

Tribal - Episode 12: Bifurcation ©



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42 EXT. YANOMAMI VILLAGE CLEARING - MORNING

It is very early morning. The sun shines through the mist as the jungle din drones in the background. Bill, Young Yanomami and a two other men are packing some light gear while Chief, Shaman, Old Yanomami and some villagers watch. Bill stands and turns to Chief who approaches him.

CHIEF

Good luck. Take this.

Chief hands Bill a pouch. Bill looks inside and sees it has money in it.

BILL

What's all this?

CHIEF

To help you get home. I have no use for this stuff. You take it.

BILL

Are you sure?

(Chief nods)

Thank you. I won't forget you.

CHIEF

You be safe in the dark.

Bill lifts up the talisman, smiling.

BILL

How can I not be?

Bill notices the dog who's been shadowing him sitting at his feet. He bends down to pet him.

BILL

Sorry buddy. I have to go. You stay here in your home.

Bill and the rest turn to go, wave goodbye to everyone and march off into the jungle.

43 EXT. NARROW JUNGLE STREAM - DAY

Bill rides in a canoe with Young Yanomami and the others through the thick jungle for a couple days. Eventually the stream empties into the much bigger Rio Negro.

44 EXT. JUNGLE NEAR BARCELOS ON RIO NEGRO - DAY

A light rain falls as the canoe pulls up to a small dock.

YOUNG YANOMAMI

This is as far as we go. You walk down this path to Barcelos. You can get boat called Yolanda. Captain is Norberto, big guy with a funny hat.

BILL

(shaking hands)

Thanks. I hope we meet again. Perhaps you can visit New York someday?

YOUNG YANOMAMI

Yes. That will be good.

Bill waves to the others who stare back blankly and starts walking towards town, then looks back.

BILL

And maybe we can see the Red Hot Chili Peppers!

Young Yanomami smiles reservedly.

45 EXT. RIVER BOAT YOLANDA - EVENING

The boat is small, carrying a few locals getting ferried upriver by the captain, NORBERTO, 50s, and mate, JOÃO, 20s. Norberto is a dark, chain smoking mestizo, sporting a sweat stained straw hat. João drives the boat while Norberto talks Bill's ear off on the fore deck. They're both in yard chairs, drinking beer.

NORBERTO

Yes, I go as far as San Carlos in Venezuela. Above that it's not too safe.

BILL

Why is that?

NORBERTO

FARC. They're a crazy guerrilla group who operate out of Columbia. They make money with cocaine and kidnapping. Bad news.

BILL

Colombia?

NORBERTO

Yeah, once we pass Cucui, the river forms the border between Columbia and Venezuela. From Cucui it's about 80 kilometers to San Carlos. Pretty safe but still best to stay close to Venezuelan side of the river. It's north of San Carlos where it gets dicey.

Norberto opens a new beer, offers one to Bill and sighs.

BILL

Have you been sailing this river long?

NORBERTO

My whole life. I was born in Novo Airão. It's a little town back down the river near Manaus. People live by fishing and taking tourists from Manaus on day trips. I find that boring so I do the longer trips up to Venezuela and back. Places where roads don't reach. Do some fishing. You never know what you're going to see.

A few beats of silence.

NORBERTO

So, where you heading to if you don't mind me asking?

BILL

Caracas.

NORBERTO

Aaagh! Dirty town. Beautiful country but the city itself is disgusting now. So much poverty. People aren't friendly there. And that nut president they got now. They worship him like a god.

BILL

I was born there.

NORBERTO

Really? I'm sorry, I meant no disrespect.

BILL

None taken. I left when I was young. I'm looking for a friend there and then moving on to New York which is my home.

NORBERTO

You do know I only go as far as San Carlos, right?

BILL

Yeah, you said that earlier. But the Indians I was staying with said you could get me close but I don't see how. Doesn't Rio Negro dead end in the Columbian jungle?

NORBERTO

Well, yes. There is a way but...which Indians were you with?

BILL

Yanomami.

NORBERTO

What did they look like?

BILL

Pretty much all the same. The chief was a little more decorated. He liked cigars.

NORBERTO

That could be any tribe in the Amazon.

BILL

They wouldn't tell me their names.

NORBERTO

Yeah, that's a taboo with them.

BILL

The chief's son, the one who got me to Barcelos and pointed me towards you...he wore a Red Hot Chili Peppers t-shirt. You know, the band?

NORBERTO

OK, now I know who you're talking about. I gave him that shirt. We're good friends. They helped me out of a jam once and ever since I've always tried to help them when I could. But this I can't do for you. Too risky.

