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Warnings We Do Not Heed

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Not so Naughty, Not so Nice

He noticed the chill air, the days grown shorter and eggnog returned to the supermarket shelves. Meaning it was time to go online and request the annual Naughty or Nice list from Santa@TheNorthPole.xmas for the upcoming season. Carl was excited. The new decision matrix would invariably have choices that could be important. Not just for him, but to the ten or so people whose cases he'd be assigned. And, if he chose well, could mean promotion.

Carl read the list and, at some point, knew he'd have to loop in his seasonal partner, Tim. Tim worked the execution side of the list for the last two years with Carl and wasn't all that experienced. Which was fine. Except he had a bad habit of questioning not just the list and what needed to be done, but who was behind the list. How they determined the list and the decision matrix and what they expected to accomplish keeping everyone in the dark about the list till nearly the last minute.

"It has to be aliens!" Tim insisted, "who only come to Earth once a year for their annual inspection. And they have to be some kind of cross between a benevolent Santa Claus and an all seeing "Cerebro" like being. Like Charles Xavier in X-men, maybe."

"Maybe," Carl would reply. "but would it matter? The results behind the list are always the same. And the obvious benefits to mankind worth the mystery, don't you think?"

"Maybe it's the CIA," Tim tried.

Carl sighed knowing the redundancy of discussing who pulled their strings year in and year out – without access to any new information - was futile. He didn't really care. Nor would it prevent him from refusing the honor of participating each year. Because, in addition to the paycheck, and the potential for promotion, you couldn't argue with the expansive benefits the list produced in society.

"Oh man, I hope they don't give us more sex offenders this year," Tim said. "Those lame fuckers were such big whiners! You'd think they'd have a little more backbone considering their crimes. But no, they cried like babies the whole time they received their punishments. And heaven help me, but it took till spring to scrub off their stink after shoving those big chunks of coal up their asses. I should've worn latex gloves up to my elbows!"

"Worse than the previous year we worked the Naughty list of accountants from the Enron Corporation? Didn't you say their '*I was just doing my job*' excuses pissed you off to no end? Especially considering the decision matrix that year didn't provide very harsh penalties? A pound of flesh or a million dollars to charity. Not very hard for them to choose."

"Hey, what do you think our chances of getting a "Nice" list this year are? We've been working Naughty a while and I think it'd be cool to provide a few rewards instead of punishments."

"Not very. You remember that organ donor fiasco two years ago with our number three on the list?"

"Oh, man. Yeah, I do. Mike Espinosa. I messed up there big time. Thank goodness he lived. I was new too, but I appreciated you going to bat for me. Sticking up for me and all."

"Well, bad news, Tim. Mike Espinosa died this year."

"Aw man, that sucks. I hope his family's doing okay. Maybe we should start a charity fund or something for them."

"Sure. That would be nice. But, Tim, I have something to tell you. Maybe I shouldn't say, but..."

"Hey man, we're partners. We've been together a while. You can tell me anything."

"I downloaded this year's list."

"Yeah? How's the list? How bad? Who do we go after this year? I hope it's them politicians from Florida. They really deserve a good ass whupping. Lotta problems coming out of Florida this year."

"No, not politicians."

"Well, who? Spit it out. I'm dying to know."

"Tim, I don't know how to say this. I don't know if I even should, but you've been a friend and I feel like I owe you something for the work we've done together."

"Just say it already. I'm dying with suspense."

"I downloaded the list and you're number seven this year."

"What?!"

"You're on this year's Naughty list. It's called 'Mistakes that Cost Lives' and you're number seven."

"You're kidding me, right?!"

"No, I double checked and confirmed it. You're on the list and, as such, have been suspended from participating in the Naughty or Nice program. I've been re-assigned a new teammate who'll be working the execution end. She'll be coming to see you this

Christmas Eve. But don't worry. The punishment I selected won't be too severe. The decision matrix allowed for some fairly lenient options. Nothing you can't handle. It'll hurt, but nothing you can't recover from."

"Aww, man. Me? Really?! Shit! We have to protest this. It was a mistake. I never intended for that guy to have his donor kidney rejected. He was on the Naughty list and I was just trying to make my bones, but still. It was just...what do you call it...an *oversight*! Who do we get in touch with? What number or website do we call to tell them when a punishment was an oversight?"

"No number or website, Tim. They don't allow questions up the chain once the list has been issued. Just the list coming down each year. Sorry, buddy, I thought you'd want to know. It's been great working with you."

"That's it? I'm out? One little mistake after all the years I served! Oh, that sucks! I never meant to harm that guy! Isn't there anything you can do? We're friends!"

"Sorry, Tim. I wish I could. You know I would if I could, but that's not how it works. The list is law and I still want the work. I hope you understand. I have no ill feelings toward you and I hope you recover and get back onto the teams. It's been great working with you."

"Aww, man. That's not nice. I feel like I'm screwed no matter what."

"Not screwed. Just one less kidney come Christmas. Merry Christmas, Tim. And a Happy New Year to you too."

Carl hung up the phone and turned back to the list on hand. He hoped Tim understood, but the list was law.

The END.