

STRIVE TO SURVIVE
A Horror Comedy Web Series
by Samuel Gerkin

Inspiration:

Scream got me into filmmaking. I loved the thrill of the suspenseful scenarios and the fun of guessing who was the killer and who would survive. When my cousins and I made a parody of *Scream*, I loved how comedy fit into that world. But striving to recreate that genre in my own work, I have struggled with combining comedy and horror in a way that does not turn into a black comedy. I want to bring a sense of innocent fun into the world of horror. I composed a plot for a web series striving to do just that, but it inevitably retained a dark element because, well, people were dying! I also found it difficult for characters to have the comedic and dramatic stories I wanted them to have while people kept dying around them.

Finally, a premise came to my mind that would allow the combination of innocent comedy and horror. Better yet, it included an elimination game show, which I have enjoyed a lot in some other stories I have read. There will still be suspense and stakes, but no one's life will actually be on the line (usually). This frees up the tone of the story, allowing the characters to go through dramatic and comedic storylines within a horror A-story without making them horrible people for not constantly grieving their friend's deaths. Another very important consideration for a web series is that this plot allows characters to continue to come back every episode, even when they've been killed off in the previous episode.

Logline:

A diverse group of people compete on an elimination game show where each "episode" (web series season) they are tasked with surviving the longest in a virtual horror movie. Immersed in these computer-generated worlds, no one's in any real danger (or so they think). Competition is fierce. Everyone has secrets, and their own reason for wanting the multimillion-dollar grand prize.

Characters:

Emilia

Emilia (21) is a young Hispanic woman with a nervous personality. She is a devout Catholic, and her faith is part of her daily life. Her family has been poor for her whole life, and she is currently working a minimum-wage waitress job to provide for her sick father. She has been working nonstop since she was 14, and this has given her little chance to have a social life. Her one source of entertainment after work is to watch *Strive to Survive*, her favorite game show. She usually snags an hour out of the time she has to sleep to watch an episode. She is naturally very smart, and whenever she has time to retreat into her head during work, she has found it fun to figure out ways to get out of situations she has seen on her favorite show. She is usually excellent at

thinking her way out of tough situations, but in social and emotional situations she is helpless. Her intelligence is being wasted at her waitress job, and she feels unfulfilled here. But she is happy that she has the chance to provide for her family.

Her attitude towards fear:

She enjoys getting scared, but she doesn't like being scared too much.

Her contradiction:

She has a tendency to doubt herself when making important decisions - but at the same time she is unwilling to trust others to make big decisions without her and subconsciously has adopted an "if you want something done right, do it yourself" mentality.

Her motivation to win:

She wants the money to bring her family out of poverty, pay for her father's medical bills, and create a nonprofit charity.

Holly

Holly (23) is a young White woman with an abrasive personality. She is a Southern Baptist, but she only turns to her faith when things are difficult. She is the daughter of the owner of *Strive to Survive*, and is therefore extremely wealthy. She really wants to become a celebrity - it's a huge dream of hers. She doesn't care about winning, just becoming famous. And she knows being mean and causing conflict will get her more attention. She has a cynical outlook on life and is annoyed easily, so it comes naturally to her. She has an obsessive personality, and she has a tendency to develop huge crushes on guys she likes. Her image comes before everything else for her - she is always willing to sacrifice a lot to make herself more popular, though not necessarily more liked. She is always seeking to get attention in any way she can.

Her attitude towards fear:

She gets scared easily, and she enjoys getting scared.

Her contradiction:

She actively avoids anything weird, unusual, or niche because she dreads being seen as weird or being unpopular. However, she often finds herself drawn to things that are interesting because they are so unusual.

Her motivation to win:

She doesn't care about winning the show since she's already rich, but she wants to become famous by lasting a long time on the show.

Darnell

Darnell (19) is a young Black man with a bold personality. He's a passionate Atheist. His family is middle class. He is secretly the leader of an organized crime family in his city (he unwillingly inherited the position from his father when he died). He tries his best to limit the amount of damage the family does to others, without letting them realize that he is against them. He is brave but reckless. He's used to being protected by bodyguards. He is also used to everyone listening to him, so he always tries to be the leader of any conversation he is in. He always wants things to go his way, and gets angry at anyone who gets in his way. In fact, he is always quick-tempered, and can

even have extremely childish temper tantrums. However, his anger never pushes him to the point of violence. In fact, he hates violence and actively avoids it whenever possible. If he has to, however, he is not against violence in self-defense. Darnell is incredibly athletic. He has been on a track team since high school, and he also has recently started learning parkour. He really enjoys debating with people; he spends a lot of time on social media debating with people who disagree with him, and trying to get them to start a discussion with him. He always has a comeback in a debate; even if he really doesn't know the answer.

