

The Donald Trump I Saw On *The Apprentice*

For 20 Years, I Couldn't Say What I Watched The Former President Do On The Set Of The Show That Changed Everything. Now I Can.

By Bill Pruitt SLATE 30 May 2024 (@ 0935 Hrs EDT)

On Jan 8, 2004, Just More Than 20 Years Ago, The First Episode Of *The Apprentice* Aired. It Was Called “Meet The Billionaire,” And 18 Million People Watched. The Episodes That Followed Climbed To Roughly 20 Million Each Week. A Staggering 28 Million Viewers Tuned In To Watch The First Season Finale. The Series Won An Emmy Nomination For Outstanding Reality-Competition Program, And The Television Critics Association Called It One Of The Best TV Shows Of The Year, Alongside *The Sopranos*, And *Arrested Development*. The Series — Alongside Its Bawdy Sibling, *The Celebrity Apprentice* — Appeared On NBC In Coveted Prime-Time Slots For More Than A Decade.

The Apprentice Was An Instant Success In Another Way Too. It Elevated Donald J Trump From *Sleazy* New York Tabloid Hustler To *Respectable* Household Name. In The Show, He Appeared To Demonstrate Impeccable Business Instincts And Unparalleled Wealth, Even Though His Businesses Had *Barely Survived Multiple Bankruptcies And Faced Another When He Was Cast*. By Carefully Misleading Viewers About Trump — His Wealth, His Stature, His Character, And His Intent — The Competition Reality Show Set About *An American Fraud That Would Balloon Beyond Its Creators' Wildest Imaginations*.

I Should Know. I Was One Of Four Producers Involved In The First Two Seasons. During

That Time, I Signed An Expansive Nondisclosure Agreement That Promised A Fine Of \$5 Million And Even Jail Time If I Were To Ever Divulge What Actually Happened. *It Expired This Year.*

No One Involved In *The Apprentice* — From The Production Company Or The Network, To The Cast And Crew — Was Involved In A Con With Malicious Intent. It Was A TV Show, And It Was Made For *Entertainment*. I Still Believe That. But We Played Fast And Loose With The Facts, Particularly Regarding **Trump**, And If You Were One Of The 28 Million Who Tuned In, *Chances Are You Were Conned.*

As **Trump** Answers For Another Of His Alleged Schemes In New York And Gears Up To Try To Persuade Americans To Elect Him Again, In Part Thanks To The Myth We Created, I Can Finally Tell You What Making **Trump** Into What He Is Today Looked Like From My Side. Most Days Were Revealing. Some Still Haunt Me, Two Decades Later.

Nearly Everything I Ever Learned About Deception I Learned From My Friend Apollo Robbins. He's Been Called A Professional Pickpocket, But He's Actually A "Perceptions Expert." Apollo Has Spent His Life Studying The Psychology Of How We Distort Other People's Perceptions Of Reality And Has Done So By Picking Pockets Onstage For The Entertainment Of Others. He Is A Master Of Deception, A Skill That Made Him, Back In The Day, The So-Called Best-Kept Secret In Las Vegas. After "Fanning" His Marks With Casual, Unobtrusive Touch Designed To Make Them Feel Safe Or At Ease, Apollo Determines Where The Items Reside — The Wallet Inside A Breast Pocket, The Rolex Fastened To A Wrist — And He Removes These Items Without Detection. He'll Even Tell

You What He Intends To Steal Before He Does It. He Does This Not To Hurt People Or Bewilder Them With A Puzzle But To Challenge Their Maps Of Reality. The Results Are Marvelous. A Lot Of Magic Is Designed To Appeal To People Visually, But What He's Trying To Affect Is Your Mind, Your Moods, Your Perceptions.

As A Producer Working In Unscripted, Or "Reality," Television, I Have The Same Goal. Like Apollo, I Want To Entertain, Make People Joyful, Maybe Even Challenge Their Ways Of Thinking. But Because I Often Lack The Cinematic Power Of A Movie, With Its Visual Pyrotechnics Or Rehearsed Dialogue, I Rely On Shaping The Perceptions Of Viewers, Manipulating Their Maps Of Reality Toward I Want Them To Think Or Feel.

The Presumption Is That Reality Is Scripted. What Actually Happens Is The *Illusion* Of Reality By Staging Situations Against an Authentic Backdrop. The More Authentic It Is To, Say, Have A 40-Foot Wave Bearing Down On A Crab Boat In The Bering Sea For *Deadliest Catch*, The More We Can Trick You Into Thinking A Malevolent Russian Trawler Is Out There Messing With The Crabber's Bait. There Is A Trick To It, And When It Works, You Feel As If You're Watching A Scripted Show. Although Very Few Programs Are Out-And-Out Fake, There Is Deception At Play In Every Single Reality Program. The Producers And Editors Are Ostensibly Con Artists, Distracting You With Grand Notions While We Steal From You Your Precious Time.

