DV8

 2375 Wilshire Boulevard

 Los Angeles, CA 91523

National Center for Missing & Exploited Children

Charles B. Wang International Children’s Building

699 Prince St.

Alexandria, VA 22314

May 7, 2017

To Who It Might Concern:

As per your request, enclosed are all relevant transcripts of recorded meetings, phone calls, email correspondence, raw video footage, edited-for-broadcast video footage, and confessional interviews used in the production (from development up until the glitch) of the reality television show *Waste of Space.* We apologize for the admittedly substandard quality of the transcripts; since you insisted on a rushed—some would say unreasonable—deadline, the task to type them up fell to an untrained intern who seems to have inserted personal commentary and conjecture in certain places. A more objective compilation is forthcoming.

We hope these documents will help you guys with your investigation, though we would be remiss if we did not insist yet again that we officially disavow any responsibility for the incident currently under investigation. Waivers were signed. Parents were informed, or so we thought.

This isn’t on us.

Sincerely,

Chazz Young

CEO, DV8 Productions

Author’s Note

Untrained intern here.

 Shortly after my boss wrote the above letter, he instructed me to go down to the post office and mail it, along with the thick packet of documents that accompanied it. On the way, I was to ask his personal courier, Boris, to deliver to the office enough recreational drugs to “stop the heart of an elephant,” as the DV8 team was “super stressed.” Then it was suggested that, in honor of the people who were giving our company so much trouble, I stop by an Edible Arrangements store to buy a symbolic bouquet of “fruits with sticks up their asses.”

 I did none of those things. The packet was not mailed. Fruit was not purchased, sarcastically or otherwise. I spoke to Boris, but about a different matter altogether. Drugs were acquired—but only for me, and only in the form of caffeine. The decision to become a whistleblower is not an easy one, and faced with the daunting task of tearing into that packet of documents and learning things I could not unlearn, I needed a pot of freshly brewed courage.

 The account that follows is my attempt to ascertain what really happened in January and February of the year 2017—not what was reported in the news, not what was claimed afterward in the statements from all parties involved. The evidence I will present is composed of the files found in the aforementioned packet, plus several additional records unearthed over the course of my investigation (some of which were obtained through measures that were not, I admit, strictly legal). All documents are presented in their original states and are labeled with as much information as I could ascertain.

 The full body of evidence calls to mind a jigsaw puzzle at a yard sale—some pieces are missing, some are bent out of shape, and some don’t make sense unless one can see the full picture. The truth may be out there, but I doubt anyone will ever be able to irrefutably prove what it is. All I can hope for is that my version is the closest.

 Full disclaimer: Because I personally knew and/or met most of the witnesses, and as I was watching and listening from behind the scenes throughout many of the events described herein, it’s inevitable that some of my own judgments and criticisms will leak into this report. But I’ll do my best to keep my perspective to a minimum and to interpret the events in an unbiased manner. To that end, I will refrain from telling this story from my point of view, as it is not meant to be a tell-all. From this point forth I’ll let the evidence speak for itself.

 I am not the story here. I, like each of you, was only a helpless witness.

When I accepted an internship at DV8, I knew it wasn’t going to lead to a Pulitzer. The network isn’t what you’d call “prestigious” or “groundbreaking” or “staffed by literate individuals,” but the road to a degree in journalism is fraught with despair, douchebags, and dead ends, and I was aware of and prepared for that. In today’s competitive job market (especially in an allegedly dying profession), I was ecstatic to land any internship at all. I vowed to throw myself into the inane, unending errands. I’d cheerfully fire off meaningless tweets, retweets, and “impactful hashtags.” I’d withstand indignities and humiliations galore, and after all that, I’d be on my way with six full credits and nary a look back at the eight months of hell I’d had to endure, all in the name of my education.

 But then came *Waste of Space.*

 And a different type of education presented itself.

 —An Intern

 July 11, 2017

Part I

Preproduction

Development

The year is 2017.

 Things aren’t looking good for the future of space exploration. Things aren’t looking good for the state of reality programming, either. It is at this intersection of earnestness and stupidity that the idea for *Waste of Space* is born.

 Naturally, it involves teenagers.

 And so it comes to pass that in the midst of a rare Los Angeles thunderstorm, a dozen shadowy figures meet in the small hours of the morning at a secret and nefarious location: the Denny’s off Wilshire Boulevard. They take up two tables, eight urns of coffee, and five carafes of orange juice. The astrophysicists wittily order Moons Over My Hammy. The television executives order nothing.

