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FOX planning 'Forever Eden' -- a new 'Paradise Hotel'-like "never-ending reality soap opera"

By Steve Rogers, 01/02/2004 Has *Paradise* been lost -- only to be replaced by *Eden*?

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FOX has announced that it is teaming up with *Paradise Hotel's* producers for a new similar reality show entitled *Forever Eden* -- with the catch being that unlike *Paradise Hotel* (which FOX extended but later ended conventionally), *Eden* would have no anticipated series conclusion... and instead be American television's first true "reality soap opera."

According to [Daily Variety](#), as in Summer 2003's *Paradise Hotel*, *Forever Eden* would feature a group of unmarried men and women who agree to leave their friends and family to live in an extremely luxurious resort setting. Only in this case, unlike *Paradise*, the contestants would live in the resort not for weeks or months, but for years.

FOX has placed an initial order for twenty-five one hour episodes of the series, which is scheduled to premiere this spring. While the network initially plans to only air the program once weekly, the unusually large initial episode commitment and continuous shooting schedule will allow FOX to broadcast it more frequently should the desire arise.

"These people could be on the air for six months, a year or three years," FOX's head of alternative programming Mike Darnell told *Variety*. "If you want to stay and you play your cards right, you could be on the air forever. It's the first real try at a reality soap opera."

"We want the audience to know there is a new conceit going on . It is truly the first attempt at a continuing reality soap opera," Darnell [told Television Week in another interview](#). "It's the first try of saying, 'Don't go on a reality show; your new life is a reality show.'" "The idea is they are not going on a reality show. They are actually divorcing themselves from their lives. They will become like soap stars, because they are going to be there for what could be a very long time."

"We learned some lessons from *Paradise*," Darnell explained. "When you keep people in one place long enough, dysfunction and a little bit of dementia sets in. So it got us to thinking, how long can people stay (on a reality show)?"

"Most people who go on these reality shows are trying to be famous," said Darnell. Assuming that the ratings of the real-life *The Truman Show*-like program warranted it, "This is a chance to be famous for a long time" said Darnell.

Since the show will not have a fixed end, it will not feature a final "endgame" grand prize, however contestants will still have the chance to earn cash prizes based on how long they

remain on the program. All contestants will accrue earnings for each week in which they remain in the resort. If they leave the show as part of the program's gameplay, then they will typically only be eligible to receive 50% of their accumulated earnings, however the program will also feature additional competitions or participation "milestones" during which the contestants will be able to "earn" the payment of the other 50% of their cash prize. Any contestant opting to voluntarily quit the program will forfeit all earnings.

Beyond that, *Eden*, which all parties freely admit is a result of conversations between Darnell and the *Paradise Hotel* producers that occurred after *Paradise Hotel* ended its run last summer, will be quite similar to *Paradise*. As in *Paradise*, the resort will be located outside of the United States. As in *Paradise*, the contestants -- whose exact number is still being determined -- will have no contact with the outside world. As in *Paradise*, new cast members will be added and current cast members will be asked to leave at different points during the show (the exact specifics of which are also still being determined.) And as with *Paradise*, there will be numerous twists and artificial drama-inducing surprises.

"Even though they are living in luxury and it's going to be wonderful, we are going to introduce elements to make it not so wonderful," Darnell explained to *Television Week*. "Surprise guests may arrive, who are there to stir things up, who won't necessarily be members of the cast but could be people from their lives or their past." Count us as among those hoping those guests won't include *Paradise's* [two-time reality show loser Toni Ferrari](#).

Casting for the show began about a month ago. Given FOX's unusually large initial twenty-five episode commitment, the clear weakness of some its current programming lineup, and the fact that a spring premiere will take the initial run well into the less competitive summer programming season, the network plans to be quite patient with the show. According to Darnell, the program will air "in a (timeslot) where the network can be very, very patient." "It doesn't need to have through-the-roof ratings when it premieres."

Despite *Forever Eden's* numerous similarities to *Paradise Hotel* -- right down to the involvement of most of the key members of *Paradise's* production team (Tom Gutteridge, Arthur Smith, Charles Thompson, Kent Weed Bruce Toms) and crew -- Darnell told *Variety* that *Eden* isn't intended to replace *Paradise* on FOX's schedule and *Paradise Hotel* "could still return next summer."

"They're different formats," executive producer Tom Gutteridge told *Television Week*, while also admitting that in many ways, *Eden* is "*Paradise Hotel*, version 2.0." "This is an extension of what we did last summer," Gutteridge added during his *Variety* interview. "The time has come to create a continuous reality soap opera where the drama is entirely derived from the characters of the guests we cast rather than the show's structure."

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