

Surviving:

OK, I admit it. I watched most of the episodes of Survivor last season. OK, not just watched but rooted and voted and participated in a pool and was glad I picked the winner. I've watched most of the episodes this season. So I guess that weakens my position on top of this soapbox. I have also watched replays of sports injuries, automobile crashes and war footage. We all have our faults. Here are my thoughts on this bit of reality TV, anyway.

First. Get rid of the remote, dangerous, beautifully photographed locations. When you look at what the crux of the show is, why not just shoot it in a studio somewhere on the mainland of ...anywhere. All that matters is whom you cut, whom you fool, how you maneuver, when you smile and when you smooch. Well, those aren't the only things. It also matters a lot how you spin and cover your cutting, fooling, maneuvering, smiling and smooching. These are "skills" that can be practiced anywhere. You just have to be sure that the contestants don't wear much in the way of clothing. When it comes to dishonesty and sex a great location is not necessary.

Second. Stop with the eating of raw, captured, dug up or crawling food. The show is carefully and expensively produced. This means there is a large video and audio crew. There is a big support staff. There are medical personnel. There are drivers, gaffs, grips and script people. There is a trailer for Jeff and someone to do his laundry. There is a catering crew that makes the meals for all these people. And all of these people are just a few feet off camera. My hat is off to the players for pretending not to notice them.

Third. Please do a two-hour special on the editing of the show. It is masterful. How far is it to tribal council, really? On every show they seem to start rowing in the morning and arrive at council long after dark. My suspicion is that Council Island is just off-camera. It's an editor's mastery of her craft that turns a stroll into a forced march. How much time is *really* spent explaining each challenge? I want to see the cast sitting down with their handbooks going over what is expected of them in any given episode. No one ever seems to make a verbal miscue. No one ever stutters, repeats, forgets or breaks down. For spontaneous, secretive, dangerous speech this is truly remarkable. I would like to see the hours of flubbed lines and nonsense that are on the cutting room floor. I would like to see the interviewers for once coaching the cast. "Rocky, one more take, big guy. This time with a little heavier accent."

Fourth. And then I'll get off the box. I would so love to see the audition tapes sent in by the people who get chosen for the show. I actually know a guy who sent one in. His angle was to try for the "older" ex-astronaut type that the show usually casts. Knowing how good his was, I would like to see the ones that worked. His didn't. What qualities do they look for? Is the executive producer surrounded by also-producers who share his *standards*? Can this level of artistic integrity actually be shared with underlings? What sort of characters are best suited for the game? How can you tell when someone is just right? I mean aside from their pecs and glutes. I guess you just have to have an eye for things, like how the world divides up ethnically. Insightful.

So I guess I've answered my questions about the show for myself. What makes Survivor work is the players' ability to manipulate the situation, a huge production staff disguised as palms and coconuts, fabulous editing back in LA and Mr. Burnett's eye for some of the things that are truly unlovely about humans.

The combination is unbeatable.