. So all I have to do is figure out what the optimal voting pattern would be for my opponents and use that to guarantee a spot in the finale.

I know that I'll vote for either Chaz or Nazz. If one of them votes against the other, that will be where I pick up the win. If they both vote against me, though...

Let's just see how the game theory shakes out before considering that doomsday scenario. So. Nazz's vote. Let's see. She can choose between me and Chaz. Chaz's biggest strength is his surprising athleticism. Mine is my intelligence. And I think that Nazz might be able to beat Chaz in a strength contest. Either way, it'd be close. And for some reason I think Nazz is smarter than Chaz. Probably because of how she played almost everybody in the game. And Nazz hates me. So I'm probably the person she votes against.

Now for Chaz. He can choose between me and Nazz. Annoyingly enough, he's a wild card. He teamed up with Nazz to get rid of my only remaining friend on the island, and then teamed up with me to get rid of Marlowe. I can't tell how smart he is, but he's smart enough to have made it this far.

Honestly, Chaz is probably the most balanced of us three and also the weakest overall competitor. But he can beat me in a strength competition. And my research of Total Drama suggests that the finale is usually physical in nature rather than mental. So it would be in his best interest to get rid of the most physically talented competitor: Nazz.

If I'm right, Nazz is going to vote for me and Chaz is going to vote for Nazz. My vote is the deciding factor. And it should go against Nazz.

When Chris walked up to the campfire pit, he didn't have any hot dogs with him.

"So, I figured we'd do something different tonight," Chris said smarmily. "Instead of giving everyone who gets to stay on the island a wiener, we're just going to skip the sausages and go straight to the votes. So, if we could roll the tape?"

A television dropped down next to his podium.

Confessional

"I think that Nazz is going home," Ingrid said. "That is, if I read the field correctly. I vote for Nazz."

Nazz had a sour look on her face. Ingrid breathed deeply. Chaz looked smug. And Chris smirked as the television cut to the next confessional.

Confessional
"Ingrid. She's boring, barely fashionable, and not as cool as the Chaz," Chaz said.

Suddenly, Ingrid looked worried, Nazz looked stressed, and Chaz still looked smug. Chris grinned as he rolled the last clip.

Confessional

"I'm probably going home tonight, but give me Chaz," Nazz said. "I'm sick of him being so, like, self-absorbed, and I can't believe he, like, got Marlowe voted off."

"Hey, you tried to get me voted off first!" Chaz complained.

"Wait," Ingrid said. "I voted for Nazz, Chaz voted for me, and Nazz voted for Chaz—that's a tie, right?"

"That's right!" Chris said. "And while I could send one of you home, I'm not going to. I just had this campfire ceremony to make you all hate each other a little bit more. Aren't I the greatest reality show host ever?" He smiled at the camera. "So we still have three campers left. Who will win? Who will lose? Everything's on the table, next time, on Total! Drama! Cartoon Multiverse!"

"Wait, so nobody won?" Nazz asked.

"Nope!" Chris said.

Voting Breakdown:

Ingrid Third: Nazz Van Bartonschmeer
Chaz Monerainian: Ingrid Third
Nazz Van Bartonschmeer: Chaz Monerainian

Final tally of votes received:

Chaz Monerainian: 1
Ingrid Third: 1
Nazz Van Bartonschmeer: 1
"Last time, on Total Drama: Cartoon Multiverse, we sent our campers to prison," Chris said. "Of course, we didn't make them share cells, use cigarettes for currency, or keep careful control of the shower soap. But we did make them attempt a prison break. Chaz didn't really care; he just stayed in his cell and got some extra beauty sleep. Trust me, he needed it. Nazz, meanwhile, made her way into the secret tunnel maze we had carved for her, but she didn't find the flashlight we left for her, so she had to go it blind. After stumbling around a bunch and squashing a lot of roaches, she finally found her way out of the maze only to discover that Ingrid, who did find the flashlight we left for her, had already attempted to run out the front gates and just barely failed. Nobody won the challenge, nobody won immunity, and all three players were on the chopping block last night. So who got kicked off the island? None of them, as the voting ended in a three-way tie! I decided to let it slide, and so it comes down to another episode with our final three of Chaz, Nazz, and Ingrid. Which one is headed for the finale? Find out right here, right now, on Total! Drama! Cartoon Multiverse!"

I wake up when Chris begins yelling.

"Alright, people, it's time for us to take three down to two. And how are we gonna do it, you ask? With a little teamwork! Meet me at the center of camp in ten. Anyone who isn't there on time is automatically eliminated. That means you, Chaz!"

The P.A. squeals as Chris turns it off. I hop out of bed and start putting my clothes on. I avoid looking at Ingrid as she does the same on the other side of the room.

I regret it. I admit it. I now regret that I didn't tell the truth. That I didn't admit to voting Wendy off. Maybe then I could have salvaged something. Maybe I could have salvaged my friendship with Ingrid. Maybe Marlowe wouldn't have tried to vote me off. Maybe I wouldn't be alone.

We're all alone at this point. Ingrid, me, Chaz. There are no alliances now. There's a clear dislike between me and Ingrid, sure, but Chaz isn't trustworthy at all. He sold Ingrid out to get rid of Numbuh Two, then he sold me out to get to Marlowe. I know, he was only looking out for himself, but there's no way I can trust him to do anything.

And today Chris is talking about teamwork. Yeah. I'm betting that this will be the most frustrating day at camp yet. There have been a lot of those lately. Ever since I voted off Wendy. Every day since then has brought brand new stresses. First I was worried about being found out. Then when Ingrid did figure it out, I turned the tables on her and lost a friend. Then I had to worry about Ingrid teaming up with the other side and getting rid of me, until Chaz offered a way out. Then Chaz turned on me and got rid of Marlowe when I was trying to get rid of him--and on top of that, Marlowe tried to vote me off, so Ingrid may have managed to change her mind. And then yesterday, with all the roaches and the creepy-crawlies and the dark tunnels--I had nightmares all night long. I didn't sleep well. I kept waking up from a nightmare of bugs with my heart pounding, realizing it was a dream, relaxing, falling asleep, and having more nightmares. Even if I end up winning, it'll take me two more days to get there. Two more days of stress and worry and dealing with whatever insane scheme Chris has cooked up to mess with our emotions.

Weird thing is, I don't regret voting off Megan. I don't regret voting off Wendy. I don't regret throwing a game so we could get rid of Snidely, especially since the game was pretty much lost already. I do regret voting off Steve, but that's more because Elise could have been a huge headache if it weren't for that RCMP bust. Which itself was a pretty strange thing to have happen.
But what I regret is that I lied about getting rid of Wendy. Marlowe would probably have been up for it. At the very least, she would have understood. Maybe Ingrid would have too. But lying about Ingrid being the real culprit, that's where I messed up. That's one place where I know I made the wrong decision.

I should apologize to her. I could do it now. But she'd probably think I was lying. And it's too late to repair our friendship.

The door shuts. Great. While I was worrying about the bad decisions, Ingrid got dressed and got out the door. I tie my shoes and run after her. Bad decisions or not, Nazz Van Bartonschmeer does not just give up.

Soon the three of us are standing in the middle of camp. Chris is in front of us with a pointer, an easel, and a huge grin on his face. He flips the blank cover over, revealing a picture of two legs from two different people tied together.

"Now, who here has heard of a three-legged race?" he asks. Everybody raises their hand. He smirks. "Good. Because today, we're doing the same thing, except your legs won't be tied together, and--" he flips the page over to show us a picture of a hand on a shoulder "--you just have to be touching at all times. What happens if you stop touching?" He gives us a picture of a hand being taken off of a shoulder. "You lose the game, you get eliminated, you get in the Cannon of Sorrow and go home. In order to make things more interesting, we've decided to kick it up a notch by making you all stand in line." He shows us a picture of three stick figures standing in a row. "And if the middle person lets go and all three of you fall apart, you all lose." He flips the page over to show a picture of the three stick figures falling away from each other and cackles. "Hey, we had to do something to make up for yesterday's tie. Now get ready...

We get into a line. I'm on the left, Chaz is in the middle, and Ingrid is on the right.

"Get set..."

We look at each other.

"Oh, and did I mention that you'll occasionally have to switch positions? Because you will. And go!"

We grab for each other. I end up holding hands with Chaz while Chaz's right hand grabs Ingrid's dress and Ingrid's left hand clutches Chaz's bicep. Chris laughs.

"Yeah, that's what I like," he chuckles. "Better hold on tight, kids, it's going to be a long day!"

Great. Holding hands with Chaz is exactly how I wanted to spend the day.

After about an hour, we haven't had anything to do. We've swapped positions twice; I'm now in the middle and holding hands with Ingrid and Chaz. Chris walks up to us again.

"Well, at this point, I'll be you're all sick of being around each other, am I right?" he asks. He's right. "That's just too bad, because all this hour was meant to do was get you three fed up with this challenge. Heck, I doubt any of it will be shown on TV! Instead, we're gonna take you to the first challenge: rock climbing!"

"In tandem?" Ingrid asks, shocked.

"In tandem!" Chris says. He frowned. "That means together, right?"
Ingrid nods.
"In tandem!" he says.

Chris takes us to a thirty-foot-tall cliff.

"The eagle-eyed in the audience will recognize this cliff," he says. "It was used in the climbing challenge during 'Who Can You Trust'? Of course, we did replace all the explosives!"

Everybody's eyes go wide.

"Wait," Ingrid says. "Wasn't this whole island destroyed after Chef totally fracked it?"

Chris chuckles. "Yeah, it was also just a peninsula jutting out from the mainland until we decided to totally ignore that plot point."

"The part about it being like, part of the mainland, also raises questions," I say. "Does that mean that we're like, just outside of civilization?"

"Okay, well, let's not think about that too hard—" Chris starts to say.

"The Chaz and his fans want to know, where exactly are we?" Chaz asks. "The Chaz would like some clarification on that point."

Chris's eyes dart around nervously. "Well, I can't divulge that information or we'll have fans descending on the island—"

"I just want to know how far from home I am," I say. I wrinkle my brow. "Wait. Where is Peach Creek, anyway?"

"ENOUGH QUESTIONS!" Chef barks. He looks scared. "TIME TO CLIMB!"