But The Real Con That Drove *The Apprentice* Is Far Older Than Television. The "Pig In The Poke" Comes From An Idiom Dating To 1955: "I'll Never Buy A Pig In A Poke/There's Many A Foul Pig In A Fair Cloak." It Refers To The Time-Honored Scam Of Selling A

Suckling Pig At Market But Handing Over A Bag (The Poke) To The Purchaser, Who Never Looks Inside It. Eventually, He Discovers He's Purchased Something Quite Different.

Our Show Became A 21st-Century Version. It's A Long Con Played Out Over A Decade Of Watching Trump Dominate Prime Time By Shouting Orders, Appearing To Lead, And Confidently Firing Some Of The Most Capable People On Television, All Before Awarding One Eligible Person A Job. Audiences Responded To Trump's Arrogance, His *Perceived* Abilities And Prescience, But Mostly His *Confidence*. *The Centerpiece To Any Confidence Game Is Precisely That — Confidence.*

As I Walk Into My Interview For *The Apprentice*, I Inadvertently Learn How Important It Is For Every One Of Us Involved To Demonstrate Confidence Above All Else.

I Sit Down With Jay Bienstock, The Showrunner, Who Has One Last Producer Position To Fill And Needs Somebody Capable And Hardworking. His Office Is Sparse, And The Desk Is Strategically Placed Directly Across The Couch, With A Noticeable Angle Downward From His Desk To Whomever Is Seated Across From Him. (I'm Recalling All Of The Quoted Conversations Here To The Best Of My Ability; They Are Not Verbatim.)

He Is Smiling And Even Laughing Throughout The Interview, But From The Steep Angle At Which He Gazes Down On Me, There Is No Mistaking Who Is In Charge. He Seems To Like What He Hears And Offers To Follow Up With My Agent. "But I Have To Check Your References Before I Can Hire You," He Says. "You'd Be Crazy Not To," I Reply.

He Laughs, Claps His Hands Together, And Grins. “*THAT’s* What I’m Talking About,” He Says. “That’s The Confidence This Show Needs!”

I Sit There, Several Inches Below Eyeline, And Ponder What Just Happened. What, I Wonder, Is So “Confident” About Suggesting He’d Be Crazy To Not Check My References? Then It Dawns On Me. He Thinks I Meant “You’d Be Crazy Not To Hire Me.” The Signal To Noise Begins.

Before I Leave, I Have To Ask: *Why Trump?* Bienstock Discovers That We Both Lived In New York For A Time. Knowing What We Know About *Trump*, *Selling The Idea That Intelligent People Would Compete To Land A Job Working For Him Will Be A Challenge.*

“The Idea Is To Have A New And Different Billionaire Every Season — Just Like There’s A New And Different Island On *Survivor*. We Reached Out To Spielberg, Katzenberg, Geffen, Among Others,” He Says. “*Trump* Is The Only One Who Agreed To Sign On.” (Bienstock Didn’t Respond To A Request For Comment.)

“We’ll Make It Work,” Bienstock Says Confidently. I Rise, Shake His Hand, And Leave, And Head Over To Dutton’s Bookstore To Pick Up A Used Copy Of *Trump’s The Art Of The Deal*. It Is Filled With Takeaways About Branding And Strategizing But Conveniently Omits *Trump* Bluffing His Way Through Meetings With Contractors, Stiffing Them When It Is Convenient To Do So, And Betraying His Most Trusted Colleagues To Get What He Wants. (The Book’s Ghostwriter, Tony Schwartz, Has Since Tried To Get The Bestseller Recategorized In The Library Of Congress As A *Work Of Fiction*.)

Another Show Of Confidence Is The Budget The Series Commands. It's Not As Expensive As A Scripted Series, But For A Reality Show, The Price Is High. Never Have I Worked On A Series With This Level Of Funding, But The Cost Is Justified. This Needs To Feel Real.

New York City Is The Perfect — Though Expensive — Backdrop. **Trump's** Actual Offices Are, However, Less Than Telegenic. *They Are Cramped, And A Lot Of The Wood Furniture Is Chipped Or Peeling. None Of It Is Suitable To Appear On Camera.* We Need What Grifters Call The Big Store: A Fake But Authentic-Looking Establishment In Which The *Con Goes Down*. **Trump** Tower, At The Time, Is Mostly Condos And Some Offices Situated In The High-Rise. The Mezzanine Comprises Vacant And Overpriced Retail Space, All Of It Unfinished. **Trump** Offers The Space To The Production — At A Premium, Naturally — And It Is Inside This Location That We Create Our Own “Reception Area” With Doors Leading To A Fake, Dimly Lit, And Appropriately Ominous-Feeling “Boardroom.”