His attitude towards fear:

He always does his best to not appear scared, even when he is. He sees fear as a sign of weakness.

His contradiction:

He's a bold, quick-tempered leader of an organized crime family, but he hates violence.

His motivation to win:

He wants to win enough money to take his organized crime family down once and for all while keeping himself and his loved ones safe.

Evan

Evan (20) is a young White man with an optimistic but naive personality. He's a devout Southern Baptist in the middle class. He's always coming up with new crazy ideas and inventions. (A toilet that doubles as a sink; putting "glowfish" into a building's pipes to help plumbers see the pipes through the walls; etc.). He actually came up with the idea for this *very* show, *Strive to Survive*, but it was stolen from him). He is incredibly absentminded. His head is always in the clouds. He cannot be trusted at all with any physical job that demands active attention, because his mind will be wandering and working on some crazy idea or something. He likes making jokes, and he talks to himself and to inanimate objects to help himself deal with fear and other issues. He also enjoys looking for inconsistencies in anyone else's logic (and the logic of the *Strive to Survive* show) and he often does this when he is under pressure to cope with stress. He likes talking dramatically and in silly voices. He also likes making silly and exaggerated faces.

His contradiction:

He seems completely devoid of practicality, but every so often his outside-the-box thinking leads to a very smart idea.

His attitude towards fear:

He likes being scared, and thinks that this game show will be a lot of fun. He is scared pretty easily.

His motivation to win:

He wants to win enough money to be able to bring his crazy inventions to life.

John "Snake Eye" Johnson

"Snake Eye" (26) is a young White man with an idiosyncratic personality. He's a lax Catholic who doesn't even attend mass weekly anymore. He's in the lower middle class. He used to be part of a vigilante group codenamed "The Old West" that would hunt

down criminals and find enough evidence to get the police to put them behind bars. The group had a falling out. One of his buddies made a bad deal with one of their criminal contacts and Snake Eye shouldered the burden of paying off his buddies' debt to a crime boss himself (unbeknownst to Snake Eye, the crime boss is actually Darnell).

Snake Eye has many weird habits and unusual skills. He is an expert at tracking animals or people; he is also an expert at knitting. He's a crack shot with any kind of firearm, and he sleeps upside-down to improve circulation. He eats apples from the top down, including the core, and his poker face is unmatched. He doesn't know how to do basic mathematics, but reads Ancient Greek manuscripts for fun. He's an expert at translating secret codes, but can't work a computer for his life. He talks in a low, gravelly voice, and has shaved his head bald. People tend to avoid him, especially strangers, but he never seems to mind.

His contradiction:

Behind all his weirdness and creepiness, he is actually a very nice and even heroic guy.

His Attitude towards fear:

He hates being scared. It takes quite a bit to scare him.

His Motivation to win:

He needs the money to pay off his buddies debt, or else his buddy will probably end up dead.

Tone

Despite its usually horror-centered visual style, the tone of *Strive to Survive* will be light and happy. This is all the fun of horror movies, none of the darkness. When watching horror films, the audience often has a happy, fun attitude; guessing who will survive and who is the killer; figuring out the logistics of where the killer is and where the victims are; having fun getting scared. In *Strive to Survive*, the characters will be able to share in that attitude. They too will be able to comment flippantly on the action and even have fun getting scared. A good example of the tone of this web series can be found in YouTube gamers playing horror videogames (example: <https://rb.gy/lqghkh> -- minus the cursing). The characters will also often be going through dramatic and comedic subplots that they may be more concerned with than the episode's virtual killer at times. Finally, this show will have a large mystery element, which is where the show's only real darkish parts exist. There is something really bad and really dangerous going on behind the scenes of this show, and some of the characters will slowly unravel what that is.

On a level of 1-10, where 10 is ultra-realistic and 1 is ultra-silly, the world of this show is a 3. Outside of the game show entirely, completely silly things happen, like a 19 year old becoming a crime boss. The one thing that is most realistic will be the character motivations - these characters will feel like they could be real people, and their motivations will make sense.

Setting

This show will have a new horror movie-esque setting in every episode. Each one will look like it could be found in a horror movie, with much darkness. The one location that will always remain the same is the stage and backstage of the game show

itself, that the characters will return to after each *StS* episode. This location will provide a huge contrast to the horror locations - brightly lit and with bright colors, it will look like it is built of large foam-like blocks.

Visual Style

Fear is part of the fun of horror movies, so the visual style of each episode's mini horror movie will be visually styled just like a horror movie - with the intention of causing a feeling of fear in the audience, even as the characters joke and don't take things very seriously. Lighting with heavy shadows, dutch angles, constricted camera angles that don't let the audience see all they want to see, etc. will build this theme.