"Well said, Chef," Chris says. He looks relieved. "All three of you have to freehand climb to the top of the cliff without breaking contact with each other. The challenge doesn't end until you all reach the top. Yes, even if one camper loses their grip on the others. And remember, if the middle player breaks contact with the other two, you all lose out on your chance for the money, so hold on tight. Now get climbing!"

We stumble towards the cliff, still unused to walking as a team.

"So how we gonna work this?" Chaz asks.

I notice Ingrid staring at me. "What?" I ask.

"You're the one who always comes up with strategies," she says. "Go ahead. Figure one out."

I blink. "Um, okay," I say. "I guess, like, we should all use our feet to hold on to ledges, and like, hold hands. And we should, I guess, use the hands on the ends to climb and try to pull each other up?"

"That plan sucks!" Chaz complains.

"Hey, you come up with a better one!" I say. It's not a very good plan, but it's not a very good situation.
"Nazz is right," Ingrid says. "I think that her plan is probably the best we can do under the circumstances."

"Aw!" Chaz complains. "Really? Do we have to?"

"Yes!" Chris calls at us. "You really do have to!"

We look at each other. Ingrid puts her hand on a ledge and strains to lift us. I see footholds and climb onto them. Chaz steps onto other holds in the cliff face and reaches for a handhold with his right hand. I'm pulled up by both of them, and Ingrid's feet scrabble against the rock until they find a jutting toehold.

Ingrid shakes her head. "These shoes were not made for climbing," she mutters. She reaches for another handhold and pulls us up a bit. We all find new footholds and step onto them.

Slowly, we make our way up the cliff. Suddenly, a bunch of explosives go off in Ingrid's face, and she's knocked off the cliff. The jolt of her falling body yanks my arm back, and my feet fall off their perch. I find myself dangling from Chaz's arm.

"GAH!" Chaz yells. "What did you two eat for breakfast?"

"We didn't have breakfast!" Ingrid complains.

"Not the point!" I yell. I pull on Chaz's arm, and he yelps but holds on tightly. My feet search for a foothold on the rough cliff face, and they manage to get enough of a grip for me to climb up until I'm where I was before. I yank Ingrid up, and she reaches out and grabs a handhold, and shortly after that a foothold.

We take a break to pant heavily. It's at this point that Chris pulls out his megaphone.

"Okay, switch!" he calls out. "Chaz, go over to the left!"

Great. Now I'm on the end instead of in the middle. This might make things easier.

Chaz begins climbing over me. "Hey!" I complain.

"Hey yourself, the Chaz is not breaking contact," he informs me.

I wince as Chaz climbs over my back, over Ingrid's back, and eventually grabs her hand. The good news is that Ingrid is in the middle, and she's the weakest climber. Hopefully Chaz and I can make it to the top more easily.

We get climbing again. This time we move faster, sometimes dragging Ingrid as we get most of the way up. Suddenly, an explosive goes off on my right. I lose my balance and swing into Ingrid, but quickly resettle my feet where Ingrid previously stood and grab on to a jutting rock next to me. Ingrid dangles between me and Chaz, but we both manage to climb to the top and pull Ingrid up with us.

"Nice job!" Chris calls up to us. "Now all you have to do is use the ladder down, and then it'll be time for your next challenge!"

We look over to the ladder. Great. Now we have to climb down a one-person ladder without letting go of each other.

"The Chaz goes first," Chaz says. He drags us to the ladder and starts climbing down. Ingrid shrugs and crouches with her hand behind her back. She climbs with Chaz unsteadily. I follow her lead and
climb down last. Chris is waiting for us at the bottom.

"Good job," Chris says. "Unfortunately, you're all still attached, so we'll have to put you through your next challenge!"

Chris takes us to the beach. Chef is dressed in his drill instructor uniform.

"ALRIGHT, MAGGOTS!" Chef yells through a megaphone. "THIS ONE'S SIMPLE! TWENTY PUSH-UPS!"

"Aw, man!" Chaz whines. "I just fixed my nails yesterday!"

"DO I LOOK LIKE I CARE, MAGGOT? GET DOWN THERE AND DO TWENTY PUSH-UPS!"

"Um, like, how?" I ask.

"FIGURE IT OUT, MAGGOTS! NOW! GO GO GO!"

We get down on all fours and continue to hold hands with each other.

"Put your weight on my hands," Ingrid says. "That way we can continue touching while doing push-ups."

"Won't that hurt?" I ask, concerned.

"Who cares, just do it!" Chaz says. Not breaking contact with Ingrid, he releases her hand and moves his hand on top of hers. He gets in position to do a push-up. Ingrid grits her teeth.

"Just do it!" she tells me. I follow Chaz's lead, and soon all three of us are doing push-ups. I finish first, and as soon as I'm done I stop pushing down on Ingrid's hand and hold on to her wrist so I won't hurt her any more. Soon, Ingrid finishes her routine, but Chaz looks like he's struggling. Ingrid has a pained look on her face as Chaz continues to try and finish his push-ups.

"JUST THREE MORE, SOLDIER!" Chef yells. "YOU DON'T WANT TO LET YOUR SQUAD DOWN, DO YOU?"

Chaz straines but manages to do another push-up. He goes down again, but pushes himself back up. Chaz's face shows evidence of strain, but he slowly pushes himself up again. As soon as he hits his peak, he collapses.

"I GUESS THAT'S FINE, FOR A SISSY BOY LIKE YOU!" Chef yells. "NEXT CHALLENGE!"

"Hey!" Chris complains. "I'm the one who announces we're moving on."

Chef lowers his megaphone. "Oh. Sorry Chris," he says sheepishly.

"That's better," Chris says. "Because your next challenge is lunch! Oh, and trade off."

I'm on the left as Chef puts bowls of soup in front of each of us. I'm holding on to Chaz's wrist with my right hand, and Ingrid is doing the same with her left.

"You know, the Chaz does not appreciate this," Chaz tells us.
"Tough," Ingrid says. "This is the best way to make sure you can't let go of either of us."

"It's demeaning!" Chaz complains. "It's like you think I'll get rid of you as soon as I can."

Ingrid quirks an eyebrow. "You mean you won't?" she asks.

"Of course not!" Chaz says.

"I'm still not holding hands with you," Ingrid says. Chaz frowns.

"Eat your lunch, maggots!" Chef says.

"Um, how?" Chaz asks. "In case you haven't noticed, I can't eat. This food definitely does not contain the necessary nutritional value for my skin and hair to continue looking their Chazziest. And I'm being held down by two girls."

"Figure it out, dude!" Chris says. "And by the way, spillage still counts so long as you finish your soup. So, ya know..."

Chris signals towards Chaz with his head and winks.

"Oh no," Chaz says. "Oh, no no no. You wouldn't do that to the Chaz. Right?"

I smirk, reach out, and grab his bowl with my left hand. Chaz winces as I bring it towards him. I stop and smile at him.

"Go ahead," I say. "Drink your soup."

Chaz looks at me, surprised, but I continue to smile. He bends down and starts to drink his soup from the bowl.

And that's when I grab my bowl and dump it over his head. Chaz rears up, shocked. As soon as he does, I grab his bowl and spill it all over him.

"Oh come on!" he complained. "Not the shirt! Could this day get any worse?"

Chris and Chef laugh. Ingrid shrugs, grabs her bowl of soup with her free hand, and drops it onto his crotch.

"Ah! My googlies!" Chaz complains. He grabs for them, inadvertently dragging our hands with him. Chris laughs even harder.

"Alright, that's a wrap people!" Chris says as soon as his laugh subsides. "On to the next challenge!"

Chris takes us into the kitchen. A jar is resting on the counter.

"You see this jar of pickles?" Chris asks. "All you gotta do is open it."

We look at each other.

"Open it?" Ingrid asks. "Are you serious?"

"Oh, yeah, that reminds me," Chris says. "Switch!"

Ingrid climbs across us and grabs my wrist. Chaz grabs me and repositions himself so his left hand is
holding my right wrist.

"There," he says. "How's that feel, huh?"

"Normal, I guess?" I say.

Chaz frowns. Chris taps his foot impatiently.

"Are we quite done?" he asks. I nod. "Good. Then get to opening!"

I step forward, dragging Chaz and Ingrid with me, and grab the jar. With one swift movement, I get the lid to start turning, and open the pickle jar with a few more twists.

"Are we quite done?" I ask.


Chris leads us out to the showers.

"It seems we've developed a bit of a plumbing problem," he says.

"So? What does that have to do with us?" Chaz asks.

Ingrid groans.

"Ingrid has the right idea," Chris says. "Because you're going to be plumbers for the day!"

I groan.

"Wait, what? The Chaz does not plumb!" Chaz complains. "The Chaz doesn't even like plums! They get their juice all over his clothes."

"Riiight," Chris says, raising an eyebrow. "Don't care. Get to work."

Chris throws a toolbox at us. It hits me in the face. I only stay on my feet because Ingrid and Chaz are holding me up. Ingrid picks up the toolbox and sighs.

"Well, let's get to work," she says.

We enter the showers. Nothing seems to be wrong.

"So where's the problem?" Ingrid calls.

"Dripping faucet! Fix it!" Chris calls back.

As soon as Chris tells us what to look for, it's obvious. The faucet is dripping heavily.

"Might as well try the obvious," I say. "Could somebody check the taps and make sure they're off?"

"Not it!" Chaz says. "My hair is perfect, and it is not going to get wet."

Ingrid rolls her eyes, steps forward, and checks the taps. They're both shut tight.

"Thanks," I tell her. "So now what?"

"Turn off the water?" she suggests.
"I'll do it," Chaz says. "Hand me a wrench."

We look at each other dubiously, but Ingrid opens the toolbox and takes out a pipe wrench. She hands it to me, and I hand it to Chaz, who immediately uses it to rip off the tap head. Predictably, water begins spraying out of the hole and drenches him.

"Oh come on!" Chaz complains. He shoves his hand over the hole.

"Well that worked out well," Ingrid says sarcastically.

"It should've!" Chaz says angrily. He takes his hand away and turns to face Ingrid. A few seconds later he realizes what happened.

"Hey! It worked!" Chaz says. He smiles and bends down to look at the hole where the tap once was. As soon as he does, water begins spraying out again and hits him in the eye.

"Oh come on!" Chaz complains.

