

'Survivor': The pests, players and places

Vecepia Towery prepared for her victory by working out on the monkey bars of her local playground.

Sue Hawk, lacking a pen, edited her famous "rats and snakes" speech with an eyeliner pencil.

Rupert Boneham, on learning that there would be a \$1 million viewers' choice award in addition to the usual prize, immediately thought: That million is *mine*.

These tidbits are brought to you by this week's "E! True Hollywood Story," a deluxe two-hour look at the phenomenon that is "Survivor."

TELEVISION



JOANNE WEINTRAUB

WHEN TO WATCH

What: "The E! True Hollywood Story: Survivor"

When: 7 tonight, repeated 10 tonight, 7 p.m. Tuesday and noon Saturday

Where: E!

Bachelors come and apprentices go, but "Survivor" lives up to its name.

Some 50 million people watched the first season finale in 2000. The viewer numbers for the recently wrapped ninth edition have been less than half that, yet the show still finishes in the top 10 every week it's on.

Producer Mark Burnett, who adapted

"Survivor" from the Swedish series "Expedition Robinson," recalls that he tried to sell the show for more than a year before a network wanted to buy it.

Then came the summer of 1999 and an unlikely smash hit called "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire" that pulled

ABC out of a ratings tailspin.

CBS executives, hungry for younger viewers, decided that a game show might not be such a bad idea after all. Even then, Burnett says, he sold the show only after promising that he'd work along with CBS to sell advertising.

Though neither Burnett nor the network people will discuss "Survivor" costs, it is not cheap to produce. The crew for the first edition was a substantial 150; for the elaborate ninth one, set on the South Pacific island of Vanuatu, the total rose to 400.

Team bandannas and survival rations come cheap, but custom-built water-and sewage-treatment facilities do not.

Neither do the five-star tourist accommodations in which the losers loll, sometimes for weeks, between the time they're voted off the team and the day they return to take part in later votes or on-camera reunions.

The locations, which have ranged from an Amazon rain forest to remote corners of Australia and Africa, are part of the "Survivor" mystique.

So are the exotic predators: sharks in the Pearl Islands, spiny sea urchins in the Marquesas, lions in Kenya, food-filching monkeys in Thailand and bugs — flying, crawling, creeping, biting, stinging — virtually everywhere.

But the players — many of whom do some creeping, biting and stinging of their own — are the real reason millions of viewers keep coming back to "Survivor."

There was Rupert, an audience favorite for his sunny personality and rumpled looks.

Sue, the former Wisconsin trucker who now lives in Las Vegas, became an overnight celebrity when she ended the first season with a blistering speech denouncing runner-up Kelly Wiglesworth — a speech, she notes proudly, from which she took pains to eliminate the most colorful terms from her trucking days.

Every cast has its con-

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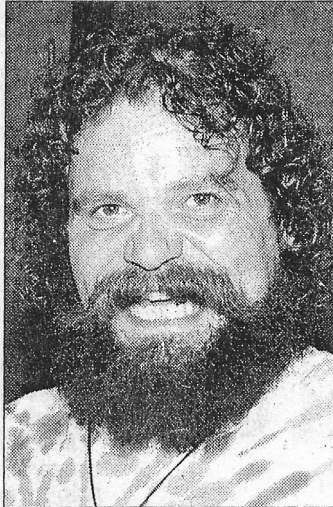
WEINTRAUB, From 1E

nivers and backstabbers, its whiners and slackers, starting with Machiavellian winner Richard Hatch of the very first season and including such love-to-hate-'em personalities as the pugnacious Jerri Manthey, the whiny Kimmi Kappenberg and the outrageous Jon Dalton, who smirkingly called himself "Jonny Fairplay" and then told a whopper about a dead grandmother to get the sympathy of his teammates.

Some two dozen of the most popular players are on hand to dish to E!, nearly all of them looking far more glamorous than in their un-shampooed, half-starved, sometimes literally flea-bitten "Survivor" days. Here and there, the kiss of Botox or the like is evident.

One exception is Rupert, who still has the appealing look of a favorite stuffed animal who's been left in a puddle and hung up to dry on a clothes line.

And yes, by the way, he was absolutely right about the viewers' choice prize awarded



Rupert Boneham, from the seventh "Survivor," won hearts.

near the end of "Survivor: All-Stars" earlier this year. Amber Brkich won \$1 million for outplaying everyone else — thanks in part to her alliance with fellow player and fiancée Rob Mariano — but when it came to the popularity contest, that million was Rupert's.

Sue Hawk, too, was among the 18 veterans who returned



Sue Hawk made an enemy or two on the first "Survivor."

for "All-Stars," but she wasn't as lucky. Like most "Survivor" alumni, she gets interview requests and shout-outs at the shopping mall, but she's hardly living the high life.

"I'm famous without the fortune," she grouses with Sue-like candor. "That's B.S."

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