

2,384 words

Alone in the Woods Surrounded by Monsters on an Island

By Aigner Loren Wilson

Day One

We find our contestants getting their bearings and searching for a safe spot to rest for their first night before the challenge truly begins. As always, each season the contestant who survives the longest gets a brand new home and to return to their family a person transformed. The ghosts of horror that they have seen lingering in the backs of their eyes so that their families wish they died on Monster Island instead of returning to haunt the halls of their new hard-won paradise.

Our first contestant Howard has been dropped off at the center of the island, which as long-time viewers know is the area with the most attacks and sightings of The Barizza, a legendary beast with razor-sharp genitals and long claws that drag beside their furry raptor-like

legs. Howard is absolutely unaware of where he is and is spending some time enjoying the small rays of sun shining through the branches near his drop spot.

“What they don’t tell you—when you’re sitting at home, you know, all you think about is the monster in the bushes behind the guy you’re watching, but when you’re actually out here, and this is what they don’t tell you—it’s really fucking beautiful.

I mean absolutely stunning. If you could see this place, you would see why this experience is worth it. I’m doing this for my family so that I can show them the wild world is still out there. Without having to worry about a house payment, we’ll be able to afford to access these beautifully remote and extremely expensive areas—without the monsters of course.

Yup—” [He stands up off the rock, mud dripping from his butt and hands shielding his eyes from the blazing sun. A handsome 47-year-old high school basketball coach from Maryland’s coast.]

“—far less monsters. And way more food.”

[Looking toward the camera standing beside him, he smiles. It reaches through the lens, spreading far and wide, but for now, held inside the small recorder.]

“Should go set up some traps. The key to survival here isn’t killing the monsters, it’s outlasting all the other schmucks dumb enough to come out here and risk their lives for the chance to say they did. At least we all know the other one is crazy. It’s all about seeing which is crazier, though, I suppose.”

[Grabbing the small camera from the ground, Howard points it at the woods in front of him. They’re thick, dark, and draped in a black lichen that is inching, crawling over the moss-covered stones toward him.]

“That’s where we are not going.”

[Flashes of green. Blurs of yellow and blue until the frame stills. An open path through the spattering of redwoods. Down below, the beginning of a lake.]

“That’s our destination. If I can get down there, I can get some water, catch a fish or two, set my traps, and find a nice high area to hide out in for the night. Here’s to my family and hoping that I survive the first night. Davey, my big dude, I love you. Karen, thank you for allowing me to live my dream. I love you all.”

[His smile is the last thing the camera captures before it goes black.]

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While Howard sets up his strategy at the heart of the Island, twenty miles south of him at the tip of the Blooddrenched Peninsula our youngest contestant yet, Uri, wastes no time tracking down the moving patterns of the creatures in zher area. The uniqueness of the peninsula lies not in its deadliness but in its diversity. The two-mile stretch of rocky swampland is home to more than eleven species of beast.

“There’s The Barizza that hangs out by the cap of the forest down yonder—gotta keep downwind of ‘em so it doesn’t pick up my scent—once that bastard gets a hint, it won’t let up till it’s picking you out of its teeth. And o’ course, the closely related snapbacks and curtails. The snapbacks are the more widely seen out of the two; you can tell them apart by the fact that snapbacks actually have tails and curtails resemble hardboiled turtles.”

[Their dark brown face scrunches up, and they shiver, letting out a squeal as they squelch through the mud.]

“The ones I’m really worried about are the mavens which are just big ass wolves with the brains of my ex, Carl; smart enough to catch you, but dumb enough that you can still get away. The other ones: tabbixes, yuttais, hurfpumps, kaats, muralaxes—those are nasty bitches, but

shouldn't be too much of a problem—water pups, and porticles aren't too much of a concern to me since the cooling temperature means they're busy finding shelter. When I was being dropped in, I saw some maven tracks breaking through the woods. With the wind on my side, I decided to make my way along the shore to see what I can see. Out of the items I chose to bring with me, I did go with the brutish approach and brought a lightweight spiked club. It might end up hurting me in the end that I didn't bring a tarp, but I know what's not going to hurt me.”

[The nineteen-year-old Park Slope survivor smiles at the camera, winking as zhe moves like a snake along the shore rocks. Soft scars from the explosion that decimated the small apartment complex dot their skin.]

“Not only will I be the youngest winner this show has ever seen, I'll also be the first Black person to win this. Woulda been the first genderfuck, but Stax from season eleven came out a couple years back, so that crown goes to per. I do want to mention to my friends back home—[Zhe stop in the tall grass and look at the camera in zher hands.]

“—I so called that.”

[Water slaps the rocks in the distance where Uri walks, balancing zher camera in one hand and zher club in the other.]

“Alright, I'm getting closer to where these tracks I've been tracking get fresher. I'm going to turn this off so I can focus. See you in hell, losers.”

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While Uri finds tracks and Howard discovers the circumstances of his position on the island, our final contestant, Marissa, makes her way through the forest in search of flat land along the mountain.

“My fear right now is not the monsters, but the fact that I may be walking in the wrong direction. I want to be going southeast toward the lake, but without a compass or a clear view of the sun, I don’t know exactly where that is. Back home, my wife is usually the one who takes the lead in these sorts of things, but she’s preparing to give birth to our third child. Hi, Maddie and Marcus. Mama loves you. Everything I do is for you. When I get home, I’m going to give you a big hug and all-new toys that I’ll make out of things I catch. I can’t find my way out of a coffin, but I can sew myself into the lining. Won’t that be fun? To catch one of these monsters and use what I produce to make some gifts for my little monsters back home? I can’t wait to get this adventure going.”