I sigh. "Maybe we should, like, attach a pipe there? So that it's not spraying us?"

"Good idea," Chaz says. He grabs the nearest pipe and hands it to Ingrid. "Ingrid, put the pipe in."

Ingrid scowls, but we shove over and she does as Chaz requests. She takes the pipe and puts it in. The pipe has a bend at the end, meaning that the water sprays out in spirals as she tightens it. When she finishes, the pipe is at a right angle behind us.

"Great job, Ingrid," Chaz says sarcastically.

"Maybe another pipe?" I suggest.

After about an hour, Chris has told us to switch thrice and we've managed to build a cage out of pipes. To make matters worse, we're all trapped inside. Even worse, the last pipe we attached had two outputs and was left pointing straight up, which means we're constantly being rained on. And worst of all, we're all out of pipes.

"So...what now?" Ingrid asks.

"I see a pipe," Chaz says.

"Where?" I ask.

"Over there," he says. He reaches out and grabs it from the wall with his right hand.

"Are you sure that's--" Ingrid starts to say.

"Huh," he says, examining it.

"What?" I ask.

"This thing's all jammed up with wire," he says. "Oh well, might as well try it."

Before we can stop him, Chaz has wedged the pipe into our pipe prison and started screwing it in. Seconds later, all the lights go off.

"Chaz, you idiot!" Ingrid says. "Do you know what you've just done?"
The door to the showers is thrown open. Chef and Chris storm in, both completely soaked.

"Do you know what you've DONE?" Chef complains.

"You ruined my hair!" Chris says.

"You crossed the electrical and water systems!" Chef adds.

"You made every electrical outlet and appliance spit water!" Chris says.

"You electrified every faucet!" Chef complains.

"You're off the job!" Chris says angrily.

"But we're still touching each other," Chaz points out.

"I! Don't! Care!" Chris says angrily. "You stooges have completely messed up the plumbing in this place! We're hiring professionals! Next challenge!"

About an hour later, Chris takes us to the kitchen. We've switched places another two times. I'm now on the left, holding on to Chaz's wrist.

"You know, we really should have forced you to do this challenge with faulty appliances," Chris says, "but the author thought it would be too hard to write. So. Bake us cookies. Peanut butter chocolate chip oatmeal cookies, please. And don't burn them!"

Chris storms out of the kitchen. Chef looks through the window.

"If you mess up my kitchen, you're going to regret ever being born," he tells us. He moves on.

"Okay, I know Chef keeps his recipes in this cupboard," Ingrid says, pointing to it.

"Are you sure?" I ask.

Ingrid rolls her eyes. "Yes," she says. She opens the cupboard door, revealing a bunch of recipe books.

"Cooking with Maggots? 101 Rotten Spud Stews? Barely Edible Rocks?" Chaz says incredulously. "Has Chef really been feeding us these recipes?"

Ingrid and I share a look. "You don't want to know," we say simultaneously.

Ingrid looks around the cupboard. "Here's the dessert book," she says. The book is Desserts to Feed the Reality Show Host and Associated Staff but Keep Away from Contestants at All Costs.

"Wow, long title," I say.

"Whatever," Ingrid says. She puts the book down and opens it to the table of contents. "Let's see, cookies start on page 192. Peanut butter chocolate chip oatmeal...ah, here it is, 231."

Ingrid flips to the appropriate page.

"So how are we going to do this?" Chaz asks.

"The same way we've been doing everything today," I say.
"By awkwardly stumbling into each other and messing everything up?" he suggests.

Ingrid sighs. "I'll get the mixer. Nazz, could you grab a mixing bowl?"

We reach into cupboards and pull out the necessary materials. We spend the next few minutes mixing the ingredients together and warming up the oven, only pausing to move over when Chris yells "Switch!" I'm in the middle when we finally put the cookies in the oven.

"So now what?" Chaz asks.

"Start on the next batch?" Ingrid suggests. "We've got time to do that."

"Yeah, it's not like the first batch took forever to get on the, what is it, a cookie tin?" Chaz says sarcastically.

"Look, let's just do it, okay?" I say.

We get to work on the cookies. As soon as we've got the next batch ready to go in, the timer on the oven dings.

"It's ready! I'll get it!" Chaz says. He opens the oven and pulls out the hot cookie tin with his bare hand.

As soon as Chaz realizes what he's done, he drops the cookie tin and screams. He grabs for his burnt hand. Chris throws open the kitchen door.

"Well, you ruined a perfectly good batch of cookies and got yourself eliminated. What do you have to say for yourself, Chaz?" he asks.

"This isn't fair!" Chaz screams. "I need medical attention! Now!"

"Wow, what a baby," Chef says. "How'd he pass the boot camp challenge again?"

"Not the point!" Chris says. "The point is, we've got our final two! Ingrid! Nazz! Big money! Who wins it all? Who goes down in flames? We'll find out, next time, on Total! Drama! Cartoon Multiverse!"
The Touching Campfire Ceremony

I stare at the empty campfire pit. Usually we hold the ceremonies here. But there's no ceremony tonight, not after Chaz is gone. It's just me and the stumps.

A television screen descends behind me. Everything is set up, and I'm ready for the finale tomorrow. All I have to do is this one performance tonight.

Now could you please get out of my head? I find the whole first person thing disorienting, and I'm not really a fan of how it keeps switching perspectives. Although I do love how it was used to keep anybody from figuring out that Nazz was the true mastermind of this game until it was more than halfway over.

Seriously. Get out of my head.

A camera focused on Chris. He was standing behind the podium he usually used to announce winners and losers. He grinned.

"Hey, thanks," he said. "I really do prefer third person. Now let's talk about tonight's chapter."

Chris clasped his hands together and looked sincere.

"You know," he said, "it's not easy to get onto Total Drama. For some reason, hundreds of wannabes send in their audition tapes to us every year, hoping for a bite of that juicy fame apple. And the money. But we all know that fame's the real motivating factor, I mean c'mon, have you heard the theme song?"

Chris smirked. "Anyway, every year we release the audition tapes of the lucky contestants to everyone. And because the author is annoyed by the fact that we never release the auditions of the two finalists, they're going to be included in this fanfic. At the beginning, so none of you can draw any conclusions about who wins. Roll it!"

The television screen behind Chris fizzled static and resolved into a clear picture.

A blue-eyed redhead turned on the camera and grinned at it. Behind him were a few people seated at work desks.

"Hey there," he said. "I'm Danny O'Farrell, and--"

"Hey, Danny, what are you doing?" the bald black guy behind him asked.

"I'm trying to make a tape--"

"O'Farrell, if this is about your butt again, I am not participating, you hear me?" a Japanese girl said.

"No, it's about--"

"How a tripod can do your job better than you can?" Ingrid suggested.

"What? No!" Danny said indignantly. "I can't be replaced by a tripod!"

Danny tried to pick the camera up and ended up knocking over the tripod and falling to the floor in a heap.
"I agree," Ingrid said offscreen. "A tripod would never be able to do that."

Chris chuckled. "As soon as we saw that video, we knew we needed to get that bundle of snark into our show. We thought she'd make a good foil for some of our other contestants. Such as..."

Nazz smiled at the camera. "Hey there, I'm Nazz," she said. "Cheerleader and future dentist. Maybe. If my other career choices pan out. I've seen every season of Total Drama, and I think that I'd be perfect for the show. I'm good at working with people, and I totally love brightening everybody's day. If you bring me on the show, I promise, I'll do my best to make it fun for everyone!"

"Yeah, we need optimists to balance out the true stars, the villains," Chris said. "Little did we know that she was going to be a villain. It's almost as if a thirty-second video clip doesn't give you a complete picture of someone's personality. Huh. Anyway, we wanted some more morally ambiguous people on the roster, so we chose..."

A security video came on in black-and-white. A woman wearing a skintight outfit–when it wasn't leaving her skin uncovered–crept into a building by way of a ladder down. The camera followed her as she climbed down a few steps, stopped, and leapt onto the floor it was guarding. She almost stuck the landing, but her left foot skidded on the slick surface, and she landed on the hard floor uncomfortably. She stood up, cracked her joints, and noticed the security camera. Her eyes widened and she ran down the hall, past the camera, and up a flight of stairs. The video ended abruptly fifteen seconds later, as though it had suddenly stopped recording.

"Yeah, somebody straight-up sent in a security video," Chris said. "I know, it was weird and creepy. And it's kinda sad that she croaked after just a few seconds of screentime–or fictime, whatever, point is she croaked really early on. And I seriously don't get what she was even doing in that place, or where it was...yeah. A lot of questions, very few clear-cut answers. But what I can answer is, do we have an audition video for the other corpse? Why yes. Yes we do."

"Okay Kenny, you ready?" the cameraman asked.

Kenny nodded and said something that was muffled by his coat.

"Good. Now you don't get the five dollars until you eat them all, okay?" the cameraman asked.

Kenny looked insulted. He blurted out something that if you strained to listen might have sounded like "Fuck you Cartman, you promised me twenty!"

"You don't get twenty dollars unless you eat twenty rats, Kenny!" the cameraman said angrily.

"Now get eating."

Kenny sighed and picked a rat out of a bucket at his feet. The rat, still very much alive, twisted and squirmed in Kenny's grip and attempted to bite him. Kenny raised his head up, opened his mouth, and dangled the rodent over it tail-first. The rat kept bucking and fighting until Kenny dropped it into his mouth and swallowed it in one swift movement.

"Oh-ho, sick!" Chris and the cameraman commented at the same time.

Kenny picked up another rat. He started to ease it towards his mouth. The cameraman started singing
"Don't stop him now! He's having such a good time. He's having a ball. Don't stop him now! If you wanna have a good time! Just give him a call! He's a shooting star leaping through the skies like a tiger defying gravity, he's a racing car passing by with that chick whose hair covers her titties! He's gonna go, go, go, there's no stopping him! Burning through the sky, yeah, two hundred degrees, nobody calls him Mister Fahrenheit! He's traveling at the speed of light! He wants to make a supersonic man out of you. Don't stop him now!"

As the cameraman sang, Kenny polished off four more rats. He then said something to the cameraman.

"Ooh, yeah, sorry Kenny, I'm gonna have to pay you later. That's okay, right? I mean, you're used to being poor," the cameraman said.

Kenny yelled something, but it was muffled by his heavy parka.

