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Survivor: Vietnam!

nytheatre.com review

by Martin Denton · May 17, 2003

Rob Reese—actor, writer, director, improv teacher, and [world traveler](#)—can now add Ultimate Capitalist to his impressive *curriculum vitae*. In *Survivor: Vietnam!*, his new parody of a certain very popular reality TV show, now running late nights at People's Improv Theatre, he gives the world the consumer product that it's been waiting for. It's called "Wipe 'N Go, the completely disposable two step cleaning system": all you need to do is open the package and then throw it away and you're done (see, two steps).

I give away just this one of Reese's dead-on satirical barbs to show you how on-target his writing is. In two hilarious, brilliantly-crafted "commercials," Reese both deconstructs and fires cautionary warning shots at the state of marketing (and consumer gullibility) in America today (he presses some other buttons as well). Performed simply at two microphones by Reese and Jason Evans, they're neat gems of comic wisdom, all by themselves worth the price of admission to this subversive little show.

Which is not to imply that the rest of *Survivor: Vietnam!* isn't worth your time. It is, but as sometimes happens in the world of TV, the commercials really are the best part. The premise of *Survivor: Vietnam!* is that a desperate network has set its newest reality show in the midst of the Vietnam War. Never mind the fact that this war ended some thirty years ago; the media honchos have thoughtfully recreated it, bombing raids and all. Oh, but this time a lot of the Viet Cong are portrayed by beautiful models in skimpy bathing suits.

Reese gives us six rather typical contestants to rough it through combat for a chance at a multi-million dollar prize. There's ditzzy vegan Julia (Julia Motyka), naive student Mike (Marcus Bonn e), vaguely lascivious warrior Orf (Daniel Berman), militant feminist Erica (Eric Brenner, in extremely unconvincing drag), and a married couple, controlling Angela (Angela DiGenarro) and her doormat of a husband, Darryl (Darryl Reilly). Egged on by annoyingly chipper host Kennedy-Johnson-Nixon (Nitra Guitierrez), they are made to play "games" like a version of Russian Roulette involving six beer cans (one of the cans has been pre-shaken so it will explode when smashed against someone's head). The women are also encouraged to lift their t-shirts frequently. It's just like TV.

Of course, even as his spot-on parody of this or that reality show goes its merry way, Reese has something a bit darker up his sleeve. Eventually, the remaining survivors find themselves up against authentic danger, perpetrated by an exec-gone-mad named Kurtz. They (and we) wind up in Conrad country, exploring the limits to man's capacity for exploitation and evil (or, more accurately, the apparent lack of such limits) as *Survivor* morphs into *Apocalypse Now*.



Not that things get too serious: the finale is a silly, slapstick combat-chase sequence that feels as much like Keystone Kops as anything; Reese's primary objective is to keep us laughing, and he succeeds. Especially with those two commercial interruptions.

The company is fearless and enthusiastic and maintain the requisite high energy level to put over the gags. The staging is simple and minimalist, as befits a director whose roots are in the world of improv; don't worry, you've seen enough of the kind of TV this show is parodying to fill in all the blanks in your mind's eye.

Survivor: Vietnam! runs Saturday nights at midnight, which is an appropriate hour for this kind of gleeful subversion.

You can read writer/director Rob Reese's account of his recent trip to Southeast Asia in [nytheatre on the road](#).

Last update: 09 June, 2003

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THEATRE

People's Improv Theatre
154 West 29th St

OPENED

May 17, 2003

CLOSES

June 28, 2003

PERFORMANCES

Sat at 12midnight

RUNNING TIME

1 hour

TICKETS

\$5
212-563-7488

CAST

Daniel Berman, Marcus Bonnée, Eric Brenner, Angela DiGenarro, Jason Evans, Nitra Guitierrez, Julia Motyka, Rob Reese, Darryl Reilly

AUTHOR

Rob Reese

DIRECTOR

Rob Reese

PRODUCING COMPANY

Amnesia Wars