 The following meeting ensues.

**Item:** Transcript of audio recording

 **Source:** Development meeting

**Date:** January 2, 2017

*[Note: Due to the difficulty in identifying multiple voices, most speakers have been labeled with their organizations rather than as individuals; this format will be employed in several instances throughout this report.]*

 **DV8:** You’re okay with us recording this, right?

 **NASAW:** We don’t know what “this” is yet.

 **Waiter:** *[off-mike]* Who ordered extra hash browns?

 *[thirty seconds of unintelligible chatter, rustling, sound of plates being placed on table and silverware clanging]*

 **DV8:** All right. Now that you’ve got your breakfasts—

 **NASAW:** Aren’t you going to eat?

 **DV8:** We don’t have time to eat.

 **NASAW:** Not even a bagel?

 **DV8:** Especially not a bagel, Paleo doesn’t—forget it. Back to the matter at hand: our proposal. Chazz?

 *[sound of a throat clearing, then a chair scraping across the floor as Chazz Young, CEO of DV8, stands up to address the group]*

 **Chazz:** Ladies and gentlemen of science, I hate to break it to you, but astrophysics isn’t cool anymore. Sure, people embrace technology when it allows them to post photos of epic bacon-wrapped food items, but drag them into a planetarium and you’ll end up with desperate scratch marks on the walls. Funds have been cut, the man on the moon is several decades in the rearview mirror, and the youth of America continue to respond to the vast and impossibly boundless possibilities of outer space with an emphatic yawn.

 **NASAW:** What about *Cosmic Crusades*? *Cosmic Crusades* is cool.

 **Chazz:** Science fiction is cool. Science is not.

 **NASAW:** But—

 **Chazz:** Example: two different panels at Comic Con, one with the cast of a space movie franchise and one with genuine astronauts. Which do you think will be better attended?

 **NASAW:** *[unintelligible grumbling]*

 **Chazz:** Exactly. Likewise, we admit, people have grown bored with the repetitive nature of reality television. They can watch only so many bar fighters, spurned lovers, table flippers, bug eaters, bad singers, and cat hoarders before it all seems like stuff they’ve already seen before. The world is clamoring for something new! Otherwise they’ll have to turn off their devices and go read a book, and we simply can’t have that.

 **NASAW:** Books aren’t bad!

 **Chazz:** Books are the worst.

 **NASAW:** *[unintelligible grumbling]*

 **Chazz:** So. *You* need to drum up interest in the space program, and *we* need more eyes on more screens. Luckily, we’ve come up with a solution that we feel will be mutually beneficial to both of us.

 **NASAW:** And that is?

 **Chazz:** We want to take a bunch of teenagers and shoot them into space.

 *[choking noises]*

 **Chazz:** And put it on television.

 **NASAW:** That’s—er—not possible.

 **Chazz:** Why not?

 **NASAW:** Aside from reasons that should be apparent to anyone with a functioning brain stem, it’s a logistical nightmare. They’d need to undergo months of training and health assessments. You’d need a ship big enough to accommodate a cast, crew, equipment—

 **Chazz:** Oh, we’ll be faking it. The whole thing will be shot on a soundstage. You really think *The* *Real Housewives of Atlantis* was filmed at the bottom of the ocean? Please. Those women were so full of silicone they would have floated straight to the surface.

 **NASAW:** But we thought this would be a purely educational endeavor. Didn’t you say you were from PBS?

 **Chazz:** Yes! We lied. We’re from DV8.

 **NASAW:** DV .º.º. 8?

 **Chazz:** It’s a cable television network with several blocks of programming across multiple platforms, including streaming services, our own website, and every social media outlet there is. We’d like to cram all of them full of this.

 *[sound of coffee urns shakily hitting the rims of coffee mugs]*

 **Chazz:** Which is why we need you! Our first choice was obviously NASA, but they not so politely declined. So the low-rent version of NASA it is!

 **NASAW:** I beg your pardon. We are the National Association for the Study of Astronomy and Weightlessness. We are not some piddling little administration—

 **Chazz:** Which is *exactly* why we’d like you to be consultants. We’ll take care of the casting, the production, everything on that end. You, meanwhile, design a convincing space plane—

 **NASAW:** *[overlapping]* Spaceship.

 **Chazz: —**you tell us what all the rumbles and beeps and boops are supposed to sound like, and we’ll bring in the best special effects team money can buy.