"Hey, maybe I should send this in to one of those reality shows. Make everybody laugh," the cameraman said.

"Well, he sent it in," Chris said. He burst out laughing. "And boy, did I ever laugh! That's some Joe Rogan sociopathy that cameraman is exhibiting! We should bring him on as a consultant."

Chris finished laughing. "Well, that does it for our contestants who are still in the game and for contestants who died. Let's move on to contestants who got kicked out in the conventional way. Starting with a giant loser, or should I say a teeny-tiny last-place finishing loser, Voltar!"

"Doctor Frogg, hold the camera steady!" Voltar complained.

"Voltar, I don't see how this is getting us any closer to world domination," the cameraman said in a strong but unplaceable Eastern European accent.

"What? Frogg! This is to get me on Total Drama!" Voltar whined. "Now hold the camera steady so they can know the face of true evil!"

The cameraman sighed but complied. Voltar let out an evil laugh.

"I, am the mighty Voltar!" he proclaimed. "And you are going to put me on your reality show! Because if you don't, me and the rest of the League of Super Evil will make sure you regret it!"

A large man in green walked by in the background pushing a baby stroller. Inside was a large yellow dog wearing a baby bonnet and sucking on a pacifier. Voltar noticed.

"Red! What are you doing?" Voltar complained.

"Oh, just taking care of Doom," the newcomer said. "He's been feeling nostalgic lately."

Voltar's face assumed a long-suffering look. "Anyway, put me on your show," he said. "Or else!"

Behind him, the man shook a rattle for his dog, ruining any menace Voltar's statement might have had.

"He was a bit Maxlike," Chris said. "But, we didn't have a Scarlett, so we figured why not let him
crash and burn? Of course, our next camper might've been Scarlett, although I don't think that was in the cards..."

Aunt Grandma smiled at the camera. "Hello, I'm Aunt Grandma," she said. "My passion is helping children around the globe. Unlike that phony Uncle Grandpa, I focus on giving kids the tools they need to succeed rather than taking them on random, pointless adventures that have no relevance to their daily lives and that don't help them anyway. But, as it turns out, being Aunt Grandma comes with several significant financial requirements, and I need to find a way to finance my activities. I plan to win the reward on your reality show, and to bring attention to my cause through my competition on your show. Thank you, and remember to have a beautiful morning."

"Okay, she's also kind of hot," Chris said. "That's part of why she got on the show. And why we accepted..."

Major Doctor Ghastly turned on the camera and quickly ran in front of it. "Hey there, this is Major Doctor Ghastly!" An explosion rocked the room. "As you can see, things are pretty busy here at Evil Con Carne."

"Skarr! Fire the missiles!" somebody shouted offscreen.

"Yes, well, we're in a bit of a pickle right now," Major Doctor Ghastly said. "But I'd like to be on your reality show. With my vast intellect, I'll surely have an easy time winning, and will be able to showcase the benefits of—"

"No! Not my good eye!" someone else shrieked.

"Oh, gotta go!" Ghastly said. "But please, if you'd like to pick me for your show, contact me at Bunny Island." The room shook again. "Oh..."

Ghastly ran off to help.

"Yeah. That, plus a belly dancing video we found on the internet..." Chris said. "But our next contestant was picked because we figured we could use some sort of teenage brat on this show. And...roll it!"

Megan scowled at the camera. "So, Melissa thinks this show is so great and says there's no way I'd ever make it on the show. Well, I want to show her up, so why not put me on the show? Seriously, I've seen your other contestants. A bald girl? A juvenile delinquent? A fat guy? A zombie obsessed? Trust me, I can do better than any of them did. Ever. Also that is totally not how Multiple Personality Disorder works!"

Chris shrugged. "What can I say, we needed a brat. This next guy is a whole lot of weird. We thought he'd be a cool underdog for the audience to root for." Chris shook his head sadly. "We were wrong. We were so wrong."

"Hello!" the Angry Scientist exclaimed. "I, am the Angury Scientist. Note, I am not the Mad Scientist, nor am I the Insane Scientist, nor am I the Occasionally Disgruntled Scientist, I am the Angury Scientist. And I want to be on your show SO THAT GENERAL SPECIFIC MAY
FINALLY BE BEING IN THE BUSINESSNESS OF LEARNING MY NAME!"

The Angry Scientist took a few deep breaths and smiled at the camera.

"So, like I was saying, pick me, the Angury Scientist, to be on your show, so that General Specific may finally be in the knowing of my name. Thank you."

"Yeah..." Chris said. "The accent was kind of cool, but his constant statements about being angry rather than mad and his inability to keep his mouth shut about it made him a huge pain in the derriere. So, he ended up leaving. Later than I hoped he would, but he left. And that brings us to the first of Snidely's angels."

A man with a thick beard looked into a camera. The camera had a night-vision lens on, and everything was tinted green.

"Hey. I'm Jim," the man said. "And this? Is Andy."

Jim moved the camera so it had a good view of another man sleeping on the couch.

"Now get ready for the greatest prank video ever," Jim said. He set the camera down and snuck over to the couch with a bowl in his hands. He set it down beside Andy and slowly moved Andy's hand into the water. He then crept back to the camera.

"Watch this. He's gonna totally whiz all over himself," Jim said.

Andy mumbled something in his sleep. A smile spread over his face, and Jim let out a muffled chuckle. As Andy continued to pee, Jim continued to chuckle until he broke into a full laugh. Andy's eyes snapped open.

"What? What's going on?" Andy asked. He rolled over and fell off of the couch, landing facefirst in the bowl of water. He came up sputtering. "What is this? Why is my face wet?"

Andy climbed to his feet and slipped on the spilled water. He fell backwards and smacked the back of his head against a corner of the coffee table. Andy got up, rubbing his head, and stumbled forward. After only a few steps, his foot landed on an empty liquor bottle, and he fell forward again, this time into a bag of junk food. Andy shoved himself to his feet, disoriented, and felt at the bag covering his face. He stumbled around the apartment until he smacked into the door. Andy then felt for the doorknob and pulled it open. As soon as he stepped into the hall, somebody hit him over the head with a frying pan.

"You wanna break into our neighbors' apartment? Huh? Do ya punk?" a voice shouted.

Andy groaned.

"Wait, is that--" the voice asked. A thickly-built bald man bent over and removed the bag from Andy's head.

"Andy?" the man asked, incredulous. He took a closer look. "Did you piss yourself?"

Chris chuckled as he wiped a tear from his eye. "After a demonstration like that, we couldn't help but invite Andy on our show," he said. "This next one came to us as a film reel. Yes, a film reel. Like this was the 1910s or something. But, we converted it to digital, and..."
The curtains of a stage opened on a Canadian Mountie and his horse. The Mountie hopped onto his horse backwards and rode off, stage right. The camera cut to a green-skinned man with a villainous mustache wearing a dark suit and a top hat and seeking to tie a redhead in a blue dress to some railroad tracks. As the villain was finishing his dastardly deed, the Mountie rode by, tipping his hat to them. A few seconds later, the Mountie realized what he had seen, and raced back, rescuing the damsel in distress and capturing the villain.

The camera cut to the villain, standing in a log cabin.

"Hello," Snidely said. "I'm Snidely Whiplash, and I want to be on your show."

A still image of Snidely in a blue circle set on a black background appeared.

"This message paid for by the Snidely Whiplash on Total Drama Fund. The Snidely Whiplash on Total Drama Fund thanks its supporters, most notably the 13th Bank of Canada," an anonymous voice said.

The Snidely in the circle smacked his forehead in annoyance.

A girl with black hair and one giant eye in the middle of her forehead leapt in front of the camera.

"Hey there, I'm Iris," she said. "And I'm gonna show you why I deserve to be on your show!"

The camera cut to Iris leaping onto a trampoline with spring shoes, smacking into a tree branch, and falling to earth, unconscious. Ruby ran up to her.

"Oh no! Iris! Are you alright?" Ruby asked, concerned. Iris didn't respond.

"I have to get her in the house," Ruby said. She pulled Iris onto her back and ran back towards the house.

"Andy had already filled the klutz role," Chris said. "So we went with the kind, caring Ruby Gloom." He frowned. "I still don't understand why she voted herself off. She was in the running for the money." Chris sighed. "Anyway, our next video was also really weird. It was like the Æon video, but more dystopian. And yet, somehow, sillier. Roll it!"

A shadowy figure sat behind a desk in an office.

"Hello, Total Drama producers!" the figure said. "You don't know me. But that's not what's important. What is important is this." The figure held up a picture of a brown-skinned teenager with a shaved head and a light mustache and beard. "This is Gary Coleman. He may refer to himself as Gandhi. But he is not Gandhi. He is Gary Coleman. And he will be the next winner on Total Drama!"

"Wes-ley," a robotic voice said. "Are you sure this is a good idea?"

"Of course, Mr. B.!!" the shadowy figure said. "How better to procure funding for my long-delayed dream, Clo--"
"Are you sure you should be revealing your plans to the world? Wesley?" the robotic voice asked.

"Oh. Of course," the figure said. "You're right as usual, Mister Butlertron. But! Total Drama producers! You will put Gandhi on your show! Or there will be dire consequences!"

The figure fell silent for a few seconds before throwing its hands up. The fingers of the hands were curved and gnarled.

"DIRE CONSEQUENCES!" the figure screamed.

"Yeah, see what I mean?" Chris said. "What I really don't get is how he got the light to do that. I mean, staying completely in the shadows while putting a photograph into the light so we could all see it clearly? It should be impossible! I mean, that was lighting genius! And speaking of lighting genius, this next audition...wasn't."

Steve sat on a sofa in a poorly-lit basement.

"Um, hi," he said. "My name's Steve. I'm an ex-lab assistant, I put in my uh, my resignation a few months ago. And I haven't, uh, been able to um, procure a, uh, a job, so I was wondering if I could be on your show? I uh, I need something to do. I've started, I've started watching anime. And I fear if I don't do something soon, I might end up staying in my basement forever. I might even start reading fanfic. Or worse, writing it! So uh, I'd like to be on your show?"

Steve paused for a few seconds.

"Okay, thanks," he said. "Just, get back to me if you could?"

"My god, that was an ugly set," Chris said. "I mean, it almost looked like some sort of loser lived there! Who does that?"