Next Door, There's The “Suite” Where The Contestants Will Live, Which Is Made To Look Like A Trendy Loft-Style Apartment They All Share. The Lodgings Are Made Up Partitions Surrounding Tiny, Hard Bunks Upon Which The Candidates Sleep; The Illusion Comes From Elegantly Appointed Common Areas, Where Most Of The Interplay Will Go Down.

During a Tour Of The Set, I Have My First Encounter With **Trump**. I Leave The Suite And Enter The Gear Room, The Only Vacant Retail Space That Will Remain Unfinished. It Is Filled With Equipment And Crew Members Milling About. In Walks A Trio Of Men. He's

Surprisingly Tall, And Not Just Because Of The Hair. He Is Flanked By Two Even Taller Men. Bienstock Makes Introductions, And I Watch As Trump Shakes Hands With Everyone. I'd Been Told He Would Never Do This, Something About Fearing Unwanted Germs. When It Is My Turn, I Decide On The Convivial Two-Hander And Place My Right Hand Into His And My Left Onto His Wrist As We Shake. His Eye Contact Is Limited But Thorough. He Is Sizing Me Up. He Looks Like A Wolf About To Rip Out My Throat Before Turning Away, Offering My First Glimpse At The Superstructure — His Hairstyle — Buttressed Atop His Head With What Must Be Gallons Of Aqua Net.

I Watch As Trump Saunters Around The Room, Snatches Up A Fistful Of M&Ms From The Craft Service Table Set Aside For The Crew, And Shoves Them Into His Mouth. Then He Is Gone, Ushered Away Toward Some Important Meeting He Must Attend, As If To Say, To One And All Present, *This Is Unimportant.*

Eventually, It's Time To Roll Cameras. When Trump Is Called To Perform, We Are Filming The First Scene Of The First Episode On The Floor Of The New York Stock Exchange, And He Is About To Deliver The First Task. Filming Inside This Beacon Of Capitalism And Wealth Gives The Series The Legitimacy It Needs. *A Con Artist Would Call Staging The Scam Inside A Legitimate Institution "Playing A Man Against The Wall."*

From The Balcony Overlooking The Famed Trading Room Floor, Trump Will Set Up The Entire Premise Of The Show On Camera And Engage In A Little Banter With The Other Participants. This Includes Introducing His Advisers, George Ross, An Older, Grouchy Attorney Devoted To Trump's Legal Affairs, And Carolyn Kepcher, A Perpetual Skeptic

Who Runs His Hospitality Units And One Of His Golf Clubs. (They Might Be Called “The Shills,” Others In On The Con Who Will Act As **Trump’s** Eyes And Ears.)

The Contestants Are There, Lined Up And Zeroed In On By Camera Operators Getting Reaction Shots To Whatever It Is **Trump** Says. Although They Mostly Just Stand And Wait, They Patiently Go Along With The Proceedings. They Are Not In On The Con. They Act As “The Little Blind Mice,” Who, In Fraudster Terms, Convey A Sense Of Authenticity By Reacting To The Goings-On, Like Lab Rats Caught In A Maze.

Nothing Is Scripted — Except For What **Trump** Needs To Say. Cue Cards Are Present, But Mostly It Is Bienstock Running Up, Coaching **Trump**, Tossing Out Suggestions From The Script He Has Written For The Man. The Feeling Is That While Doing A Fair Job Of Repeating The Necessary Words Verbatim, **Trump** Also Appears To Be Inadvertently Shouting At The Contestants. His Hands Shuttle Back And Forth As If Holding An Invisible Accordion, A Gesture Now Famous In Memes.

Each Episode Is Filmed Over Three Days. For The First Episode, The Two Teams Of Contestants, Divided By Gender, Take To The Streets To Carry Out The Initial Task Of Trying To Sell Lemonade For The Most Money. The Women Pulverize The Men.

Having Won, The Women Are Invited Upstairs For A Direct Look At **Trump’s** Very Own Apartment In **Trump** Tower, A Reward Designed Specifically To Introduce Viewers To The Gaudy But Elevated World Of **Donald Trump** At Home. The Men, Who Lost, Go Back To The Loft To Await Their Fate At The Hands Of **Trump**. He Will Be Sending One Of Them

Home.