 **NASAW:** But won’t this seem like one big joke? With all due respect to your special effects, not even the major Hollywood movies can get it a hundred percent right. It’s going to look silly.

 **Chazz:** People believe what they want to believe. Remember *America’s Next Top Murderer?* Viewers thought that victims were *actually* being picked off by a serial killer. The network had to start airing a disclaimer before each episode,saying, “No one’s really dying, you morons.”

 **NASAW:** Are you serious?

 **Chazz:** Well, I’m paraphrasing.

 **NASAW:** I’m sorry, I’m having a hard time wrapping my head around this. It just doesn’t seem necessary. We’ve got a bunch of new initiatives in the works—

 **Chazz:** *Snore. Yawn. Coma.* Let’s be real. Space is passé, and everyone knows it. But you still need a new generation to carry on that galaxy research gobbledygook, or your life’s work will be nothing more than a sham, right? *[hearty laughter]* So let’s get them excited. Let’s take a bunch of young, gullible, energetic, absurdly good-looking teenagers, stuff them into a space plane—

 **NASAW:** *[overlapping]* Spaceship.

 **Chazz: —**give them some bullshit training, and tell them they’ll be the first ones ever to set foot on Jupiter!

 **NASAW:** You can’t set foot on Jupiter. Jupiter is a gas giant.

 **Chazz:** *You’re* a gas giant! *[sound of high-fiving]* That’s what they’ll say. That’s what the kids will say. Comedy gold like that.

 **NASAW:** But—

 **Chazz:** Point is, this’ll get the youth of America high on space again. Audiences will watch those beautiful idiots floating out there in zero G and want to be *just like them.* They’ll buy space suits. They’ll buy that astronaut ice cream that tastes and looks and feels like Styrofoam. The merchandising possibilities alone are astronomical. Pun intended! *[sound of more high-fives]*

 **NASAW:** Now, you listen here. I’ve raised teenagers, and if there’s one thing I can tell you about them, it’s that they do nothing but talk. All day long. On the phone, on the computer, to themselves. How do you expect to get a group of high schoolers in on a secret like this and not blab thirty seconds later about how lame and fake it is?

 **Chazz:** Easy. We tell them it’s real.

 *[pause]*

 **NASAW:** You want to trick a group of kids into thinking that they’re *actually* being launched into space?

 **Chazz:** Yes.

 **NASAW:** You want them to think that they’re *actually* being torn away from their friends and family for months, undertaking a dangerous mission from which they *actually* might not return?

 **Chazz:** Yes. Drama.

 **NASAW:** But isn’t that cruel?

 **Chazz:** “Cruel” is such a subjective word .º.º.

 **NASAW:** Not in this case! The entire proposition is morally questionable! I’m sorry, but we—we can’t sign on to do something like this.

 **Chazz:** Fine. Continue your recruiting efforts in the same way you have been. How’s that going for you?

 *[silence]*

 **Chazz:** Envision with us, for a moment: Plucky kids. Touching backstories. Plaintive piano music. They first set foot in the space plane. Their eyes light up. Our intrepit explorers are—

 **NASAW:** Intrepid.

 **Chazz:** Huh?

 **NASAW:** The word you’re attempting to use is “intrepid.”

 **Chazz:** Pretty sure it’s intrepit. Anyway, the mission commences. Lifelong friendships are formed. Bitter fights erupt. Maybe a slap or two. A slap in zero gravity—that’s never been done before! *[sound of a pen scribbling in a notebook]* Every eye in America will tune in to check on their new cosmic sweethearts. We’ll edit it down to a half hour each week, plus a live segment tacked on at the end of the show so the cast can wave to their furiously jealous friends in real time. We’ll air it online, too. Live stream, 24/7. Shove it into viewers’ faces until they can’t help but get swept up into it. And before you know it, their impressionable young minds will be putty in your hands. They’ll sign up in droves to join the *Cosmic Crusades!*

 **NASAW:** That is a fictional movie featuring fictional space heroes.

 **Chazz:** All the more reason to bolster their ranks! Point is, once this show airs, you’ll have an entire generation of walking, talking, floating space zombies begging to be a part of it, ready to do your bidding.

 *[sound of chairs scraping]*

 **Chazz:** We’ll give you some privacy to discuss.

 *[rustling]*

 **NASAW #1:** Has it really come to this?

 **NASAW #2:** The worst part is, they’re right. We’ve tried so hard, reached out as much as we can, but we still haven’t connected with the voice of today’s youth. These .º.º. *people,* horrible as they are, *do* have the kids’ attention.