Chris looked pensive for a moment. "Although Steve did come from New Jersey. That would explain a lot. Maybe he lives in that filth. Because it's New Jersey. Whatever, next clip."

"Hello, Total Drama!" a voice said. It directed the camera to look through the kitchen window of a one-story house. A tall man was making pancakes. "This is Chris. He's in a toxic relationship with Elise." Elise walked into the frame and kissed the tall man's cheek. "So, Total Drama, you want a good contestant? Here you go. You get Elise away from Chris for a few weeks and I know I can help him. She's definitely a good competitor. And with the way Chris eats, she'll jump at the money. So c'mon, Total Drama. Take a chance on Elise."

The camera focused on Elise as she walked out of the room.

"We figured, why not?" Chris said. "Maybe we help fix a dysfunctional relationship. And, if not, she might be interesting. And oh, boy, was she! She had the possibility of going all the way on her skills alone. She shouldn't have robbed that bank, though. Bad choice, Elise. Now let's move on to another villain!"

"Hello!" Boris said happily. "I am Boris Badenov, master of disguise, titan of treachery, and all-around nogoodnik. And I wish to appear on your show. I have an extensive resume dating back to
the 1950s, and if you put me on your show I'll show everyone what a classic villain can do! I'll give them my full arsenal of treacherous tricks and make my homeland of Pottsylvania proud! And remember, if I'm doing it, it's definitely Badenov!"

"Weird thing is, I can't actually remember him engaging in any villainous behavior," Chris said. "I mean, there might have been some villainous behavior somewhere along the line, but I don't remember where. Anyway, our next clip was sweet, and kind, and loving, and it's gonna be nice enough to make you puke."

"Are you sure about this, Raven?" Triana asks.

"C'mon, I know you can do it," the cameraman said. "You're amazing, babe."

Triana giggled. "Oh, Raven."

"No, seriously, you're amazing," Raven said. "I believe in you."

Triana giggled. "Okay, so, my dad's rental place burned down a while ago, and I want to buy him a new one, so I figured, why not come on this show? Oh, and I have magic powers. Watch this."

Triana turned to the side. A rake floated into view. Triana turned back to the camera, and the rake dropped to the ground.

"Yeah, so, I levitated that," she said. "I'm training to get better, but I thought maybe you'd like to see it."

Chris shook his head. "They did a good job disguising the wires, but c'mon. Everyone knows there's no such thing as magic teenagers," he said. "Now, on to a video that's basically a reject from the Web 2.0 era."


The picture appeared upside down.

"And I--"

A racecar zoomed by underneath her, spewing flames behind it.

"Falls Oregon, Oregon Gravity," she said in a robotic voice.

The screen filled with smoke which dissipated into a warped and twisted version of Wendy.

"–aceb wohs ruoy no eb ot tnaw I dnA" she said in an incredibly deep voice. Wendy warped into a picture of an eye.

"–useitsareallycoolshowandIthinkIcouldmakefriendsandbeagoodcompetitorandmaybewinitall," Wendy said in a fast, high-pitched tone.

A fly flew into the eye's lashes and got caught.

"Ahh!" Wendy screamed.
An picture of a fat man wearing board shorts and bending over to show off his bohunkus while winking appeared, obviously green-screened against a red background. The camera switched back to a normal picture of Wendy, rapidly blinking her left eye.

"Geez, that was horrible! You'll edit that out, right?" Wendy asked.

The camera cut to a series of explosions and then an ending title card.

"We figured anybody who would send in that trainwreck is somebody we wanted on our show," Chris said. "Turns out, we were right. This next video was also kind of a trainwreck, but more because of content than because of editing reasons. Roll it!"

Dale was standing in an alleyway, drinking a beer.

"Hey Joseph!" he called to someone off-camera. "Wanna wrestle?"

A blue blur tackled Dale to the ground. Soon, it was revealed as a thirteen-year-old boy, who proceeded to lay a beatdown on Dale.

"Oh god it hurts! It hurts so much!" Dale screamed. "Uncle! Uncle! I give! I give!"

The teenager let go of Dale, and Dale slowly climbed to his feet.

"Okay, good job, son," Dale said, obviously in pain. "You–you really know how to–hwoo."

Dale toppled over.

"We needed a wimp," Chris said. "I still can't believe he got that far. I mean, sure, everybody underestimated Cameron, but he at least had some brains in his head. Dale was...yeah, nobody saw him getting this far. The same can't be said for our next contestant, though!"

Numbuh Two turned on the camera. He backed up a few steps and offered a wave.

"Hey there, I'm Numbuh Two," he said. "And I've got a lot of skills. I make funny jokes, and I come up with cool inventions, and I'm a hit with the ladies! Although they don't seem to know it yet. But they will. Oh, yes, they will. And I'm also really good at flying planes and stuff. If, y'know, that's something you need."

"Okay, so we took him just because of his name," Chris said. "So sue us. Actually, don't, do not sue us!"

"Hi there, my name's Marlowe, and I play bass," Marlowe said. "Check it out."

Marlowe proceeded to play a killer bass solo.

"After the success of the Drama Brothers, we figured, why not put another musician on the show?" Chris explained. "And now, we're down to our final contestant. Chaz. For some reason, the producers liked Topher and wanted another guy like him. So we got this guy. The most ANNOYING competitor of the season. Somebody who was totally self-absorbed and never shut up.
"Hi there, peeps, it's the Chaz, and this is Chaz's Audition Tape!" Chaz sang the last few words. "Why should you let me on your show? Because I'm the Chaz, of course! I'll take your lame little reality production and make it the biggest, the best, the coolest show you'll ever see, ever! That's right peeps, the Chaz will take your show and make it the hottest thing ever. And how's he gonna do that? With this—" he gestured to his body, "—this—" he gestured to his hair, "—and of course this!" He gestured to his face. "Trust me, peeps, you need the Chaz to add his Chazziness to your show. Go ahead and call me when you're ready to put me on, and if I'm busy, leave a message. I'll get back to you. Thanks! Bye."

"So, that's our audition videos," Chris said. "I could spend a bunch of time talking about Nazz and Ingrid. Who will win? Who will go home empty-handed? Who has better attributes, and why? And what's the speculation about the final challenge—I know what it is, but you don't, so we can talk for a while about all that."

Chris smirked. "I'm not an NFL Draft analyst, though, so instead of wasting everybody's time, we're just gonna end the chapter right here, right now. The next chapter will be the finale, so be sure to tune in for the Last! Episode! Of Total! Drama! Cartoon Multiverse!"

*Don't Stop Me Now*: music and lyrics by Freddie Mercury
Nazz

I have to do this.

I have to confront Ingrid. I may never get another chance after this. And I've got nothing to lose.

A few friends made at summer camp. It doesn't seem like a huge price to pay. Losing them? That's something that would've happened anyway. None of us live in the same place, or go to the same school, or, well, have any associations with each other at all. I dunno. It's pretty obvious that as soon as this show was over, we'd all go back home.

It's hard to believe that it's only been twenty-four days. I got on a plane the network paid for, spent a night in a hotel, got driven to a marina and then got on a boat to Wawanakwa. Since then, it's been twenty-two days, twenty-two challenges. All leading up to today and the last challenge of all. I haven't even been away from home for four weeks and I'm in the finale.

And I'm lucky. Megan didn't even last a week. I've managed to make it through this whole grueling quest, and it all comes down to today. One last challenge.

If I could have been told at the start of the game that I'd be in the final two with somebody I called my friend, I would have jumped at the opportunity. But today, it feels like ashes in my mouth.

I knew going in that I'd have to find allies. And I knew that I'd have to sell them out somewhere along the line. But it hurt when they figured it out and turned on me. Especially since I never turned on anybody I liked. Megan? I'd seen her type before. Desperate to be popular, wants to be liked, but isn't exactly likable. Usually because she can't accept that somebody might like her. And Wendy, I could tell that she wanted to be on top. I got the sense that back home she was used to being the biggest fish in her pond. The problem is, I was a bigger fish in this pond. If that analogy makes sense. Or maybe I wasn't a bigger fish, but I was able to take my opportunity where I found it.

Marlowe and Ingrid are good people. And I loved having them as friends. Even if I know one of them would have to go, I sincerely hoped that we could all be in the final three together or something. I did get close to doing that, actually. Three of the final four, and if Marlowe voted with me...

But she didn't. And now it's me and Ingrid.

Ingrid. She figured it out. I was impressed and scared when she confronted me. It took guts to do that. It was the right thing to do. And she was willing to stop being friends with me when she figured it out.

Or maybe I was the one who was willing to stop being friends with her. I lied. When she came after me, I could have admitted it. I could have said that I knew that Wendy was the strongest competitor and we wouldn't be able to get rid of her if we waited any longer. I could have told them why I did it. I could have asked forgiveness. I could have pointed out that none of us really liked her that much; Marlowe was uncomfortable with her, and Ingrid might have been won over by my confession. If I told the truth, maybe Ingrid would have stayed my friend. Maybe Marlowe wouldn't have tried to vote me out. Maybe...

Maybe.
It's too late for maybes. It's not too late to tell Ingrid that I'm sorry.

Ingrid

Breakfast today is bacon, eggs, oatmeal, fresh fruit, milk, and orange juice. When I asked why, Chef muttered that it was for the challenge. That made me suspicious, but everything I took a bite of tasted delicious. I eat the eggs and start on the oatmeal, and I'm halfway through a plum when Nazz sits down across from me.

I quirk an eyebrow at her. She keeps her gaze down and twiddles her thumbs. She's obviously nervous.

I clear my throat. Nazz doesn't react.

I return to the plum. After I finish on that, I go back to my oatmeal. The spoon is close to my lips when I hear her take a deep breath.

I pause, mouth open, and look up. Nazz takes a few more deep breath and looks straight into my eyes.

"I want to apologize."

This is not what I was expecting.

"What do you mean?" I ask.

Nazz takes a deep breath and exhales again.

"You were right," she says. "You figured it out. I voted off Wendy."

I stare at her. "Why didn't you say so?" I ask.

"I am," she tells me.

"You know what I mean," I say. She looks away. "Why'd you let Marlowe think I was the traitor? Why'd you sell me out? Why couldn't you have been honest."

Nazz takes another deep breath. "I was scared," she admits.