Inside The Now-Empty Boardroom Set, A Meeting With The Producers Is Called For The First Briefing Of Trump Before The Anticipated Firing. With Trump Are His Cronies, Ross And Kepcher. Trump Is “Too Busy,” So They Have Each Observed Both Teams In The Field And Make An Assessment Of Who Prevailed And Who Fell Behind.

Now, This Is Important. *The Apprentice* Is A Game Show Regulated By The Federal Communications Commission. In The 1950s, Scandals Arose When Producers Of Quiz Shows Fed Answers To Likable, Ratings-Generating Contestants While Withholding Those Answers From Unlikable But Truly Knowledgeable Players. Any Of Us Involved In *The Apprentice* Swinging The Outcome Of Prize Money By Telling Trump WHOM TO FIRE IS FORBIDDEN.

Considering This, Bienstock Wisely Chooses To *Record* These Off-Camera Briefings In case The FCC Ever Rolls Up On Us. Rather Than Blurt Out Who They Think Should Get Canned, The Two Producers Of That Week’s Episode — Each Following One Team — Are Coached To Equitably Share With Trump The Virtues And Deficiencies Of Each Member Of The Losing Team. This Renders A Balanced Depiction Of How And Why They Lost. There Are Obvious Choices Of Whom To Fire, But We Want It To Be Something Of A Horse Race, To Sustain The Drama And Keep People Watching.

Satisfied He Has What He Needs, Trump Dismisses The Prefiring Discussion With A Wave Of A Hand, Claiming He Has Places To Be, Let’s Get On With It, Etc. We Proceed To Set

Up For What Will Be Our First Boardroom.

The Producers Retreat To The Adjacent Control Room To Watch The Event Unfold. Per The Show's Format, The Losing Team Is Summoned In Anticipation Of One Of Its Members Being Sent Home. Leaving Their Luggage In The Reception Area, The Men Walk Into The Boardroom, Where **Trump** Is Flanked By Ross And Kepcher, Waiting For Them Solemnly. **Trump** Just Frowns From A Gigantic Red Leather Chair, His Eyeliner Noticeably Well Above Those Sitting Across From Him.

The Men Proceed To Verbally Go After One Another Like Gladiators Jousting Before The Emperor. **Trump** Takes The Conversation Into Potentially Dangerous Terrain, Asking One Contestant, Who Is Jewish, Whether He Believes In "The Genetic Pool." The Contestant's Retort Is Swift And Resolute: He Tells **Trump** That He Does, In Fact, Have The Genes, "Just Like You Got From Your Father, Fred Trump, And Your Mother, Mary Trump." It Pours Out Of Him. It Is Dramatic. It Is Good Reality TV.

The Project Manager Must Then Choose Two Of The Men To Come Back To The Boardroom With Him While Everyone Else Is Dismissed. An Off-Camera Prefiring Consultation With **Trump** Takes Place (And Is Recorded), Right Before The Three Men Are Brought Back For The Eventual Firing. We Film **Trump**, Ross, And Kepcher Deliberating And Giving The Plusses And Minuses Of Each, Remarking On How Risky It Was For One Of The Contestants To Stand Up For Himself The Way That He Did. **Trump** Turns Back And Forth To Each, Listening. His Cronies Stick To Their Stories And Give Added Differential Treatment Toward **Trump**, With Ross Strategically Reminding Him, "You've

Been Taking Risks Your Entire Life.

Trump Summons The Three Men Back Into The Boardroom For Final Judging. **Trump** Grills One And Says, “I Will Let You Stay.” (*Wow! We Think. A Benevolent Leader.*) When He Turns His Attention To The Other Man — The One He Asked About Genetics — It Looks Clear. He Is Doomed. So Much So That The Man Stands When **Trump** Tells Him, “It Seems Unanimous.” **Trump** Then Offhandedly Tells Him To Sit Down, Calling Him “A Wild Card,” Echoing Ross’ Earlier Observation Of The Boss, **Trump**.

After This Comes An Unwieldy Moment When, At The Behest Of Bienstock, **Trump** Fumbles Through A Given Line. “We Have An Elevator,” He Says To The Remaining Contestant, Named David, “That Goes Up To The Suite And An Elevator That Goes Down” — He Pauses To Recall The Exact Wording — “To The Street. And, David, I’m Going To Ask You To Take The Down Elevator.”

The Men React And Awkwardly Rise. It Is An Unsatisfactory Conclusion, Given All The Preceding Drama.

From The Control Room, We All Watch As The Three Men Depart The Boardroom. A Quick Huddle Takes Place Between The Producers And The Executive From NBC. We Bolt From The Control Room Out Into The Boardroom And Confer With **Trump**, Telling Him We Will Need Him To Say Something More Direct To Conclude The Moment When David Is Let Go.