 **NASAW #3:** It pisses me off! Sitting here across from these plastic, vapid nincompoops, having to listen to this claptrap. We’re scientists, for Galileo’s sake! People should be looking to *us* as golden gods of knowledge, worshiping *us* for our big brains and thick glasses! Why can’t anyone see that?

 **NASAW #4:** I don’t know. But something has to be done. Something drastic.

 *[commotion]*

 **Chazz:** All right, time’s up. What do you say, nerds?

 *[long pause]*

 **NASAW:** *[dejected]* When do we get started?

 **Chazz:** Casting begins next week!

Casting

Despite the assumed glamour of it all, the logistics of organizing a nationwide audition are tedious, daunting, and involve more screaming fits than one might think. Hundreds of phone calls, emails, contracts, and location deposits go into the organization of the *Waste of Space* Star Search (pun intended!), and within one breakneck week, all necessary casting and administrative personnel are marshaled and five lucky shopping malls across America are chosen as casting locations.

 Thousands of teenagers show up. Each is photographed, given an applicant number, and paraded before a panel of network representatives. Those deemed attractive enough are admitted through to the interview phase, where casting directors interrogate them on the spot.

 Not a single interview is recorded. DV8’s casting procedures are unconventional at best and impulsive at worst; this is by design, as will be described in the pages ahead. But this particular lack of content may be for the best. Many applicants are desperate, depressed, lonely, and/or starving for attention, the sorts of kids for whom the opportunity to be shot into space would be an improvement in their lives rather than a calamity. The fact that their audition interviews will never see the light of day will be, for many of the applicants in the years to come, a blessing in disguise.

 Besides, the evidence that’s left is, in some ways, far more enlightening.

The following is a small compendium of documents featuring the applicants hat are eventually chosen as cast members on *Waste of Space.* Not all final cast members are represented in this selection, and not all documents are particularly relevant to the troubles that befall the show, but they are provided here to offer a bit of insight into the curious mindsets of those who would endeavor to audition for this particular reality program in the first place.

**Item: Email**

**From: jamarkuscurbeam@gmail.com**

**To: a.evans@mit.edu**

**Date: December 18, 2016**

 Dear Mr. Evans,

 You probably don’t remember me, but we met last month at the “Leaders of Tomorrow” luncheon. I’m the one who lost out on the scholarship. No hard feelings, though! For the chair of the MIT Aerospace Engineering program to take note of my academic achievements and flight simulation skills and even go so far as to label me a “future astronaut”—that was reward enough. I am humbled and honored to have met you, and your vote of confidence means more to me than you can ever know.

 Thank you again for your consideration. I hope our paths cross again one day—in space!

**Item: Transcript of audio recording**

 **Source: Chazz’s cell phone voicemail**

**Date Recorded: January 12, 2017**

Hey Uncle Turd,

 It’s me again. I know you think you can keep blowing me off, but guess what? Circumstances have changed. I think you’ll want to pay attention to me this time.

 But first, let’s talk about how you declined to cast me last summer in *Pantsing with the Stars*—an egregious oversight, I think it’s now clear. I wept for the unwatchable drivel that you doomed yourself to produce without my tour de force personality in the mix. I can only assume that your foul, idiotic casting directors were felled by the brain-altering effects of a chlamydia outbreak. How else to explain their insistence on my absence? My appeal is boundless. My charisma is unmatched. My pores are impeccable.

 And my middle finger is extended in their direction.

 But you’ve got a chance to make it up to me. I heard about your new show. I want in.

 And this time, I think you want me in too. Would be a shame if that video of you and Mom were to end up in Dad’s inbox.

 Tell me when and where I should show up. Peace OUT.

**Item: Post on *Cosmic Crusades* online forum**

**Username: LadyBalwayGalway**

**Posted: January 6, 2017**

 *[excerpt from page 3 of 5]*

 .º.º. and if you freeze the frame at exactly eighty-three minutes and thirty-seven seconds, you can see that the gamma-ray missile that Fekawa Gooe sets up is NOT in fact aimed at the Intragalactic Senate, in fact it’s cocked at an angle of 52.6 degrees, which would in fact point it directly at Lord Balway Galway, WHO, if you’ll RECALL, stated during the Transnebula Peace Talks that his home planet of Gavinjia was sure to escape the conflict unscathed, so OBVIOUSLY the bombing mission was intended as a wake-up call to prove him wrong and send a TELEKINETIC message that .º.º.