"Scared?" I ask.

"Scared you'd vote me off," she says. "That neither of you would want to be my friends anymore. That you liked Wendy more than me."

My mind races. Nazz saw Wendy as competition? Wendy was cool, but Nazz always seemed to be the nicest of us. Probably because she's good at wearing a mask. At disguising how she really feels. She's wearing a mask now, isn't she.

"And how do you think I felt when you turned on me?" I ask her angrily. She leans away from me, startled. "How do you think I felt to have both you and Marlowe betray me? How do you think it felt, having to cast my votes against both of you? Knowing that I'm the reason Marlowe got kicked off because I teamed up with Chaz? How do you think I felt when I realized that you were lying to me this whole time?"
"Well, I--" she stutters.

"And now you come up to me, say you're sorry, you were afraid, all of that--Nazz, that's bullshit. If you were truly sorry, you would've said so sooner. When you had something to lose. You would have apologized as soon as you realized what you were doing was wrong. You would've admitted it when Marlowe was still around!"

Nazz takes a shaky breath, but I'm not done.

"Instead, you let Marlowe think--you tried to make everyone think that I was a traitor. That I sold Wendy out, that I sold you out, that I sold Marlowe out. And here it is, the final two, and you've got nobody's respect to lose by admitting the truth, and you decide to say you're sorry. Nazz, you're not sorry at all! You just feel guilty, and you want me to take you by the hand and tell you it's okay, I don't mind, you were just playing the game! Just playing the fucking game! You want me to sit here and absolve you of the hurt you know you deserve because you don't want to face the facts. Well, here are the facts, Nazz. You're a liar, you're a sneak, and you don't care about your friends. So take your apology, and--"

Nazz is in tears. I stop.

"Forget it," I say. I return to my breakfast. It now tastes like ashes, but I eat anyway.

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**Nazz**

The tears have dried, but the hurt remains.

I think Ingrid may be right. I did lie to everybody. And I did sell people out to save myself. I got rid of Megan to make Ingrid and Marlowe loyal to me. I got rid of Wendy so she couldn't knock me out. And when Ingrid figured out the truth, I lied and said she was bluffing. Maybe that's the best way to play the game, but it's not the most ethical way. Plus, if I don't win today, it'll have all been for nothing.

So was it worth it?

I don't know. Chef got us and led us to the beach a few minutes ago. Chris hasn't shown up yet, but we're standing in front of a line drawn in the sand.

And just as I start to wonder if Chris is ever going to show up, he walks up with a cocky grin on his face and a pistol in his hand.

"Welcome to the last challenge of Total Drama: Cartoon Multiverse!" he tells us. "Today, we've decided to go Olympian!"

"So you weren't inventive enough to come up with your own challenge?" Ingrid says.

"Hey, it's not easy coming up with all-new challenges each season," Chris says. "Even if we did a few rehashes, we had plenty of vaguely original ideas this season. And I'm proud of them." He pauses. "Well, some of them. Point is, today's challenge is the modern pentathlon!"

Ingrid and I look at each other, confused. Chris sighs.

"It's an Olympic event consisting of five different activities," he explains. "Running, fencing, swimming, riding, and shooting. It was created prior to World War One by some guy who thought it summarized the skills an officer would need when stranded behind enemy lines. Of course, machine
guns and cars pretty much removed any need for fencing skills or riding ability, but because the Olympics are stuck in the past this event still exists. And we're lending it legitimacy by including it on this show!" He grins. "Now, each event has a different number of points attached to it. Whomever has the most points at the end wins it all, so no 'I won the first three events and automatically won.' That's not how we're playing this. I spent time setting this up, and we're going to do it right. Understand?"

"Yes," we both say.

"Good!" Chris says. "Then get ready for the running portion!" He raises his pistol. "Get set!" We get ready to take off. "And..."

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**Ingrid**

A gunshot goes off, drowning out Chris's voice. We take off down the sand, digging for the finish line. I take the lead quickly, and run off into the distance.

I still can't believe that Nazz tried to apologize to me at breakfast. Did she think it'd make me go easier on her?

Was she being honest when she apologized? I'd like to believe that she was. That she really did feel remorse for having sold me out. For having sold out Wendy, and Megan, and lied and snuck her way into the final two. For putting me in a position where I felt like I had to vote with Chaz against Marlowe. For--for doing everything that I ranted at her at over breakfast.

But on the other hand, she did wait until now to apologize. She could have done it at any other time and it would have meant more. Here it's just a formality, because it doesn't matter if everyone else knows she lied. It's one on one and she has nothing to lose at this point. Her apology means nothing but my forgiveness would mean something.

And it's possible that she was just playing a psychological trick. Trying to take me off-balance as we entered the finale. Trying to make it so I wasn't as certain of what I was doing. And if that's the case, I'm playing right into her hands by overthinking this.

Not to mention the fact that this is a longer run than I expected. I took off like it was a sprint, and my lungs and legs are starting to kill me. I'm sure I've travelled more than half a mile, but the finish line doesn't seem to be anywhere in sight.

Maybe I'm going in the wrong direction. Chris is cruel enough to not tell us if we lined up wrong.

Or maybe it's a lap around the island.

Wait. I think I see something up ahead.

A checkered banner strung between two poles. I squint and spot a paper ribbon stretched between them too.

The finish line. It's right up ahead.

C'mon, legs. Just a little more. Just a little more.

I stumble across the line, breaking the ribbon. Chef, who was waiting by the finish line, blows a whistle.
"Ingrid wins the running part of the pentathlon!" he declares. "Ten points!"

Nazz

After I figured out that Ingrid was going to beat me easily, I stopped chasing her and started walking. After all, there isn't any sense in wasting all my energy in a hopeless quest. I just have to hope that I can win enough in the next four challenges to take home the money.

Of course, that was before Chef drove up in an ATV with Ingrid and told me to hop in. He got Chris and took us to the top of the cliff. A clearing has been created there. We get placed on opposite sides while Chris heads for the center of the arena.

Chris holds up two large swords. "It's time to fence!" he declares.

Well. That's just great. I'm going to be decapitated on live television.

"Of course, you won't be using these," Chris chuckles. "Not because I don't want you to, but because the lawyers refused to let me get away with it. So instead, Chef?"

Chef tosses us both wooden prop swords.

"The first one to land a killing blow is the winner," Chris declares. "And Chef will be the one deciding what counts as a killing blow." Chef grins. "So get ready to d-d-d-duel!"

"Isn't that—" I start to ask.

"Yes, I know memes get killed as soon as they become mainstream enough to be on TV," Chris says. "But the producers demanded it. Said it would seem more 'hip' and bring in the 'youth demographic.'"

"Isn't the main audience already the youth demographic?" Ingrid asks.

"SHUT UP AND FIGHT!” Chef yells.

I pick up my sword and slowly approach Ingrid. She does the same. We stare each other down and move around in circles, waiting for the other one to strike.

I'm the one who attacks first. I lash out at Ingrid, and she jumps back. She regains her balance and charges at me. I duck underneath her and manage to trip her up, but she rolls to her feet and brandishes her sword at me.

We stand still and silent. Neither one of us makes a move.

Suddenly, Ingrid jumps forward. She doesn't move after that, but the sudden jump is enough to make me stumble backwards. I take my focus off of her while regaining my balance, and when I look back up I see that she's shifted into an attacking position. All she needs to do is run at me.

I run to the side, trying to confuse her. Ingrid shifts her position but doesn't run after me. It looks like I'll have to be the one who attacks. Again.

I swerve towards her. Ingrid's eyes widen, and she throws her sword up when I try an overhand swipe. I'm knocked off balance when she shifts her sword to knock mine away, and she swiftly jabs me in the stomach with her sword. I choke and fall back.

"FINISH HER!” Chef yells.
Ingrid approaches me. I try to crawl away and desperately wave my sword, trying to ward her off. Ingrid swings her sword into the side of my neck.

"THAT'S A KILLING BLOW!" Chef yells. "Ingrid wins the fencing part of the competition! Thirty points!"

_Ingrid_

As soon as I win against Nazz, Chris makes us take an elevator down the cliff onto the beach. I have a gut feeling about what this challenge will be, and if the points for each round continue to grow, this one could be very important if Nazz wants to win. And she probably will win this round.

"This one is the swimming part of our challenge," Chris says. "A simple one hundred meters out, and a hundred meters back. That's all. But here's the twist: you have to do it in your normal clothes! No swimsuits!"

"Can we get rid of our shoes?" I ask. There's nothing worse than walking in waterlogged shoes.

Chris wrinkles up his face. "I guess," he says. "And you can lose the socks too. But nothing else!"

Nazz and I get rid of our shoes and socks and stand at the edge of the water. Chris raises his pistol in the air.

"Get ready...get set...and..."

His pistol goes off, obscuring his voice. Nazz and I rush in to the surf and swim when the water gets deep enough. Although our clothes slow us down, Nazz easily powers ahead of me and takes off for the halfway mark. Even though I know I won't catch her, I still fight to catch up. But by the time I get halfway there, Nazz is already turned around. I keep swimming, but before I reach the midpoint I hear an announcement from the shore.

"Nazz wins the swimming part of the competition! Ten points! Ingrid, just swim back so we can move on to the next part of the competition."

_Nazz_

There aren't any towels for us to dry off in. Instead, Chef just has us sit in the back of his ATV as he drives us back into the woods. As we ride, Chris sets the stage for the next part of the pentathlon.

"The woods of Wawanakwa are deep, dark, and mysterious," he says. "It is said that Wawanakwa is home to mythical creatures that evolution left behind. Or perhaps, that evolution made leap ahead of the rest of us. These creatures are mighty, brutal, and vicious." He grins. "So we thought we'd make you ride one for the riding part of this challenge."

Chef stops the ATV. We get out, and Chris leads us to a clearing.

"A mechanical bull?" Ingrid asks, unimpressed.

Chris shrugs. "Turns out some animal rights activists didn't like it when we used a bull moose way back in season one. So we're going robotic, baby!"

"Didn't that backfire on you during Pahkitew when you used a mechanical island?" I ask.
Chris scowls. "Firstly, it was Scarlett that made it backfire. Not me! Second, this is just a bull. Not an entire island. Now who wants to go first?"

Neither of us step forward.

"Fine," Chris says. "Chef?"