“Well, Id Probably Just Fire Him,” Trump Says. “Why Not Just Say That?” Bienstock Asks. “Fine,” Trump Says.

We Return To The Control Room. The Three Men From The Losing Team Are Brought Back Into The Boardroom, And Trump Repeats His Line About The Elevator, Then Turns To David, Who Already Knows His Fate, And Adds, “David, You’re Fired.”

The Line Insertion Happened In A Perilously Scripted Way, But It Is Deemed Satisfactory. “You’re Fired” Becomes The Expression We Will Stick With. It Works. Trump Comes Off As Decisive And To The Point.

Later, Trump Will Try To Trademark “You’re Fired.” He Is Not Successful.

Trump’s Appearances Make Up So Little Of Our Shooting Schedule That Whenever He Shows Up To Film, It Isn’t Just The Wild-Card On-Camera Moments We Both Hope For And Are Terrified Of That Put Everyone On Edge. It Is The Way He, The Star, (And Half Owner) Of The Show, Targets People On the Crew With The Gaze Of A Hungry Lion.

While Leering At A Female Camera Assistant Or Assessing The Physical Attributes Of A Female Contestant For Whoever Is Listening, He Orders A Female Camera Operator On Which She Is About To Film Him. “She’s Too Heavy,” I Hear Him Say.

Another Female Camera Operator, Who Happens To Have Blond Hair And Blue Eyes, Draws From Trump Comparisons To His Own Ivanka Trump. “There’s A Beautiful

Woman Behind That Camera,” He Says Toward A Line Of 10 Different Operators Set Up In The Foyer Of **Trump** Tower One Day. “That’s All I Want To Look At.”

Trump Corners A Female Producer And Asks Her Whom He Should Fire. She Demurs, Saying Something About How One Of The Contestants Blamed Another For Their Team Losing. **Trump** Then Raises His Hands, Cupping Them To His Chest: “You Mean The One With The ... ? He Doesn’t Know The Contestant’s Name. **Trump** Eventually Fires Her.

(In Response To Detailed Questions About This And Other Incidents Reported In This Article, Steven Cheung, A Spokesman For The **Trump** 2024 Campaign, Wrote, “This Is A Completely Fabricated And Bullshit Story That Was Already Peddled In 2016.” He Said, That It Is Surfacing Now Because Democrats Are “Desperate.”)

Trump Goes About Knocking Off Every One Of The Contestants In The Boardroom Until Only Two Remain. The Finalists Are Kwame Jackson, A Black Broker From Goldman Sachs, And Bill Rancic, A White Entrepreneur From Chicago Who Runs His Own Cigar Business. **Trump** Assigns Them Each A Task Devoted To One Of His Crown-Jewel Properties. Jackson Will Oversee A Jessica Simpson Benefit Concert At **Trump** Taj Mahal Casino In Atlantic City, While Rancic Will Oversee A Celebrity Golf Tournament At Trump National Golf Club In Briarcliff Manor, New York.

Viewers Need To Believe That Whatever **Trump** Touches Turns To Gold. These Properties That Bear His Name Are Supposed To Glitter And Gleam. All Thanks To Him.

Reality Is Another Matter Altogether. The Lights In The Casino's Sign Are Out. Hong Kong Investors Actually Own The Place — Trump Merely Lends His Name. The Carpet Stinks, And The Surroundings For Simpson's Concert Are Ramshackle At Best. We Shoot Around All That.

Both Rancic And Jackson Do A Round-Robin Recruitment Of Former Contestants, And Jackson Makes The Fateful Decision To Team Up With The Notorious Omarosa, Among Others, To Help Him Carry Out His Final Challenge.

With Her Tenure On The Series Nearly Over, Omarosa Launches Several Simultaneous Attacks On Her Fellow Teammates In Support Of Her "Brother" Kwame. For The Fame-Seeking Beauty Queen, It Is A Do-Or-Die Play For Some Much-Coveted Screen Time. As On Previous Tasks, Ross And Kepcher Will Observe Both Events.

Over At Trump National Golf Club, Where I Am Stationed, It Is Sunny And Bright, Set Against Luscious Fall Colors. I Am Driven Up To The Golf Club From Manhattan To Scout. With Me Are The Other Producers, All Of Whom Are Men. We Meet Trump At One Of The Homes He Keeps For Himself On The Grounds Of The Club.

"Melania Doesn't Even Know About This Place," He Says Out Loud To Us, Snickering, Implying That The Home's Function Is As His Personal Lair For His Sexual Exploits, All Of Which Are Unknown To His Then-Fiancée Melania Knauss.

