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Next On Bravo... The Woman From Wasilla

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I watched the lines of people waiting for Sarah Palin at a Grand Rapids book signing, and had to wonder, as I have many times in the past: what's the attraction?

Are all of those people lined up in the mall really anti-choice, anti-gay marriage, anti-smart-ass media, pro-gun, pro-global warming denial and pro shooting wolves out of helicopters? Do they care that her sound bite policy statements lack the depth of a beauty pageant contestant's answer to "What do you love about America?"

And then it hit me. These are loyal fans of one of America's great reality shows -- and, yes, I appreciate the oxymoron.

Stick with me on this.

I did a little research. Reality TV has a formula.

One of the surprisingly numerous guides I found to selling a reality show said that the key is the right mix of four elements: talent, love, torment and sex.

Others pointed out that the most important thing is letting people watch other people fail at something they desperately want to do. Studies show that American Idol loses a large segment of the audience after the ritual tortures of the early rounds.

Another attraction, the guides point out, is spying on our neighbors without risking a restraining order. We don't necessarily feel their pain. We just like to watch it.

Extreme interaction between a couple key characters is a must; lust, hate, envy, fist fights -- whatever it takes. Puck versus Pedro; Tanisha versus Jennavecia; Amarosa versus Donald. (If you get all three of these references, you might want to think about a hobby.)

Another proven winner is to set up a competition, where we get to watch the contestants emotionally savage, betray and sometimes hit each other to win a prize.

One of the best story lines is to yank people out of their normal lives, and throw them into unfamiliar situations -- think wives swapping families. It's even better when you do it to a C-list celebrity -- think Paris Hilton shoveling manure.

Consider the arc of the Palin story, and the pitch to the Bravo Network almost writes itself. Ok...

We take a C-list first-term governor from a state with a population the size of the city of Charlotte. She'll have this hot-for-teacher thing going on; tight skirts, high heels, hair tied up in a twist. She's a huntin, fishin, scrappy hockey mom, who tells it like it is.

Then we'll throw her into the middle of a bunch of snotty Beltway types running a campaign turning on themes of race, war and economic collapse. Great stuff.

She'll have a pregnant daughter. She's hot. She'll have a hunky husband who doesn't say much. He's hot. The pregnant daughter will have a boyfriend. He and the mother say they love each other, but as the story line progresses, they hate each other. He's hot, too -- kind of a young Donny Osmond, but buff. They'll all live in the same house.

Then, we'll throw her into a national television interview, where she desperately wants to make a good first impression, but she gets crushed by an exquisitely cordial tormentor. Some call her the "warrior queen of the idiotocracy." Others say she stands for all that's right with America. A divided nation; just like *American Idol*.

Her party will lose the election badly. Then, she and her handlers will turn on each other like wolverines. They'll blame her for losing the election. She'll blame them for not allowing her to win it. Blood will spill.

The boyfriend will split with the daughter, then he and the mother will get into a media slap-fight. He'll say the family kicked him out of the truck as soon as they no longer needed him, and that he knows things that would ruin her. Margin note: Somewhere along the way, his mother gets busted for selling Crystal Meth and Oxycontin.

The Governor quits her job. Great plot point, because the story lines would bog down if she was stuck in the office attending to the dreary work of running a state.

The boyfriend will make the cover of America's leading liberal magazine, space usually reserved for stars, models and politicians. He'll also stretch out naked for a magazine with a 50 percent gay readership. That will cause the Governor to wave off criticism from anyone who would "sell their body for money."

Just when the audience thinks it's over, she'll write a book, which will sell out before it's published. It will cause people to camp out all night in the chill of late fall in Michigan, to get wrist bands that permit them to wait in long lines to get her signature and shake her hand. Those who don't get in chant her name.

She won't rule out running for president, which gives us a bridge to a second season. She'll hug Oprah.

It's great TV.