Bill nods, sips his beer and suddenly has an idea and gets up.

BILL
I'll be right back.

Bill returns with a wad of cash which he hands to Norberto.

BILL
There's about two thousand reales there.

Norberto eyes wide. He thumbs the money and looks at Bill smiling.

NORBERTO
I suppose I could make an exception in your case. A friend of my friends is a friend of mine.

BILL
Hey, they helped me out of a jam too.

46 EXT. SAN CARLOS DE RIO NEGRO - EVENING

All the other passengers have long since disembarked. João loads a few boxes of supplies while Norberto secures a dingy to the back of the Yolanda.

NORBERTO
It is best we depart at night so as to not attract too much attention.

BILL
What's the little boat for?

NORBERTO
Back up. You never know what you'll run into up river.

JOÃO
That's the last of it.

NORBERTO
Alright, let's wait until dark. Then we go.

47 EXT. RIVER BOAT YOLANDA - NIGHT

The Yolanda chugs along under a moonless, starry night, hugging the Venezuelan shoreline. With no light pollution the Milky Way is visible across the sky. João sleeps on a

crate and Bill dozes in a chair while Norberto helms the boat, occasionally glancing nervously behind and over towards the Columbian side of the river. All is black however.

48 EXT. RIVER BOAT YOLANDA - LATER

Norberto is peering through binoculars back towards the Columbian side of the river. He sees a faint light through the haze a couple miles back moving away from the shoreline, another boat. He watches for a few more seconds, throws his cigarette into the water and kicks João's foot. Bill stirs.

NORBERTO

We got company.

BILL

Who is it?

NORBERTO

I don't know. Maybe no one, local fisherman perhaps. Could be FARC. You just don't know around here. Best not to take chances.

Norberto signals to João with his eyes and a nod. João picks up a bag, pulls the dingy up along side the boat and hops in. He starts pulling stuff out of the bag.

BILL

What's he doing?

NORBERTO

(grins and laughs)
A secret mission!

When he sees the quizzical look on Bill's face his tone becomes more serious.

NORBERTO

Don't worry. Whoever it is they're pretty far back. You just relax and watch.

LATER

NORBERTO

Almost ready?

João climbs back into the boat and lets the dingy drift back behind the boat.

JOÃO

OK

NORBERTO

Another minute. On my signal.

João stands ready by a fuse box in the cabin. Bill looks confused. Norberto brings the boat to a complete stop.

NORBERTO

Hold. Hold. Now!

João simultaneously flips one switch on and the other off, causing lights on the dingy to turn on and lights on the boat to turn off. He then flips another switch which starts the motor on the dingy, then races to the back of the boat, untying the rope and setting the dingy free.

NORBERTO

(to Bill)

Hold on.

Norberto carefully steers the boat to the right and into another feeding stream while the dingy continues up the Rio Negro. After a ways he pulls the boat behind a small island and shuts off the engine. He and João both pull out rifles and sit, gazing back towards the Rio Negro.

NORBERTO

And now we wait.

After a few minutes they see the boat that had been behind them sail past and on up the Rio Negro. Norberto pulls out a few beers from the cooler, smiling.

NORBERTO

Oh, the suspense!

BILL

You've been through this before?

Norberto and João have a good laugh.

NORBERTO

Yeah, me and João know the drill, ha! But now we need to keep moving in case they discover our prank and decide to chase us. FARC usually doesn't come up here, too deep into Venezuela but you never know.

Norberto fires up the engine and moves out.

BILL

Where does this take us?

NORBERTO

To the Orinoco.

BILL

Orinoco? I didn't think it was connected to the Amazon.

NORBERTO

This is what they call the Casiquiare. It's what they call a bifurcation flowing out of the Orinoco and into the Negro. Not too well known. I can get you up to Santa Rosa which is near the road. From there you can hitch a ride up to Puerto Ayacucho and then catch a bus to Caracas.

BILL

Well, I'll be damned.

Norberto smiles smugly.

49 EXT. SANTA ROSA DOCK - DAY

Norberto and Bill stroll off the dock.

NORBERTO

Route 12 is a kilometer or so that way. Puerto Ayacucho is about 100 kilometers north. Just make sure you stay on the road. There are farmers and miners up and down this road so someone will give you a ride.

BILL

I can't thank you enough.

NORBERTO

Always glad to help my friends. Be careful in Caracas. It's turned into a jungle since you lived there.

BILL

I will.