We Are Taken Around The Rest Of The Club's Property And Told What To Feature On Camera And What To Stay Away From. The Clubhouse Is A Particularly Necessary Inclusion, And It Is Inside These Luxurious Confines Where I Have The Privilege Of Meeting The Architect. Finding Myself Alone With Him, I Make A Point Of Commending Him For What I Feel Is A Remarkable Building. The Place Is Genuinely Spectacular. He Thanks Me.

"It's Bittersweet," He Tells Me. "I'm Very Proud Of This Place, But ... " He Hesitates. "I Wasn't Paid What I Was Promised," He Says. I Just Listen. "Trump Pays Half Upfront," He Says, "But He'll Stiff You For The Rest Once The Project Is Completed."

"He Stiffed You?"

"IF I TRIED TO SUE, THE LEGAL BILLS WOULD BE MORE THAN WHAT I WAS OWED. HE KNEW THAT. HE BASICALLY SAID *TAKE WHAT I'M OFFERING*," AND I SEE HOW HEAVY THIS IS FOR THE MAN, ALL THESE YEARS LATER. "SO, WE SENT THE INVOICE. HE DIDN'T EVEN PAY THAT," HE SAYS. NONE OF THIS WILL BE IN THE SHOW. NOT TRUMP'S SUGGESTED INFIDELITIES, NOR HIS AVERSION TOWARD PAYING THOSE WHO WORK FOR HIM.

When The Tasks Are Over, We Are Back In The Boardroom, Having Our Conference With Trump About How The Two Finalists Compare — A Conversation That I Know To Be Recorded. We Huddle Around Him And Set Up The Last Moments Of The Candidates, Jackson And Rancic.

Trump Will Make His Decision Live On Camera Months Later, So What We Are About To Film Is The Setup To That Reveal. The Race Between Jackson And Rancic Should Seem Close, And That's How We'll Edit The Footage. Since We Don't Know Who'll Be Chosen, It Must Appear Close, Even If It's Not.

We Lay Out The Virtues And Deficiencies Of Each Finalist To Trump In A Fair And Balanced Way, But Sensing The Moment At Hand, Kepcher Sort Of Comes Out Of Herself. She Expresses How She Observed Jackson At The Casino Overcoming More Obstacles Than Rancic, Particularly With The Way He Managed The Troublesome Omarosa. Jackson, Kepcher Maintains, Handled The Calamity With Grace.

"I Think Kwame Would Be A Great Addition To The Organization," Kepcher Says To Trump, Who Winces While He Bobs His Head Around In Reaction To What He Is Hearing And Clearly Resisting.

"Why Didn't He Just Fire Her?" Trump Asks, Referring To Omarosa. It's A Reasonable Question. Given That This [Is] The First Time We've Ever Been In This Situation, None Of This Is Something We Expected.

"That's Not His Job," Bienstock Says To Trump. "That's Yours." Trump's Head Continues To Bob.

"I Don't Think He Knew He Had The Ability To Do That," Kepcher Says. Trump Winces Again.

“Yeah,” He Says To No One In Particular, “But, I Mean, Would America By A N—
Winning?”

Kepcher’s Pale Skin Goes Bright Red. I Turn My Gaze Toward Trump. He Continues To
Wince. He Is Serious, And He Is Adamant About Not Hiring Jackson.

Bienstock Does A Half Cough, Half Laugh, And Swiftly Changes The Topic Or Throws To
Ross For His Assessment. What Happens Next I Don’t Entirely Recall. I Am Still
Processing What I Have Just Heard. We All Are. Only Bienstock Knows Well Enough To
Keep The Train Moving. None Of Us Thinks To Walk Out The Door And Never Return. I
Still Wish I Had. (Bienstock And Kepcher Didn’t Respond To Requests For Comment.)

Afterward, We Film The Final Meeting In The Boardroom, Where Jackson And Rancic Are
Scrutinized By Trump, Who, We Already Know, Favors Rancic. Then We Wrap
Production, Pack Up, And Head Home. There Is No Discussion About What Trump Said
In The Boardroom, About How The Damning Evidence Was Caught On Tape. Nothing
Happens.

We Go Home And Face The Next Phase Of Our Assignment, The Editing. In Stitching The
Footage Together, The Swindle We Are Now Involved In Ascends To New Levels.