"Ingrid," Chef says. "Let's see what all those book smarts can do on a bull."

Ingrid shuts her eyes and opens them again. She steps forward and gets on the bull.

"Ready?" Chris asks.

Ingrid nods.

Chris presses a button on his remote. The bull bucks into action immediately, spinning and jerking around madly. After a few seconds, Ingrid flies off the bull and crashes into a tree with her left shoulder. She gets up with a pained look on her face.

"Chef?" Chris asks.

"Eight seconds," Chef replies.

"Okay, Nazz! You're up!" Chris says.

I take a deep breath and walk over to the bull. I pet it gently before climbing on. I hold tightly to the handles.

"Ready?" Chris asks.

I nod. Immediately, the bull starts trying to throw me. I hang on for dear life, but I soon get sent flying. I land hard on the ground with the wind knocked out of me. As I gasp for air, I hear Chris and Chef discussing what happened.

"Twelve seconds," Chef says. "Nazz wins the riding part of the pentathlon! Twenty points!"

---

**Ingrid**

"It all comes down to this," Chris says. "One last competition. Ingrid leads Nazz by ten points. Unfortunately for her, this last event is worth fifty."

Nazz and I are in another clearing in the woods. A hundred yards away from us, a large sheet of paper has been set up between a pair of trees.

"So what's this event?" Chris asks. He pauses to increase the tension. "Why, it's nothing other than the shooting competition! And, because Ingrid has the lead, she gets to go first." He pushes a pistol into my hand. "All you have to do is hit that target over there. The first one to break that paper sheet wins."

I take a deep breath. I've never fired an actual gun before in my life. But it should be easy. Right? All I have to do is release the safety, aim, and pull the trigger. Or do I aim, release the safety, and then fire? That sounds right. Assuming it's loaded. I've never loaded a gun.

"Is this loaded?" I ask.
Chris laughs. "Of course!" he says.

Well, that's that. I aim the pistol at the target. Release what I think is the safety. And fire.

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**Nazz**

I don't see anything happen to the sheet of paper.

"That's a miss!" Chris proclaims. "Nazz, your turn!"

Chris hands me a gun. I look it over. I've never held a firearm before. I've never seen one up this close.

Oh well. Time to fire.

I take aim and pull the trigger. Nothing happens. Chris snorts with laughter.

"You have to release the safety," he informs me.

"Like, where's that?" I ask.

"Left side of the gun, by the barrel," he tells me.

I see a lever sticking out on the left side. I release it. Aim again. And fire.

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**Ingrid**

"And after that miss, it's Ingrid's turn!" Chris says. "Will either of these two ever hit their target? Tough to say!"

I grit my teeth, raise the gun, release the safety again, and fire.

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**Nazz**

"Nazz is up!" Chris says when Ingrid misses a second time.

I raise the gun and fire.

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**Ingrid**

Nazz misses.

I shoot again.

I miss.

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**Nazz**

I smirk. My tongue pokes out of my mouth as I focus on aiming directly at the target. I stare down the barrel and fire.
"That's another miss for Nazz!" Chris says. "After another few misses, we'll have to reload. And that would really say something about the abilities of our competitors in a gunfight."

"Hey!" Nazz complains.

"I'm just saying, I wouldn't trust either of you as cowboys," Chris says. I release the safety and pull the trigger.

The world hangs still for a few seconds.

"She did it!" Chef yells. "She broke the sheet! Ingrid wins!"

"That's fifty points for Ingrid!" Chris continues. "Fifty points to add to her total, a 90-30 win, and most importantly, ONE! MILLION! DOLLARS!"

Well. That's it. Ingrid won.

I won.

I can't believe it. I managed to make it all the way to the finale and pull off a win. Somehow, despite thinking I'd be one of the first ones out, I managed to get a win on Total Drama.

And I beat Nazz. I beat her even though she turned Marlowe against me. Even though she got Wendy and Megan kicked out.

An elated smile spreads across my face.

"So there are just a few loose ends to tie up," Chris says. "The money will be presented at the campfire ceremony tonight. And, as a special treat, we've invited everybody back to see the presentation! Three people couldn't make it, for various reasons, but, that leaves eighteen of your fellow contestants to see the presentation! Congratulations, Ingrid!"

I'm happy for Ingrid. But I won't deny that I'm disappointed. All that effort, all that work, the lost friends—all of that was for nothing. And as I stand there, I feel a creeping sickness in my guts. I just know that everything's going to get worse for me when the others arrive.

Everything I did—it didn't matter in the end.

Or maybe it gave Ingrid the win. I probably did help Ingrid get this far by allying with her early on.

It doesn't matter. As much as I want to feel happy for her, Ingrid's victory tastes bitter to me.
That night, every contestant who could make it gathered at the campfire pit for the last campfire ceremony.

"That ought to be good enough," Aunt Grandma said as she tightened a gag around Voltar's mouth. "I must say, you're even more of a troublemaker than that annoying mad scientist over there."

Behind his gag, the Angry Scientist screamed.

"Oh, hush, you," Aunt Grandma said. "Nobody really liked you anyway. But I still don't understand how they could have booted me out. Me! I'm Aunt Grandma! I bring joy to the children of the world! I help children and solve their problems! How anybody could dislike me, I'll never know."

"So where's Triana?" Ruby Gloom asked Chris McLean.

Chris shrugged. "We got everybody we could, but four people were unwilling or unable to return. Triana was one of them." He frowned. "She said, and I quote, 'fuck off.' Yeah. Not the most polite rejection I've ever had."

"Hooray," Ruby said sadly.

"Don't worry!" Chaz said, swooping up to her. "The Chaz is here, and he's much better than boring old Tina."

"Triana," Ruby corrected him.

"Her too," Chaz said. "Point is, the Chaz is going to make this the greatest party of your life."

"I don't think that's possible," Ruby said. "I've been to plenty of great parties back home. Although I suppose it might beat the one with the luna monster. I spent most of that party hiding in the house."

"Right..." Chaz said. "Well, rest assured, this is a party you won't want to miss. Too bad we don't have the Glamazons to help out, but hey! You've got the Chaz."

"Hooray," Ruby said unhappily.

Elsewhere, Snidely Whiplash had decided to talk to Elise.

"What do you want?" she asked him angrily.

"I wanted to ask if you were still upset about our alliance making you a lot of enemies on this island," he said.

"Oh, no," Elise said sweetly. "I got over that a long time ago."

Suddenly, Elise punched Snidely in the kidney. The villain keeled over and choked up some blood.

"Being framed for your bank robbery, however..." she said.

"What do you mean?" Snidely asked breathlessly. "I never--"

Elise kicked him in the throat.
"Say what you want," she told him. "But I know it was you. And trust me, do you know what they do to clowns in prison?"

Snidely coughed and hacked.

"It's nothing compared to what I can do to you. Sleep soundly."

Elise walked away from Snidely's fallen form. She passed a conversation between Marlowe and Ingrid.

"So, uh, this is awkward, but congratulations," Marlowe told her friend. "I'm really happy for you."

"Thanks," Ingrid said.

"And I did see that Nazz sold out Wendy, and that you were right," Marlowe continued. "So, y'know, I'm sorry that I believed her over you."

Ingrid shrugged. "It's okay," she said. "I realize it could have been either one of us who actually did it."

"Yeah, but still, I was wrong," Marlowe said. She noticed raised voices a dozen feet away. "Hey, mind if I run interference for Nazz over there?"

Ingrid raised an eyebrow. "Why would you want to?"

"Because she's my friend," Marlowe said. Ingrid looked at her quizzically. "Yes, I know, but still. I think Nazz is a good person, she just got too competitive and, well--"

"She was just playing the game?" Ingrid suggested.

"Yeah," Marlowe said. "Sure, it wasn't the nicest thing to do, but I can't really fault her. I think she's a good person."

Ingrid shrugged. "Go ahead and defend her then."

Marlowe walked over to Wendy, who was in the middle of giving a verbal beatdown to Nazz. Nazz was just standing there and listening.

"Do you know what it was like, knowing that you betrayed me?" Wendy ranted. "I swear, Nazz, if you ever come to Oregon, I'm gonna--"

"Hey, guys, what's up?" Marlowe said, inserting herself between them. "Say, Wendy, what is Oregon like? I've heard good things but I've never been."

While Marlowe distracted Wendy, Nazz slipped away. Suddenly, she found herself confronted by a sour-faced blonde.

"Oh, hey, Megan," Nazz said awkwardly. "What's--"

"Can the bullshit, Nazz," Megan said. "Why'd you do it?"

"How do you even know about this?" Nazz asked. "Did Numbuh Two tell everyone, or--"

"We got notecards telling us who voted for whom," Megan said. "That's not important. What is important is that you and Marlowe voted for Elise, and Numbuh Two said it was so I'd be the one who got kicked off. Tell me. Why'd you vote for Elise when we all agreed we'd vote for Snidely?"
"I thought Elise was the bigger threat?" Nazz offered. Megan didn't respond. Nazz sighed. "Okay, fine, so Numbuh Two was right. I got you kicked off."

"Oh, well thanks for that!" Megan said sarcastically. "If it weren't for you, I could have gone all the way! I had friends, I had skill, I had everything, and you took it away from me! I can't believe you did that just because you were jealous of me!"

"Jealous? Of you?" Nazz questioned.

"Yeah!" Megan said. "You couldn't stand how I was getting the girls to do stuff together, could you! You couldn't stand not being in charge!"

"Hold on a second, Megan," Nazz said calmly. "Who was the first person here that tried to be your friend?"

"It was--" Megan paused. "You," she finally said.

"And why were you on the chopping block in the first episode, anyway?" Nazz asked.

Megan huffed. "I don't know, probably something stupid."

"Oh come on, I know," Nazz said. "I think it was because you lied about something. But what was it?"

"I don't remember!" Megan said. "And it doesn't matter! Without you--"

"Oh that's right!" Nazz interrupted. "You said you were super popular and had a lot of friends back in Detroit!"

Megan fell silent for a few seconds. Eventually, though, she spoke up. "Even if that's true, it doesn't matter. You killed my chances!"

"Oh really?" Nazz asked. "And what chances were those?"

"Well, I--" Megan started.