**Item: Online video**

**Username: the\_entropy\_within**

**Posted: January 8, 2017**

 *[IMAGE: hands strumming a mandolin while words are spoken over the tuneless chords]*

 looking up at the sky /

 and a thought floats by /

 what if the galaxy /

 is just a strawberry /

 and all the stars we see /

 are only flecks of seeds /

 that get stuck in your teeth /

 and increase carbon emissions /

 and line the pockets of corporate America

**Item: Social media account**

**Username: @BacardiParti**

 *[collection of more than 2,000 photos, half of which are unprintable because they are blurry, the other half of which are unprintable because they feature underage nudity]*

Informative as these documents are, there are two cast members in particular who warrant closer attention. They will emerge as the most crucial players in this chronicle for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is that they personally provide a substantial volume of information about what occurs during production—both of them by way of personal video diary entries, also known in reality television parlance as “confessionals.” A small window into their pre-shooting mental states is provided in the following two documents.

 (It’s also worth pointing out that both cast members choose to express themselves in the form of dispatches to their parents—symbolically in one case, and literally in the other. This is nothing more than a coincidence, but as their body of work will come to show, the bond between children and their absent parents is a complicated one, to put it mildly.)

 The first is a clip from Nico’s personal GoPro video camera. Nico rarely captures himself in the frame of these videos; rather, he uses his words as a soundtrack for the often mundane images he is recording, which are mostly of wherever he happens to be at the time.

**Item: Transcript of video recording**

**Source: Nico’s camera**

**Battery charge: 100%**

**Date: January 14, 2017**

 *[IMAGE: Nondescript room. From the angle of the camera, it seems that Nico is seated at a large table at the center.]*

 **Nico:** *[voiceover]* Hi Mom. Hi Dad.

 Um.

 I did something stupid.

 *[The camera pans downward under the table, now pointing at his feet. They are rested on a skateboard, which he rolls back and forth.]*

 I don’t know why I did it. I don’t know *how* I did it. A lot of systems had to come together to make it happen. My legs had to push me here, my mouth had to say things, my eyes had to make contact with other eyes, my brain had to formulate thoughts, my hamster-size soul had to blow up to ten times its size and pretend to be a lion. And I can honestly say I don’t know how all those things worked in tandem to do what I did.

 I auditioned for a reality show.

 *[pause]*

 Shit.

 Saying it out loud makes me feel like throwing up.

 *[Nico gets up from the chair. Camera pans to window and holds steady on people walking down the sidewalk—a couple, then a woman pushing a stroller, then two men smoking cigarettes.]*

 It was like .º.º. like I couldn’t help myself. I’d heard that they were holding auditions at the Queens Center mall, so I told Diego that I was going there to see a movie with some friends—which he didn’t buy, by the way. “What’s wrong with movie theaters in the Bronx? Since when do you have friends in Queens? Why ride the subway for an hour for no reason? Are you out of your mind?”

 All fair questions. Especially that last one.

 But it was the weekend, and I pointed out that I can do whatever I want with my free time, and he washed his hands of me like he always does, so I went. Just to watch. Just to film the people in line. Figured they’d be an interesting crowd. When I got there, I saw the DV8 banner hanging across the entrance, and I thought, obviously I would never audition, obviously that is something for the otherninety-nine percent of the teenage population to embarrass themselves with, *but* when I went inside .º.º. I got in line.

 Okay, in my defense:

 You know how rough I’ve had it.

 You know how miserable I’ve been.

 (I know you don’t *really* know. But let’s pretend that you actually watch these videos. That for the past couple of years I have not been pouring the contents of my heart into a digital cache that I’d rather chuck under the B train than let anyone see. Let us pretend that the phrase “pathetic delusion” does not figure into any of this.

 Because the thought of college feels like a five-ton block of concrete pressing on my back, and the thought of getting a job instead feels like the floor is rushing up to squish me against the ceiling. Like I’m trapped in a dungeon in a video game, with all these moving contraptions of torture trying to flatten me into a splat of pixels. Like no matter what I do, the future is going to crush me.

 I wish you were still here. Diego’s all right, but legal guardian-slash-older brother is not the same as parent. And I don’t know why I thought that this show was the answer, but it was something different, a change, an honest-to-God *decision* in a haze of fuzzy, unknowable .º.º.)

 *[Camera pans away from window and focuses on a pair of vending machines in the corner of the room.]*

 Anyway. Back to the mall.