Editing In A Reality TV Show Is What Script Writing Is To A Narrative Series. A Lot Of
Effort Goes Into The Storytelling Because, Basically, In Every Single Unscripted Series —
Whether It’s A Daytime Talk Show, An Adventure Documentary, Or A Shiny Floor Dance-

Off — There Are Three Versions: There's What Happens, There's What Gets Filmed, And There's What Gets Cut Down Into 43 Minutes Squeezed Between Commercial Breaks. Especially For A Competition Series, It's Important That The Third Version Represent The First As Much As Possible. A Defeated Contestant Could Show Up In The Press And Cry Foul If They're Misrepresented. Best To Let People Fail Of Their Own Accord. That Said, We Look After Our Prized Possessions In How We Edit The Series, And Some People Fare Better Than Others.

We Attend To Our Thesis That Only The Best And Brightest Deserve A Job Working For **Donald Trump**. Luckily, The Winner, Bill Rancic, And His Rival, Kwame Jackson, Come Off As Capable And Confident Throughout The Season. If For Some Reason They Had Not, We Would Have Conveniently Left Their Shortcomings On The Cutting Room Floor. In Actuality, Both Men Did Deserve To Win.

Without A Doubt, The Hardest Decisions We Faced In Postproduction Were How To Edit Together Sequences Involving **Trump**. We Needed Him To Sound Sharp, Dignified, And Clear On What He Was Looking For And Not As If He Was Yelling At People. You See Him Today: When He Reads From A Teleprompter, He Comes Off As Loud And Stoic. Go To One Of His Rallies And He's The Off-The-Cuff Rambler Rousing His Followers Into A Frenzy. While Filming, He Struggled To Convey Even The Most Basic Items. But As He Became More Comfortable With Filming, **Trump** Made Raucous Comments He Found Funny Or Amusing — Some Of Them Misogynistic As Well As Racist. We Cut Those Comments. Go To One Of His Rallies Today And You Can Hear Many Of Them.

If You Listen Carefully, Especially To That First Episode, You Will Notice Clearly Altered Dialogue From **Trump** In Both The Task Delivery And The Boardroom. **Trump** Was Overwhelmed With Remembering The Contestant's Names, The Way They Would Ride The Elevator Back Upstairs Or Down To The Street, The Mechanics Of What He Needed To Convey. Bienstock Instigated Additional Dialogue Recording That Came Late In The Edit Phase. We Set **Trump** Up In The Soundproof Boardroom Set And Fed Him Lines He Would Read Into A Microphone With Bienstock On The Phone Directing From LA. And Suddenly **Trump** Knows The Names Of Every One Of The Contestants And Says Them While The Camera Cuts To Each Of Their Faces. *Wow, You Think, How Does He Remember Everyone's Name?* While On Location, He Could Barely Put A Sentence Together Regarding How A Task Would Work. Listen Now, And He Speaks Directly To What Needs To Happen While The Camera Conveniently Cuts Away To The Contestants, Who Are Listening And Nodding. He Sounds Articulate And Concise Through Some Editing Sleight Of Hand.

Then Comes The Note From NBC About The Fact That After **Trump** Delivers The Task Assignment To The Contestants, He Disappears From The Episode After The First Act And Doesn't Show Up Again Until The Next-To-Last. That's Too Long For The (High-Priced) Star Of The Show To Be Absent.

There Is A Convenient Solution. At The Top Of The Second Act, Right After The Task Has Been Assigned But Right Before The Teams Embark On Their Assignment, We Insert A Sequence With **Trump**, Seated Inside His Gilded Apartment, Dispensing A Carefully Crafted Bit Of Wisdom. He Speaks To Whatever The Theme Of Each Episode Is —

Why Someone Gets Fired Or What Would Lead To A Win. The Net Effect Is Not Only That **Trump** Appears Once More In Each Episode But That He Also Now Seems *Prophetic* In How He *Just Knows* The Way Things Will Go Right Or Wrong With Each Individual Task. He Comes Off As All-Seeing And All-Knowing. We Are Led To Believe That **Donald Trump** Is A Natural-Born Leader.

Through The Editorial Nudge We Provide Him, **Trump** Prevails. So Much So That NBC Asks For More Time In The Boardroom To Appear At The End Of All the Remaining Episodes. (NBC Declined To Comment For This Article.)

When It Comes To The Long Con, The Cherry On Top Is The Prologue To The Premiere. It's A Five-Minute-Long Soliloquy Delivered By **Trump** At The Beginning Of The First Episode, The One Titled "Meet The Billionaire." Over A Rousing Score, It Features **Trump** Pulling Out All The Stops, Calling New York 'My City' And Confessing To Crawling Out From Under "Billions Of Dollars In Debt." There's **Trump** In The Back Of Limousines. **Trump** Arriving Before Throngs Of Cheering Crowds Outside **Trump** Tower. **Trump** In His Very Own Helicopter As It Banks Over Midtown — The Same Helicopter With The **Trump** Logo That, Just Like The Airplane, Is Actually For Sale To The Highest Bidder.