"Because if I remember correctly, I was the only one who wanted to hang out with you," Nazz said. "And I was the one who introduced you to Marlowe and Ingrid. And I was the one who kept all four of us working together for the first three days. And meanwhile, you thought you were the top of the world. But without me, you probably don't make any friends. I mean, remember that first challenge? I worked hard convincing people to vote off Voltar instead of you. Because I thought maybe you needed a friend. But three days in and I was fed up with you. Sure, we all could have voted off Snidely or Elise. That might've made things easier. But then I would have had to spend more time with you, and I'm sure that most people would agree that me getting rid of you? That's an acceptable trade-off. Or are you going to get your hundreds of Detroit friends to back you up?"

Megan's face flushed red.

"You. Complete. Bitch!" Megan spat. She leapt at Nazz, and soon they were both tussling on the ground. Chaz smirked as he watched.

"Me-ow, what a catfight!" Chaz said. "On the burn scale, Nazz gave out at least a third-degree to Megan, while Megan's oven wasn't even on! Wow! What a show, folks, am I right?"

"Chaz?" Ruby said.
"Yes, Ruby?" Chaz said.

"Shut up."

Chaz and Ruby weren't the only observers. Most of the other campers were watching the fight. Two of them weren't, however.

"...and then we were left standing at attention in the hot sun because of his stupid policy—which, incidentally, ended up getting him trampled," Major Doctor Ghastly said. "How about you? Anything dumb your boss has ever done?"

Steve shrugged. "His ass once ate his hand."

Ghastly looked at him blankly for a few seconds before bursting out laughing. "That's a good one!" she said. "How does that even work?"

"Oh that's not even the strange part," Steve said. "The strange part was that it then ate the rest of him."

Ghastly stopped laughing and looked at him, surprised.

"You're not joking, are you," she said.

"No, this really happened," Steve said. "He sucked himself into his ass. I was used to this stuff, so I just ordered my hoagie for lunch, ate it, dicked around the lab for the rest of the day, then went home. I came back the next day, and Doctor Weird was just fine." He shivered. "Although still insane."

"That story alone tops anything I have," Major Doctor Ghastly said.

"I have more," Steve said.

"Tell me," Major Doctor Ghastly said eagerly.

"Sure," Steve said. "You know, you're not so bad for a mad scientist chick."

"What's wrong with mad scientists?" Ghastly asked.

"Dr. Weird." Steve said. Ghastly looked at him quizzically. "He once merged our bodies into this weird slime thing where we both had faces."

Ghastly's face wrinkled.

"H–how?" she finally managed to ask.

"I don't know," Steve said. "But..."

While Steve and Major Doctor Ghastly swapped boss stories, Andy French watched the proceedings with a disinterested eye. Every few minutes, he'd reach for something on the ground, feel around for it, look around for it, and then frown when he remembered it didn't exist. Nobody was paying attention to him, so Andy was surprised when Chris sidled up to him.

"Hey, Andy," Chris said softly. "Wanna make a deal?"

Andy looked at him with heavy eyelids and asked "Why?"
"Because I'll make it worth your while, and it won't hurt you any," Chris said.

"Not interested," Andy said.

"You don't have anything better going on," Chris pointed out.

"So?" Andy asked. "You're interested in making our lives worse."

Chris chuckled. "That's true. So how about you help me and go talk to Ruby and Chaz."

Andy turned to fully face the host. "Why?" he asked, completely befuddled.

"Just do it," Chris said. "I think it'd be interesting."

Chris walked away. After a few minutes, Andy sighed, got up, and walked over to Chaz and Ruby.

"Hey, guys," Andy said.

"Andy!" Chaz said happily. "Hey, thanks so much for the whole court thing. It was definitely one of the high points of the game for Chaz fans."

"Yeah, no problem," Andy said. "Hi Ruby."

Ruby tuned away from him, annoyed.

"Oh come on, you can't still be upset that I was in an alliance with Snidely," Andy complained.

"Oh, she can," Chaz said. "But enough about the past, let's talk about the now. So. Why'd Chris send you over to talk to us? Hmm?"

Andy shrank away. "I don't know what you're talking about," he fibbed.

"Oh come on, seriously?" Chaz said. "Give me some credit, I know what I'm doing as a reporter. So. You, Chris, us. What's the dealio?"

"I--I don't know," Andy admitted.

"Really?" Ruby asked suspiciously.

"Really, he just said I should go talk to you," Andy said. "I swear, I'm not lying."

While Andy, Chaz, and Ruby tried to figure out what was up with Chris's instructions--a problem made harder by the fact that both Ruby and Chaz suspected that Andy wasn't telling them everything--Boris, Dale, and Numbuh Two sat together on some stumps.

"You know, even though none of us won, I'm glad I met you guys," Dale said.

"I'm still annoyed that you used a fake name around me," Boris said.

"It's no big deal, I use a fake name in public all the time," Dale said.

"Yeah, Numbuh Two isn't really my real name either," Numbuh Two admitted.

"Really?" Dale asked, shocked.

"And as long as we're disclosing the truth, I suppose I should admit I always wear a disguise and that Boris Badenov isn't really my actual name either," Boris said. "Although I don't know what is. Huh."
I guess I don't even know my real name."

"Anyway, I'm glad I met you all too," Numbuh Two said.

"Me too," Boris said. "Although if we meet again I might stab you in the back. Just a heads-up."

Numbuh Two smirked. "I wouldn't expect anything less."

"Me neither," Dale said.

Suddenly, a sharp whistle blast drew everyone's attention. Chris was standing behind the podium. Next to him was Chef Hatchet, wearing a hot pink dress and carrying a silver briefcase. The fire roared to life.

"And now, the moment you've all been waiting for!" Chris announced. "The presentation of the million dollars to the last! Camper! Standing! Ingrid! Get up here, and take your money!"

Ingrid walked up to Chef. Chef held the briefcase out to her. Ingrid opened the briefcase. A light orange bill fluttered out. Ingrid picked it up and frowned.

"What is this?" she asked.

"It's a hundred dollar bill," Chris said smarmily.

"Why is it orange?" Ingrid asked.

"It's a Canadian hundred dollar bill," Chris said. He smirked.

"Why doesn't it feel like plastic?" Ingrid asked.

"Because the Canadian government is interested in being environmentally friendly and has switched to paper," Chris said.

"Where's the intricate design of Robert Borden?" Ingrid asked.

"We got sick of people confusing him with Lizzie Borden," Chris said.

"And why does this bill say Monopoly on it?" Ingrid asked.

Chris cracked up. When he finished laughing, he wiped a tear from his eye.

"Because you got a million dollars in Monopoly money!" he said happily. "Now, Chef, if you would do the honors?"

Chef pulled on a gas mask. Chris did the same. Everyone looked around, confused.

"Wait, what's going on?" Andy asked.

Chef hurled a ball of something into the fire. The ball exploded into a giant cloud of black smoke that spread out and covered the entire campfire pit.

"Don't worry," Chris said into a microphone in his gas mask. "It's non-toxic."

The world turned black.
So, that's the end of the story.

To summarize: Voltar annoyed everybody. Aunt Grandma creeped everyone out. Snidely's alliance got rid of Major Doctor Ghastly. Nazz split the votes, and Snidely's alliance got rid of Megan. The Angry Scientist annoyed everybody (and screwed up royally). Ruby found out about Snidely's alliance during the snowball fight. Andy got exposed by Chaz and voted off. Snidely ate it when the three girls pulled Steve over to their side. Ruby voted herself off. Gandhi messed up everyone's art projects. Steve left instead of Elise–a decision which Marlowe and Nazz regretted as soon as they learned it was merger time. A game of basketball was played, and Triana was immediately set against the remaining girls. Elise got caught in an RCMP sting that should have picked up Snidely. Boris couldn't tell a joke to save his life. Wendy got the girls to turn on Triana. Nazz turned on Wendy when she thought Wendy was taking control of the unspoken female alliance. Ingrid figured out what was going on and rallied support. Dale Gribble, aka Rusty Shackleford, got kicked off the island because of his cigarette addiction. Chaz teamed up with Nazz and Marlowe to kick Numbuh Two off. Chaz teamed up with Ingrid when he realized Nazz was going to stab him in the back, and they voted off Marlowe. Nobody escaped from jail. Chaz burned his hand and lost his chances at winning. Ingrid managed to hit a target with a pistol, winning it all. The prize was actually Monopoly money. Chef threw a smoke bomb at the wrap party, knocking everyone except for him and Chris unconscious.

So what happens next?

I have a Camp Lazlo fic in the works. It's going to be my first attempt at a shipping fic, so fingers crossed. (Edit: now posted as The Angry Lesbian Diaries.) Also, I'm writing an Underfist fanfiction that will pick up where Underfist: Halloween Bash left off. Hopefully it does a decent job of capturing Atoms' sense of humor and the general feel of Billy & Mandy/what Underfist looked like it would develop into. (Edit: now posted.)

Besides this, I'm thinking of doing a series of songfics based on an album that go franchise hopping. And as for TD:CM, I know there will be a (for lack of a better term) Total Drama Drama Drama Drama Island style fanfic that sets up the sequel to this. Whether such a sequel ever materializes, I can't say; I don't want to make any promises. Regardless, I know how I'd want to conduct such a sequel, I know who would be in the cast, and I know who the final two would be. And I also know that said sequel would take all the problems I saw in Total Drama Action and ramp them up to excessive proportions...you've been warned.

That said, let's talk about the bridge between this and the (possibly nonexistent) sequel.

I plan to call it Corridors. Every contestant will reappear and have an individual challenge, so it'll read more like a series of twenty-two drabbles with one final wrap-up chapter. With any luck, Corridors will start on April 16th and update every day until it's complete.

Now, to everybody who made it this far (and didn't just skip straight to the end): thank you for reading. I had a blast writing this, and I hope you enjoyed reading it (if not, sorry about that). I'd especially like to thank Dm4487 for the Kudo and comments, and I'd like to give a shout-out to ShiveringPixels and the guest who gave me a Kudo. Please feel free to drop me a line in the comments (and I do love Kudos), and have yourself a wonderful life.
That's about it for this long, long wrap-up. I purposefully didn't put notes in the rest of the story to avoid breaking it up, so this is pretty much everything that I wanted to say after completing this. Once again, thanks for reading. Y'all rock.

Sincerely,
Steve Atwater

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!