Despite the bright lightning and set design in the game show location, sometimes similar constricted camera angles to the horror parts of each episode will give of the feeling that not everything in this game show is as safe as it appears.

Pilot Story:

"Aw, crap," says a man about to be axed by a killer. The *Strive to Survive* title sequence plays, and the host explains the rules. He says the first episode of the new season is on tonight. EMILIA (21), a waitress, watches the advertisement (on silent) on a restaurant's TV. She snaps out of it and gets to work. In a montage, she works long hours, from when it is still dark in the morning to when it is dark at night. She see her coworkers check in and check out for their shifts. She serves a large table and works very hard serving them for the last few hours; but they leave a mean note instead of a tip. Stressed, she goes into the back to cry. She wipes her tears away and walks out to serve the table with a bright smile on her face. Then a customer points to the TV screen. Emilia's face is on *StS* - she's won a spot on the show and a chance to win 100 million! At home, her family celebrates. Taking the garbage out, she runs into a man in sunglasses who tells her that she didn't win by chance - his people bought her way onto the show, and she has to do what he says if she wants to go. Emilia, now on the *StS* stage, puts on a VR headset and enters the game.

In the game, she meets EVAN (20). They narrowly survive an encounter with the killer, due to Emilia's smarts. Evan decides to stick with Emilia. They meet HOLLY (23) and DARNELL (19). Darnell has Holly at gunpoint, and points his gun at Emilia and Evan as well when they come in. Emilia notices that an old radio is playing a message that one of the players is working with the killer.

Emilia manages to talk Darnell down; they've got to trust each other if they are going to survive the killer. SNAKE EYE (26) steps out of the corner. He was there the whole time. He clearly knows what he's doing survival-wise. They all follow his lead until he gets instantly dispatched by the killer out of nowhere.

Everyone freaks out. The killer looks right in Emily's eyes. And cue heart-pounding chase! Emilia and Holly end up hiding in a room with an old projector that is flashing cryptic symbols and a recording that is saying a strange code. Emilia gets closer and then suddenly THE GAME CRASHES.

Back on stage, the host apologizes for the technical difficulties, and the game reboots. Emilia is suspicious when the same room is now empty. Holly thinks nothing of

it. Lucas is killed by the killer, but Darnell saves Emilia and Holly at the last second in a cool way. As they are all hiding, they lay out all the supplies they've each found. They can't figure out what to do. Emilia tells them that with these supplies they can escape in a car. Sunglasses Man appears to Emily (the others just see her stand there with a dumb expression on her face) and tells to watch out: they detect an anomaly nearby, and she may be in very real danger.

They get a car started up with the supplies they had found. Emilia is driving. She is shocked when she sees a GLITCHY CREATURE appear on the road. She screams and crashes the car while swerving to avoid it.

Darnell is caught in the car accident, and Holly and Emilia leave him to escape. Darnell is caught and killed by the killer. Holly and Emilia realize they are the only players left. Holly betrays Emilia and reveals that she was the player selected to work with the killer. Holly wins this round of the game. Emilia is surprised and disappointed.

Back on the game show stage, Emilia is shocked to discover that no one except her saw the glitchy creature – not even the virtual cameras filming the whole show. Then she sees the creature staring at her from the back of the auditorium – it's in real life now.

Episode 2 Plots:

A: The players try to survive a ghost in a haunted mansion

B: In flashbacks, Darnell is revealed to be a reluctant crime boss of an organized crime family

C: Darnell sees Emilia talking to the sunglasses man and gets curious; she is worried her secret will come out

Episode 3 Plots:

A: The players try to survive a killer clown at a carnival

B: In flashbacks, Holly is revealed to be the daughter of the owner of the show

C: Holly and Darnell have a feud and try to kill each other in the game, forcing the other players to take sides

Episode 4 Plots:

A: The players try to survive a shapeshifting killer that can look like any of them in a hotel

B: In flashbacks, Snake Eye is revealed to be part of a vigilante group

C: The players have to form alliances and figure out who to trust as the first player is about to be voted off the show

Theme:

The defining principle, what ties everything together: though separating fact from fiction can be extremely difficult, perseverance will always lead to truth. Most characters

are not entirely honest, and all have secrets. The game show has the most secrets of all. But the characters that persevere in their search for truth will find it.

What Makes This Show Different:

This show combines horror and comedy in a unique way while keeping the tone genuinely light and innocent. The tone and feel of this show will be therefore extremely unique, since nearly all horror comedies that exist now end up with a dark tone. There aren't many horror comedies to begin with, so this genre combination is already unique. The fact that this show is structured like a game show is another aspect that will make it stand out. Finally, the show's mystery will be designed similarly to the mysteries of *Lost* and the *Five Nights at Freddy's* video game series, which each developed online fan communities dedicated to solving their mysteries.