

'There is a tremendous impulse to voyeur, we de-personalize ourselves.'



On the CBS hit game show Survivor, 16 contestants are voluntarily stranded for 39 days on Pulau Tiga, a tiny island in the Malaysian state of Sabah, off the coast of Borneo.

Surviving the Survivor phenomenon

BY PATRICK CASEY
Staff Writer

A month ago, the only television programs Mike Ford watched emulated the Outdoor Life Network. Today, Survivor takes precedence over a life enjoyed outdoors.

Scott Olson is a cynic when it comes to viewing reality-based programming, but like many of his industry colleagues, the Thornhill-based associate television producer can't survive without Survivor.

And Holland Landing's Samantha Timbers raced from a restaurant with her mother last Wednesday evening, realizing they had 10 minutes to dash home in time for Survivor's fourth episode.

"I had forgot to set my VCR, so we got our bill and ran for the exit. We made it home with one minute to spare. We just couldn't miss it," rationalized Timbers.

Of course, they're all passionately hooked on Survivor, a televised game show where 16 contestants are voluntarily stranded for 39 days on Pulau Tiga, a tiny island in the Malaysian state of Sabah, off the coast of Borneo.

With the clothes on their backs and one other item of their choice, the players are divided into two tribes — Pagong and Tagi — with one member voted off the island every three days. Once it's down to two remaining players, the previous seven participants return to cast the crucial vote, with the eventual winner awarded \$1 million (US).

It has become the most successful summer program since the Sonny & Cher variety show and may well be one of the strangest shows to hit the airwaves since ABC introduced Cop Rock, where lawyers, informants, junkies and cops would burst into song at a

moment's notice.

But to Ford, who spends his days working at Camper's Place Inc. in Newmarket, Survivor will remain must-see TV until the 13th and final instalment is aired on Aug. 21, when ratings are expected to exceed the 24 million U.S. viewers glued to last week's show.

"I just love it," he said. "It allows you to see these people and learn their personalities. The idea of having to choose between themselves to remove people from the island is fascinating."

"I don't think there are many positives that come from TV and I can't see wasting my time watching some lame sitcom. But as far as I'm concerned, I'd love to be on Survivor, I'm a competitive soul at heart and it caters to my way of life. I couldn't care less about Who Wants to be a Millionaire."

"It's surprising I'm this involved in a TV show, but it taps in to the elements of life I enjoy," Ford added.

Survivor is a knock-off of Expedition Robinson, a Swedish television show that's been drawing huge ratings for the past three years.



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

Mike Ford, Survivor fanatic.

With similar ventures in Denmark and Switzerland, producer Mark Burnett received more than 6,000 applications for contestants willing to brave harsh tropical storms, poisonous monitor lizards, pythons and deadly sea snakes, all the while eating charred rats, sunfish, fruits, nuts, berries and a tapioca-like substance made from rice plants.

A cross between 60s TV hit Gilligan's Island and Lord of the Flies, the brilliant 1954 novel by William Golding about a group of stranded boys who turn into barbar-

ians, Survivor has tapped our subconscious where, as voyeurs, we peer through the world's looking-glass.

After all, if our life is boring and mundane, someone else may be experiencing excitement and adventure.

"Anybody that uses the Internet knows there are quasi-pornographic sites around where video cameras are stashed and people are unaware they are being observed."

See WHO, page 15.

SURVIVOR WEBSITES

• **cbs.com** — On the CBS home site is a link to the network's hit show Survivor, where viewers can get caught up on the previous week's episode, listen to the final words of the contestants booted from the island and get a glimpse into an upcoming edition. But a word of warning, the site crashed three times while attempting to log on.

• **http://maxpages.com/survivor** — A site completely dedicated to the Survivor series, visitors can view pictures and read bios of all 16 contestants from the Pagong and Tagi tribes, with the faces of the eliminated players crossed out in red ink. Pictures of their island arrivals have also been downloaded, as well as the slugs consumed in episode number 2 and updates on immunity challenges.

• **survivorsucks.com** — The site's organizers, who claim to have been tipped off by an island insider, post weekly predictions of who will be next off the island. Last week, they were correct in stating Dirk Been was history.

• **www.thetelevine.com** — The site is a tribute to some of the top television shows in history, where visitors can talk with the stars and fans of the shows, using a password to enter chat rooms, post messages on bulletin boards and interact using instant messaging.

• **washingtonpost.com** — Television critic Tom Shales' intriguing article on Survivor is posted on the site, where he ponders why viewers have "patience for such contrived, gimmicky, ultimately pointless and dehumanizing entertainment".

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