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# INSIDER



MAN DOWN: FITZGERALD AND PHILLIPS

## A View to a Kill

**SURVIVORS WOULDN'T LAST A DAY AGAINST THE GUN-TOTING CONTENDERS**

**S**urvivor's losing contestants are "voted off," while players on *The Mole* are "executed." But what do unlucky *Contenders* get? They're killed. Literally.

Just when you thought "reality" couldn't get any harsher, along comes "Series 7," a film that satirizes reality TV by imagining how low the latest programming craze can go. "I had to have the highest stakes possible," says writer-director Daniel Minahan, 37. "I just thought, 'Let's take it to its extreme.'"

Minahan's movie, which was the hottest ticket in town during the recent Sundance Film Festival and will be released in March, tracks a reality-TV series called *The Contenders*. Drafted by a covert government agency, the game's six players are forced—"for the entertainment of our television viewing masses," jokes Minahan—to assassinate their competitors.

Thus, a well-armed old man hunts a teenage girl while a Catholic nurse stalks the show's reigning champion, the very pregnant Dawn (Brooke Smith). In order to win, Dawn must take

out the competition—including a dying man (Glenn Fitzgerald, above, with Angelina Phillips) who was her high school sweetheart. "It's a tough film to watch," says Smith. "Hey, it was a tough film to make. I almost threw up after the first scene."

In the movie's opening sequence, Dawn storms into a convenience store and guns down a fellow Contender at the checkout counter; neither the store's clerk nor Dawn's cameraman (who's wearing a bulletproof vest) seems shocked. "I tried to create this inside-out world where entertainment reigns supreme," says Minahan, a self-described reality-TV junkie ("I couldn't stop watching *Cops!*") who wrote "Series 7" in 1995—well before *Survivor*.

With the networks upping the shock value by airing such shows as Court TV's canceled *Confessions*, Fox's *Temptation Island* and UPN's planned *Manhunt*—in which "bounty hunters" will pursue their contestant "prey" with fake weapons—the-reality game show hybrid is ripe for Minahan's parody. "I think [a show like *Survivor*] is really mean-spirited," he says. "It's all about exclusion, hatred and negativity." But don't expect him to denounce reality TV. "I would be a hypocrite if I did that because, well, I can't stop watching." —*Rochell D. Thomas*

## Wise Quacker

**QUEER DUCK RETURNS FOR A SECOND SEASON**

If it walks like a duck and talks like a duck but stalks Barbra Streisand, then it must be *Queer Duck*—the hilarious Internet series (which returns this month on [www.icebox.com](http://www.icebox.com)) about a web-footed male nurse who really gets into being out of the closet.

One of three hits spawned by [icebox.com](http://icebox.com) (the others, *Starship Regulars* and *Zombie College*, recently landed pilot deals with Showtime and Fox), *Duck* has an eclectic cast with strong TV ties. Created by Mike Reiss, former executive producer of *The Simpsons*, its star is voiced by Jim J. Bullock, aka bumbling Monroe from the '80s sitcom *Too Close for Comfort*. *Seinfeld*'s Estelle Harris plays his mom; RuPaul sings the theme song; and *Futurama*'s Billy West and *The PJs*'s Kevin Michael Richardson voice Openly Gator and Bi Po-



lar Bear (above, with Duck). "I wrote the theme song in 1984," says Reiss. "[Years later] I created the show to match the song." Now that's what we call winging it. —*Jim Colucci*