



# SURVIVOR

## – THE REALITY SHOW

BY LIN ROY

When the American media conglomerate CBS first featured 'Survivor' in the year 2000, it turned television viewing on its head, so much so that it pulled in 15.5 million viewers! Its success in America showed the high potential for programmes that record real people doing real life things. Interestingly, the format was first developed in 1992 for a United Kingdom television production company, inspired by reality shows that were already trending in Europe. Currently, 'Survivor' is a television franchise that is produced in many countries around the world.



So, what is exciting about the reality show? It has elements of 'Lord of the Flies' and 'Treasure Island' where adventures, uncertainties and challenges await contestants who are stripped off the modern day's conveniences by placing them in deserted locations. The contestants or <sup>1</sup>castaways must survive the natural elements, construct shelter, build fire, look

for water and <sup>2</sup>scrounge for food and other necessities. They are split into tribes and assigned separate camps. The objective is to outlast the others and emerge the overall victor to claim the \$1 million prize. This makes for a <sup>3</sup>riveting reality show especially when the tribes face off in challenges for rewards of food, shelter, luxury items or immunity from being voted out.

Another interesting aspect is that ‘Survivor’ records total strangers in a constant flux of collaboration and competition. They fend for themselves for the entire length of the game, generally around 39 days, delighting viewers who like the <sup>4</sup>authenticity and at times, unpredictability, of unscripted reality shows. For example, audiences were reminded just how dangerous and real the game was when Michael Skupin fell asleep and into the fire in the Australian outback, burning the skin off his hands in the process. Or when John Carroll, in Marquesas, demanded that someone pee on his hand that had been pierced by a sea urchin for the cool relief that only fresh urine could provide. With unplanned and unexpected content, ‘Survivor’ makes for an exhilarating viewing.

While ‘Survivor’ has a huge fan base and has many outstanding features it does have its naysayers. Reality television is ultimately designed by the director’s vision of what makes a good show. Consequently, several contestants have expressed disappointment at how they were featured under the director’s cut. Others <sup>5</sup>lamented the scenes that had been deliberately omitted. Critics also expressed disappointment at the lack of diversity in the casting of the contestants. Despite this, the contestants have been thankful to have been a part of the reality show with many leaving the show with newly acquired survival skills, among others.

At its core, ‘Survivor’ is a social experiment that aims to, in the words of its award-winning host Jeff Probst, “outwit, outplay and outlast” its rivals. It is no wonder then that the show has been running for close to 20 years in the United States!



## Word Bank:

- 1 castaways:** people who have escaped from a ship that has sunk, and managed to get to an island or country where there are few or no other people
- 2 scrounge:** to get things, especially money or food, by asking for them instead of buying them or working for them
- 3 riveting:** extremely interesting
- 4 authenticity:** the quality of being real or true
- 5 lamented:** expressed sadness or felt sorry about something



Will you be keen to join a reality show on survival? Why, or why not?