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By HELEN YUN

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HUNGER STRIKE: The host of "American Cannibal."

Photo: Dave Roberts

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April 23, 2006 -- A recipe for a reality-TV farce: Toss two aspiring writers in with a handful of average Joes starved for celebrity and human flesh. Have one of the Joes sustain severe injuries and fall into a coma. Then mix in a p.r.-savvy porno czar named Kevin Blatt - the man behind "One Night in Paris" and Whitney Houston's labia surgery DVD.

The result: "American Cannibal," Perry Grebin and Michael Nigro's new documentary, which serves up one of the most deliciously bizarre tales at this year's Tribeca Film Festival, where it debuts on Wednesday.

The story begins with Gil S. Ripley and Dave Roberts, two N.Y.C. comedy writers

trying to make it in Hollywood. After Comedy Central passes on their pilot for mash-up sitcoms - "Golden Girls" meets "Sex and the City" - the duo try their luck with reality TV.

They somehow sell Blatt on a show called "Virgin Territory," but it's another of Ripley's crazy notions - "the ultimate, ultimate challenge" of driving folks to cannibalism - that Blatt wants to produce.

"The honest truth was, yes it was a joke," says Ripley of his man-eats-man concept, also called "American Cannibal." "I'll throw ideas out there just to test the waters."

Lark or not, "Cannibal" begins shooting on an island off Puerto Rico. Contestants get nothing but salt and water for sustenance and compete in "Survivor"-esque physical challenges - until the sixth day, when a Playboy bunny wannabe falls into a coma.

The woman survives, but the show halts production and is scrapped soon after. Ripley and Roberts see their partnership destroyed, typical of the damage the directors see rampant in the reality-TV world.

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"Mark Burnett said that when things like this happen, his technique is not to cut around it because it's real life," says co-director Grebin. "That's the human cost of entertainment."

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