

Surgery Between Breaths

By ChristopherDDouglas

The task, simple.

One red light; One Green.

From the open chamber of an elevator, a pallet of undetermined goods would be delivered down a conveyor belt to be judged by the lights.

In the event that the lights judged the undetermined goods negatively, the red light would signal its failure and would send the pallet and its contents down an opposite path of conveyor belts

Space elevators and the product delivered were part of such a strict itinerary of management that once the product was delivered the chances of the red light illuminating and rejecting the undetermined goods was calculated as a near impossibility.

Nevertheless, redundancies had been installed to ensure that production was never slowed. So skilled were the maintenance technicians that many times they would require the elevator to never halt production at all.

A surgery performed between breaths.

To further cut down on material costs, these space elevators would be located in isolated mountainous terrain as it cut down on material and labor costs up to 10,000 feet.

There was an essential flaw to the process that the company could not resolve. Through the games of government bureaucracy, it was determined that every location must employ one site manager. The only job of the site manager was to ensure that the green light turned green.

In the event that any other action was performed by the machine, the job of the site manager was to immediately press the button located on the observation platform. This would

signal to the company of the malfunction and a team of technicians would be on site within six hours.

Because of the isolation of these sites, the site manager would take up occupancy within the facility. The company preferred five year contracts.

This is a story of Jim Richards, site manager, elevator #2240. Year two. Month five.

Jim was chosen for a particular reason; He was dumb.

The company saw fit to employ the simplest of people to perform the simplest of tasks. If one could tell the difference between the color green and the color red, they could effectively be hired as a site manager.

Because of the extreme cost cutting measures done by the company, elevator sites were provided little in habitat and recreational accommodations. This required that anyone employed as site manager to undergo a rigorous battery of tests to ensure that one's intellect did not require stimulation beyond watching the green and red lights.

While this practice worked in theory, the reality was a suicide rate of thirty-six percent amongst site managers. The delivery of goods was intermittent and required that Jim stand on a platform installed forty feet above the lights, providing Jim a perfect vantage of the elevator.

Perfect operation gave Jim enough time to think. Unfortunately, his thoughts were never complicated, and lacked the stimulation a human being requires.

He took up menial tasks as a hobby. The small pantry and kitchen facilities were stocked with a five year supply of MREs. He found organizing the packaging by color the most aesthetically pleasant, as he should, considering his only talent that the world found fit was the ability to tell the difference between a green and red light.

That is what Jim Richards did every day. Watch the space elevator deliver the undetermined goods, confirm the green light did in fact turn green, and return to looking at his favorite corner of the machine and ponder about nothing in particular.

Sometime between the sweeping of the facility, the organizing of his MRE's (which required no organization since Jim had done that task everyday for the past two years) and the delivery of the first pallet of goods for the day, that Jim hurdled the intricacy of his thoughts and discerned an unfamiliar emotion.

This epiphany of Jim's was not as shocking of an experience as one would imagine. It simply took up a large amount of the brain space that before would be best described as blank, but better understood as the sound of static from a TV.

He was trending towards a thought; A solution of finality. There was no way around the eventuality of it all.

Jim's path led in a single direction.

One conclusion.

A non-anomaly statistic.

The ponderance of this conclusion had not yet settled upon Jim's smaller than average brain (though his head was quite large). How Jim came about this thought of his untimely but all too well predicted and analytically deciphered death, would be hard to describe in any meaningful way to someone of normal intelligence, but is surprisingly easy for someone with Jim's similar comprehension to express.

If we were to fly down into Jim's head, electronically wire ourselves into Jim's nervous system and roomy prefrontal cortex, controlled the neurons that released his brain chemicals, we would likely have a view of the object that caused the most defining decision of Jim's life.

A decision of life and death. Black and white; Green and Red.

Of course we know that Jim doesn't think in these terms (Jim doesn't think much), but we know Jim has the ability to differentiate between a green and red light.

The answer to the now neverending question that lay in the now, not so dormant mind of Jim Richards had been judging him since his contract began.

The thought had always been there, everpresent.

At sporadic times throughout the day it would turn on, and judge the thoughts that went through Jim's head. He would stare down at it from the platform, and for the past two years and five months the lights judged every thought of Jim's with a green indication.

Today however the idea that came across Jim's mind, caused, for the first time since his arrival, a malfunction.

The red light illuminated.

A pallet of undetermined goods delivered by the space elevator was sent down the opposite line of conveyor belts.

It was time for Jim to complete the other task he'd been contracted to perform; The failsafe. With the glow of the red light, and the rejection of both the undetermined goods and this simple thought of Jim's, he pressed the button located on the platform he stood on.

The company had placed the utmost importance to the efficiency of the space elevator. A second wasted was profit lost, and profit lost was money unearned. Investments were costly, upgrades carefully calculated, and efficiency placed at the highest order of all. Therefore the task of climbing down the ladder rung by rung was considered an inexplicable waste of time for the site manager to have to endure and was replaced by the most efficient and least complicated method known.

Jim also knew this as it was the very thought he had conjured causing the rejection by the red light.

Jim's condition and current state of mind did have a positive effect however. It meant Jim Richards wasn't scared.

He wasn't scared at all.

Not to say Jim was happy, but he followed an instinct that felt as natural as drawing in a breath.

And so Jim drew in his last one.

His step off the platform was easier than Jim had imagined since he had never executed the procedure before, which was the most complicated thought Jim produced since his contract with the company began.

It would have been a beautiful thing to explain all the incredible moments that flashed throughout Jim's head during his flight from the platform to the ribbed metal floor below. Of course, Jim doesn't think in those terms.

The thought was static from a TV. He simply stepped off the forty foot platform and fell, turning a half somersault on the way to his meeting with the ground.

Jim completed all tasks that he was assigned to do.

He lay crooked in a pool of blood that escaped. Jim was part of the statistical non-anomaly who did not complete their five year contract with the company. Therefore as Jim Richards lay dead, still warm, the pallet of undetermined goods, rejected by the red light, became determined.

The pallet, sent down a long conveyor belt, ultimately stopped just shy of Jim's lifeless body as an alarm echoed throughout the facility, the container doors opened...

Jim Richards took his first breath and his heart pumped its first beat.

He exited the rejected pallet and stood above the expired Jim who had befallen the unfortunate fate of the thirty-six percent of site managers that pressed the button. Within six hours a team of operators and technicians would arrive to maintenance the facility.

A surgery performed between breaths.

The new Jim Richards climbed the ladder and stood on the platform forty feet high and performed the first task he was assigned.

To supervise the green and red light.