 The line was so long, it wrapped all the way past the escalators and ended near Macy’s. I thought, *obviously I’m not going to give them my name*, *obviously I’m not going to forge Diego’s signature on the waiver, obviously I’m not going to stand in that ridiculous line—*

 But the line moved fast, and before I could change my mind, my name was called. They brought me into a vacant store where they had set up screens to make little cubicles, like the kind they use in blood drives. There was a cameraman and an interviewer, a woman with a blouse that was cut so low I could see her bra.

 (Sorry for that detail, Mom, but I couldn’t *not* notice. It was staring me in the face, and I’m a healthy adolescent boy.)

 (Dad, it was bright turquoise with little rhinestones. You get what I’m saying.)

 She asked me all sorts of awful questions, and I answered them. Told her my age, where I’m from, that I’m into skateboarding and shooting videos. To be honest, I don’t remember most of what I said, because it all went by so fast, and she kept nodding, so I kept talking—and also, you know, the bra. All I remember is that her face lit up like Yankee Stadium when I told her you were dead, and after that, it all felt like a done deal. That’s when the dread started, the feeling that this might actually happen. Like I’d stepped into a pool of sticky tar and it wasn’t going to let me go.

 I mean that literally. They wouldn’t let me go.

 They brought me into this break room, told me to wait, and closed the door.

 *[Camera pans to door handle. Hand reaches out to jiggle it.]*

 Locked.

 They ducked their heads in about fifteen minutes ago and said that it shouldn’t be much longer, they’ll be reaching a decision soon.

 Shit. Shit shit.

 I mean, even if I do get cast, it’s not like I have no choice in the matter, right?

 Obviously I can say no.

 Obviously I’m not going to do it.

The final pre-taping document is another video, this time featuring cast member Titania. She is in a public restroom, aiming her phone camera at the mirror. She looks straight into the lens.

**Item: Transcript of video recording**

**Source: Titania’s cell phone**

**Date: January 15, 2017**

 **Titania:** Remember *Trackleton’s Guide to the Big Outdoors*?

 Cute little picture book that you bought for three ninety-nine at the ranger’s station. The pages were held together with a plastic coil. It had maps of Washington’s hiking regions. And it followed Trackleton, that charming, bearded outdoorsman, as he went on adventures.

 His catchphrase was “Keep moving. Keep exploring.” Advice so good it became our family motto.

 You read it every time we went camping, which added up to a lot of readings over the years. We used to snuggle into our sleeping bags, and you would read it aloud to us by the lantern light, as little black specks of bugs giving a shadow puppet performance against the walls of our tent.

 *[Titania’s reflection smiles.]*

 We loved that book. Patrick liked the colorful maps. Nathan liked to chew on the coil. Lily made up songs to go along with the words—remember how you used to tell her to sing quietly so the rest of us could still hear you read? As if that girl would ever stop singing.

 *[Her smile fades.]*

 I’ve been thinking a lot about that book lately. About Trackleton’s cheery optimism and can-do attitude. I hadn’t for years, not since it slipped out of Dad’s pack during the hike through the Columbia River Gorge. But after our last trip—*the* trip—it all came rushing back to me. I can’t get it out of my head. And I finally realized why.

 It had only two rules: Keep moving. Keep exploring. Hard and fast, with no room for error. Don’t overthink them, don’t second-guess them, and everything will work out.

 But life isn’t like that at all. Keep moving, and maybe you’ll succeed. Or not. Keep exploring, and maybe you’ll be happy. Or not. Do both, and they could lead to the best possible outcome.

 Or do both, and they could ruin everything.

 Keep moving, keep exploring.

 I’d always thought it was good advice. The best advice.

 But I’m not so sure anymore.

The applicants are impressive enough to warrant this response from Chazz Young, the CEO of DV8, delivered via an all-staff conference call.

**Item: Transcript of audio recording**

 **Source: Chazz’s cell phoneDate: January 16, 2017**

 **Chazz Young:** Hey guys! Chazz here.

 So I’d like to bring the entire DV8 family up to speed on our new project. As mentioned at the companywide meeting last week, this project is going to be groundbreaking. It’s going to break, like, every ground that’s been put there since television started.

 So over the past week we’ve been holding casting sessions in cities around the country, and—hang on a sec, before I go any further, we all need to give up some mad, *mad* props to the publicity department. Thanks to your commercials, press releases, and social media efforts, over *ten thousand* kids came out to audition! That’s a lot of hormones to shoot into orbit!