THE TRUTH IS, ALMOST NOTHING WAS HOW WE MADE IT SEEM.

So, We Scammed. We Swindled. Nobody Heard The Racist And Misogynistic Comments Or Saw The Alleged Cheating, The Bluffing, Or His Hair Taking Off In The Wind. Those Tapes, I've Come To Believe, Will Never Be Found.

No One Lost Their Retirement Fund Or Fell On Hard Times From Watching *The Apprentice*. But **Trump** Rose In Stature To The Point Where He Could Finally Eye A Run For The White House, Something He Had Intended To Do All The Way Back In 1998. Along The Way, He Could Now Feed His Appetite For **Defrauding** The Public With Various Shady Practices.

In 2005 Thousands Of Students Enrolled In What Was Called **Trump** University, Hoping To Gain Insight From The **Donald** His “Handpicked” Professors. Each Paid As Much As \$35,000 To Listen To Some *Huckster* Trade On **Trump’s** Name. In A Sworn Affidavit, Ronald Schnackenberg Testified That **Trump** University Was “Fraudulent.” The Scam Swiftly Went From Online Videoconferencing Courses To Live Events Held By High-Pressure Sales Professionals Whose Only Job Was To Persuade Attendees To Sign Up For The Course. The Sales Were For The Course “Tuition” And Had Nothing Whatsoever To Do With Real Estate Investments. A Class Action Suit Was Filed Against **Trump**.

That Same Year, Trump Was Caught Bragging To *Access Hollywood* Co-Host Billy Bush That He Likes To Grab Married Women “By The Pussy,” Adding , “When You’re A Star, They Let You Do It.” HE LATER TRIED TO RECRUIT PORN ACTOR STORMY DANIELS FOR *THE APPRENTICE* DESPITE HER PROFESSION AND, ACCORDING TO DANIELS, HAD SEX WITH HER RIGHT AFTER HIS LAST SON WAS BORN. (His Alleged Attempt To Pay Off Daniels Is, Of Course, The Subject Of His Recent Trial.)

In October 2016 — A Month Before The Election — The *Access Hollywood* Tapes Were Released And Written Off As “Locker Room Banter.” **Trump** Paid Daniels To Keep Silent

About Their Alleged Affair. He Paid \$25 Million To Settle The **Trump** University Lawsuit And Make It Go Away.

He Went On To Become The First Elected President To Possess Neither Public Service Nor Military Experience. And Although He Lost The Popular Vote, **Trump** Beat Out Hillary Clinton In The Electoral College, Winning In The Rust Belt By Just 80,000 Votes.

Trump Has Been Called The “Reality TV President,” And Not Just Because Of *The Apprentice*. The Situation Room, Where Top Advisors Gathered, Became A Place For Photo-Ops, A Bigger, Better Boardroom. **Trump** Swaggered And Cajoled, Just As He Had On The Show. Whom Would He Listen To? Whom Would He Fire? *Stay Tuned*. **Trump** Even Has His Own Spinoff, Called The House Of Representatives, Where Women Hurl Racist Taunts And Body-Shame One Another With Impunity. The State Of The Union Is Basically A Cage Fight. THE DEMANDS OF PUBLIC OFFICE NOW INCLUDE BLOWHARD BUFFOONERY.

I Reached Out To Apollo, The Vegas Perceptions Expert, To Discuss All Of This. He Reminded Me How If A Person Wants To Manipulate The Signal, They Simply Turn Up The Noise. “In A World That Is So Uncertain,” He Said, “A Confidence Man Comes Along And Fills In The Blanks. The More Confident They Are, The More We’re Inclined To Go Along With What They Suggest.”

A Reality TV Show Gave Rise To An Avaricious Hustler, And A Deal Was Made: Subvert The Facts, Look Past The Deficiencies, Deceive When Necessary, And Prevail In The Name

Of Television Ratings And Good, Clean Fun.

Trump Is Making Another Run At The White House And Is Leading In Certain Polls. People I Know Enthusiastically Support Him And Expect He'll Return To Office. It's Not Just Hats, Sneakers, A Fragrance, Or Bibles. **Donald Trump** Is Selling His Vision Of The Worlds, And People Are Buying It.

KNOWING ALL THEY KNOW, HOW COULD THESE PEOPLE STILL THINK HE'S
CAPABLE OF BEING PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES?

Perhaps They Watched Our Show And Were Conned By The Pig In The Poke.

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