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SURFING THE WAVES OF POPULAR CULTURE  
BY MICHAEL GILTZ & FRIENDS

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## "Rolling Stone" On "American Idol"

*Rolling Stone* has a cover story promising "The secrets of the unstoppable starmaking machine" that is *American Idol*. As if anyone could reveal new secrets about a series so thoroughly dissected by now. They picture Simon, Paula and Randy in bed together. Inside, what we get doesn't even pretend to do that: it's simply a profile of Simon, with tiny boxes devoted to Paula, Randy, Ryan, Simon Fuller and predictions on this season's contestants. But it's filled with foolish exaggeration and mistakes. (Shouldn't *Rolling Stone* be the one magazine to take a more sober look at *AI*?) They say the show "usually" hits 35 million viewers per episode. Try "almost never." The last month or so, the audience has been 33 million, 32 million, 28 million, 30 million, 31 million and so on. That's of course for the performance shows. The results shows are invariably lower rated. 33 million is a ton of viewers, but it isn't 35 million. You have to go back to January, when it scored 34.96 million viewers for one show to back that stat up. You could say "sometimes as high as 35 million viewers," but not "usually." Does it matter? Yes. The show is a phenomenon, so why exaggerate its ratings? They also say "the show has drawn more viewers than ever before, a historic anomaly that television's statisticians are still struggling to comprehend." Also not true. It's certainly very noteworthy, but other shows have grown in viewership even further into their runs than *Idol*, most notably *Law & Order*. Again, the fact of growth is impressive; why pretend it's never happened before? Then *RS* says this: "Has any British import in recent history rooted any deeper into the national psyche than Cowell? His words and manners have been debated constantly for the past five years." I watch the show faithfully, but this seems pretty overblown even to me. And how about Princess Di, for one small example? Finally, they talk about his early success marketing pop album tie-ins to non-music properties like Teletubbies, Power Rangers and WWF wrestlers, insisting that "this kind of tie-in approach had never been attempted." I'm not sure how narrowly they want to define this, but pop music is littered with tie-in

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