 So as usual, we’re implementing the classic smash-and-grab casting technique our network has become famous for. Any of you out there who are new to the DV8 family, allow me to elaborate on our patented selection process. Back when we were a tiny fledgling network that didn’t know any better, we dragged out the audition process for weeks. We left no stones unturned, no cell phones untapped. We were thoroughly exhaustive in our attempts to pinpoint what potential castmates might do to one another.

 But let us recall the season four finale of *Alaskan Sex Igloo.* We had thought, based on Saffron’s tendency to fly off the handle and start stabbing things, that she would break one of the icicles off the ceiling and use it to stab Khaleesi. We spent all season leading up to it, right? With foreboding music? And tasteful close-ups of the icicles? And Saffron’s confessional, where she talked about “getting her stab on”? It’s *why* we *cast* her. But for all of our efforts, look what happened—she and Khaleesi *hugged* and *cried* and shared a *snow cone.* With *Jared.* Jared was the one who was supposed to be so lonely and ignored that he left the safety of the igloo to seek the loving embrace of a grizzly bear!

 But the bears never came. And no one got stabbed.

 From that point forward, we decided to take a more hands-off approach. Now, rather than have the whittled-down pool of applicants come in for a final round of casting, we simply go with our gut reactions and finalize the cast based on their original, uncut interviews. In fact, we whisk them directly out of the auditions as soon as their parents or guardians sign the waiver! (Reminder to all employees: any questions from the press that contain the word “kidnapping” should be forwarded straight to the PR department.) And so we are proud to announce that we have already chosen the final ten cast members—only one week after auditions!

 We’ve still applied the standard network reality casting percentages: fifty percent male, fifty percent female; sixty percent white, thirty percent ethnic, ten percent undetermined; balanced dispersal of ages from fourteen to eighteen; plus the four Golden Tokens: gay, foreigner, disabled, and orphan. And as per usual, we’ll be throwing all sorts of plot bombs and crazy situations at the poor bastards—*with* the new added twist of a live segment at the end of each episode.

 Of course, we’ll still leave some things up to chance. Fifteen percent of the editing will be done on the fly, based solely on the relationships and developments that we’ll be monitoring closely over the course of each week. Who knows how it’ll unfold? Who knows where it’ll lead? Who knows what those hyperactive, questionably sane caricatures will throw at us?

 I do: *Drama.*

A brief word about Chazz Young, CEO of DV8, walking innuendo, and overall trash barge of a human being.

 The word that pops up most often when people attempt to describe Chazz is “exceedingly.” He is exceedingly tanned. His teeth are exceedingly white. He is exceedingly self-centered, as evidenced by his initiative to move the human resources department to the basement of DV8 headquarters so his twin puggles could have their own corner office. He is exceedingly arrogant, treating everyone involved in his television productions—cast members, crew, staff, and, yes, interns—as insignificant specks who exist solely to make his star shine more brightly. And he is exceedingly cocky, given the fact that he unilaterally declared himself to be the best candidate for on-air talent. Plenty of talented hosts have presented themselves to DV8 over the years, and although a lucky few manage to grab a sliver of airtime now and then, it’s Chazz’s vinyl face that you’re most likely to see whenever you tune in. Especially when it comes to something as high-profile as *Waste of Space.*

 Which calls to mind another of Chazz’s qualities: he is exceedingly lazy. He thought that *Waste of Space* was going to be a home run no matter what, and that all he had to do was plug in the numbers to a tried-and-true formula that hadn’t failed him yet. But when someone as oblivious as Chazz Young stops seeing people as human beings, he might also stop noticing other details. Smaller details.

 Important details.

**Item: Transcript of audio recording**

 **Source: Chazz’s cell phone**

**Date: January 9, 2017**

**Chazz:** You nerds there? Ready to get this conference call party started?

 **NASAW:** We’re here.

 **Chazz:** Great. So let’s—*[doorbell rings in background]* oh, hang on a sec, everyone. Rock climbing wall delivery.

 **NASAW:** You have your own rock climbing wall?

 **Chazz:** *Two* rock climbing walls. LA’s an earthquake town, it’s important to always have a backup—listen, just talk amongst yourselves for a few minutes. I'll be right back.