[For several minutes, the camera bobs alongside Marissa’s face. Sweat beads down and drips onto her shirt, soaking it until she’s forced to take it off. A blur covers her entire torso, distorting her body and mystifying her form.]

“Okay. Alright. At some point, you just have to say to yourself, you’re just not going to make it.”

[Marissa sits down and places the camera in front of her so that it peers up at her from the ground, the sun behind her, shining. A halo appears around the purple-dyed curls atop her head.]

“I thought it’d be different, you know. I thought it’d be like Jurassic Park. All monsters and screams. But this, this long monotonous trek through what seems like endless uphill stone cliffs and jagged rocks will be the death of me.”

[More minutes pass with Marissa on the ground. For a few moments, she moves to rest on her knees, bent in a pained prayer, as a light rain begins to fall.]

“Mama loves you. Mama loves you. It’s only been a couple of weeks since I saw my family and the thought that I’ll have to go another few weeks or months without seeing them

breaks my heart. I have a kid on the way. A fucking baby that's depending on me to be there as the best mom that I can be. What do they care if I survive some fucked up contest? This is selfish."

[Holding her breath, Marissa unclips the large red satellite phone from her pack and presses the call button.]

"Come get me. I'm ready to see my family again."

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Sadly, many contestants through the years have pulled the plug on the first day—either by finding themselves between a tree and the hunger of a hurfpump during mating season or by picking up the red brick and calling for the quick and easy. With Marissa gone, there are only two remaining contestants. Last time we saw Howard he was setting out to catch some fish and to set up a nice hidey-hole away from all the dangers. Let us check back in and see how that turned out.

Day Five

[Wherever the camera is, it is dark. An outline of Howard lays- eyes wide and white-in a sleeping bag.]

"I haven't been able to move for the past two maybe three days. Time's ... hard to follow. Think I've been running a fever. It's been making everything ... a thousand times worse. I don't want to tap out, but ... I don't know how much longer I can lay here not eating or drinking anything. My stomach is in knots. It feels like snakes are fucking in my guts. This ... isn't how I imagined I'd go out. Dying on Monster Island ... would have been a heroic death, but only if I did it beneath some ugly mother fucker bent on sending me to meet my maker. This ... agony ... is beyond imagine. It's worse than death."

[Howard sobs. In the view of the camera's nightlight, his tears appear nonexistent, fake. Globbs of snot roll down his lip.]

"I hate to know that my family is going to see me like this. Worse yet, my son's going to see his father as a coward. I wasn't strong enough, Davey, but you'll be better than me. When you grow up, you can come back here ... to Monster Island and show these mother fuckers what type of men we are."

[He laughs while he digs out the red phone nestled in his sleeping bag.]

"If I wait another night, I might not be able to make this phone call. It's the smartest, best thing for me to do. I've got to be an adult about this. So long and thanks for all the fish."

His laugh turns dark as the camera fades out.

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Unbeknownst that zhe is our winner, Uri barricades zherself in a small cave.

"Find myself in a bit of a tight spot. The hunter has become the hunted. Haven't turned this dumb thing on in a few days because I've been dodging and weaving what I think is The Barizza. If it is, I'm fucked. Absolutely fucked. It's going to have me for dinner and there's nothing I can do about it but try and fight. Hell, it's what you all came here to see right. We tune in night after night, week after week, season after season in the hopes that we can see someone's insides splayed out on TV.

"You want blood not feelings. Defeat not victory. So, that's what I'll give you. At least, I'll be the first teenager to die on this show."

[There is a great rumbling and shaking of the camera while Uri backs out of view.]

"Come on, you asshole! Come and get me."

[A long arm with thick drooping claws reaches in front of the camera, drags its hairy body along the dirt. Uri screams and comes back into view. Zhe darts around the arm, swiping at it with zher club. The creature roars, ripping its way into the cave. Sunlight bursts through and falls onto Uri.]

“That’s it. You want to take me out? You’ll have to put your whole body into it. I’m not no one-buck ride. I’ve fought devils mightier than you.”

[They pull a dagger from out of the holster on the side of their pants. Using it to fight off the creature’s swings, Uri slips the club’s pointed tip up its body ripping into its abdomen. Black blood spills out onto zher and the creature screeches, bringing Uri to zher knees. Beside zher, zher pack falls open and the red phone tumbles out onto the ground. Zhe picks it up.]

“I got something for you!”

[Breaking open the phone, Uri takes matches to the battery. Once it sparks, they toss it at The Barizza. It becomes a chaotic tantrum, all sparks and claws. Striking down, it gets a talon into Uri. Blood spurts out of zher shoulder. Whimpering, Uri grabs ahold of the creature’s arm as it thrashes zher about the cave. Zhe holds on until zher only a body, a splattered array of torn muscle and broken bone.]

[Scrapping the last of Uri off along the wall of the cave, The Barizza touches its chest where Uri’s wound drips blood onto the ground. Moaning, it steps toward the light and howls. Each sound out of its throat a call to some unknown in the deep woods of Monster Island. What comes to answer is a small resemblance to the creature. It creeps in on all fours, shaky on its claws. The larger beast directs it to the lifeless corpse and guides it to drink before collapsing dead beside it.]

[A broken throat fresh from birth cries out to no one and nothing but the lens of the camera.]