 *[beat]*

**NASAW #1:** I can’t believe we agreed to this. *[sound of papers sifting]* These people are certifiable.

 **NASAW #2:** And irresponsible.

 **NASAW #3:** Don’t forget soulless.

 **NASAW #4:** *[sighing]* Well, there’s nothing we can do about it now. We signed the papers. We’re in this whether we like it or not.

 **NASAW #2:** But look at these emails! They are *hurling* money at this thing. We’ve been trying to get this sort of funding from the government for years and received nothing—because apparently the money’s all wrapped up in television! I called to double-check the budget because I figured it couldn’t possibly be correct, but it *is.* The girl on the phone offered to throw in an extra million just because I asked how her day was going!

 **NASAW #4:** How do they have so much money? They’re a television network!

 **NASAW #2:** Two words: Chazz Young. I did some research on this guy. Got rich off his daddy’s trust fund, then used it to buy a struggling sports channel. He did an extensive overhaul, switched all its programming to trashy reality television, bumped up its online presence, and installed his own in-house production company to develop his own projects.

 **NASAW #4:** What does that mean?

 **NASAW #2:** It means that whenever a ridiculous idea pops into Chazz Young’s mind, he has the unlimited budget and power to make it into a show, air it on television, and spread it all over the internet, just like that.

 **NASAW #3:** Let me see those figures. *[sound of coffee being spit across the table]* Jesus Christ! We could buy a brand-new shuttle for that kind of money! Plus fuel!

 **NASAW #4:** I say we round up the lot of these dolts and send *them* into space.

 **NASAW #2:** And I quote: “We will spare no expense on the visuals. None whatsoever.” They’re teaming up with a company called ImmerseFX—it makes video games or virtual reality or theme park rides, I don’t know what the heck it is—to handle the special effects. Which we’re supposed to keep quiet about, by the way, since they’re trying to pass this thing off as real.

 **NASAW #4:** *Psfff.* Good luck.

 **NASAW #2:** They’ve reserved the largest soundstage in the New Mexico desert, and they’re handing it over to us, keys and all. “Build a space plane inside!” they said. “Bounce it up and down! Make as much noise as you want!” The effects people will be out here for a few days to build the thing based on our designs—then after that, it’s up to us. All for the purpose of torturing these poor kids with ridiculous pre-written plot points—

 **NASAW #3:** Pre-written? I thought this was a reality show.

 **NASAW #2:** Ha! Reality, my ass. The only thing that’s real is the team of video editors they’ve got on call, ready to craft it into whatever they need it to be while we get to sit around with our thumbs up our posteriors, shaking a tin can with of a bunch of spoiled little fame whores sealed inside.

 **NASAW #4:** But there’s a host onboard with them, right? Some form of adult supervision?

 **NASAW #2:** Nope! *[slightly hysterical laughter]* The network people aren’t even going to be on set! They said they’d, quote, “rather be shot into the sun than spend three months in that shithole of a desert,” so they’ll be monitoring everything via live feeds, safe and cool in their air-conditioned offices in Los Angeles, and sending us their instructions. Instructions that, I might add, would be hilarious if they weren’t so blisteringly idiotic.

 **NASAW #4:** *[papers sifting]* “Week number one: Asteroid Attack. Will require impacts against the walls of the space plane. Week number two: Spinning Out of Control. Will require a rotating video animation to be displayed in the space plane’s window.”

 **NASAW #2:** And there’ll be more where that came from! The cameras onboard the ship will record six hours at a time, upload the video files to the main server we’ll have on-site, then automatically wipe the memory cards and begin recording again. It’s a process that can sustain itself indefinitely without any manual upkeep, which frees up even more time for them to dream up even more foolishness. And then there’s the list—the twenty-three-point list!—of consultants who are only a phone call away should we wish to contact them. Industrial Light and Magic, Pixar, a charter helicopter company, the Jim Henson workshop—

 **NASAW #3:** Are you kidding me? Puppets? Do they want aliens?

 **NASAW #2:** They might! They might want aliens!

 **NASAW #1:** Enough. *[sound of a coffee mug pounding the table]* There is a clear path through all this.

 **NASAW #2:** Yeah, right through to the unemployment office. Better get in line.

 **NASAW #1:** You’re looking at this from the wrong angle. What we have here, ladies and gentlemen, is an opportunity. A golden opportunity.

 *[pause]*

 **NASAW #2:** What are you proposing?

 *[sound of coffee being poured]*

 **NASAW #1:** We make their spaceship.

 *[sip]*

 **NASAW #1:** We make their show.

 *[sip]*

 **NASAW #1:** And then we make history.