

JL Spears  
authorjlspears@gmail.com  
<https://www.jlspears.com>  
© 2025 JL Spears

Approx 1700 words

THE REDUNDANCY MACHINE PART 3 – THE COMPLAINT ESCALATION BUREAU  
by  
JL Spears

**A Chilly Transfer**

One fine morning—if one can truly call any morning spent in an office “fine”—Noah Barrow arrived at his desk in the Conference Room Occupancy Division, only to be greeted by a dour-faced Ms. Greene. Yes, *that* Ms. Greene. She was accompanied by Wesley Ong, who wore the uneasy expression of a man witnessing a crime he couldn’t prevent.

“Mr. Barrow,” Ms. Greene intoned, “there have been... complaints.”

Her expression, if you recall from previous episodes, had the unique ability to wither houseplants at thirty paces. Noah’s stomach turned. He’d done his best to keep the meeting schedules full, with only a few attempts at discreet efficiency improvements. How could that be a problem?

Wesley cleared his throat. “Apparently, some employees are... frustrated that your scheduling ‘innovations’ sometimes cause confusion.”

Dear reader, if you have never encountered the word *innovations* in an office environment, you might be confused. Suffice it to say that, in certain companies, “innovation” can be a dirty word when it threatens to reveal how meaningless things truly are.

Ms. Greene tapped her glossy tablet. “Your assigned role here is concluded. You’re being moved immediately to the Complaint Escalation Bureau. Pack your things.”

Noah’s halfhearted protest died in his throat. He could read in Ms. Greene’s sharp gaze that there was no room for discussion. And so, with the weight of yet another “opportunity” pressing down, Noah gathered his personal items, gave Wesley a sympathetic nod, and trudged after Ms. Greene.

**You might imagine that transferring an employee every few weeks for performing too well is an unusual business practice. And you would be right. But let us not forget that unusual is the bread and butter of TranSys Global—where illusions of busyness are as precious as real work.**

---

### **Welcome to the Bureau**

The Complaint Escalation Bureau (CEB) occupied a narrow wing on the 31st floor, tucked between the break room and a rarely used “Mindfulness Spa.” A frosted glass door proclaimed the department’s motto: **“Your Voice Matters—When Properly Filed.”**

Inside, rows of cubicles bristled with telephones, sticky notes, and employees typing furiously, as though every keystroke determined the planet’s fate. A harried woman with short, curly hair and an impressive collection of pens in her breast pocket noticed their arrival.

“Ah, Ms. Greene.” She wrinkled her nose in polite curiosity. “New recruit?”

“Indeed,” Ms. Greene answered, stepping aside to present Noah like a reluctant pageant contestant. “This is Noah Barrow. Effective immediately, he reports to you, Ms. Burgess.”

Ms. Burgess adjusted her many pens with a click-clack. “Excellent. I’m sure Mr. Barrow will appreciate how vital our work is. The Reliability Machine specifically recommends thorough complaint documentation and swift escalation whenever feasible.”

Noah flashed a friendly smile, though he felt more like a mouse cornered by cats. “Happy to be here. I think.”

**At this point, dear reader, you might suspect that no one could be *truly* happy to join a department dedicated exclusively to handling and escalating complaints. You are, of course, correct. Yet, in the labyrinth of TranSys Global, sometimes an unpleasant role is preferable to no role at all.**

---

### **The Nature of Complaints**

Ms. Greene left as briskly as she’d arrived, and Ms. Burgess whisked Noah to a cramped cubicle adorned with a battered swivel chair and a phone that looked like it still had a rotary dial. Several sticky notes covered the desk:

- **Complaint #3095: Discolored coffee mugs in break room**
- **Complaint #4021: Elevator music too soothing**
- **Complaint #5587: Meeting schedule overlaps**

With a pointed glance, Ms. Burgess tapped one particular note:

**#5587: Mr. Barrow’s scheduling confusion**

He swallowed hard.

“Your first duty is to follow our escalation protocols,” Ms. Burgess explained, handing him a sizable binder labeled *CEB Manual—Volume 1 of 12*. “A complaint enters the system, you determine its severity, then you escalate it to the next tier if unresolved in 24 hours.”

Noah opened the binder and flipped through sections with headings like “Category D Minor Grievances: Odd Smells, Misplaced Items, Potted Plant Abandonment” and “Category A Major Grievances: Cybersecurity Breach, Social Media Outrage, Lack of Sufficient Lunch Options.” Each category cross-referenced subcategories, creating a near-endless bureaucracy.

**If you, dear reader, have ever wondered how many synonyms there are for ‘procedure,’ you will find the CEB Manual enlightening indeed. If, however, you prefer your reading material to consist of entertaining novels, witty dialogue, and moral lessons, you are in for a disappointment.**

With an air of pride, Ms. Burgess continued, “We’re the backbone of communication here. Employees can’t solve issues on their own. That might disrupt *reliability*. So they must file complaints, which we escalate accordingly.”

“Right,” Noah said, already envisioning a simpler digital ticketing system that would automatically sort and route each complaint to the correct team. A wave of caution washed over him. *Not again*, he thought. *They don’t want me automating anything*. For now, he’d learn the manual steps.

---

## A Day in CEB

Noah's first day at the Complaint Escalation Bureau was a masterclass in tedium:

- He answered calls from colleagues grumbling about minor annoyances: stale cookies, blurry nameplates, suboptimal air conditioning.
- He diligently typed up each complaint into a shared spreadsheet—**not** an automated system, mind you—and assigned it a severity code.
- If no resolution emerged by the next day, he had to escalate it to Tier 2—by printing a copy and physically walking it to Ms. Burgess's desk for her signature.
- Once signed, it moved to Tier 3. But only if Tier 2 *also* deemed it unresolvable.

"I see," Noah murmured, flipping between pages of the manual for the correct subcategory: "Tier 2—Category C: Non-Emergency, Non-Equipment, Non-HR Grievances." It was like searching for a needle in a haystack that had been neatly subdivided into dozens of smaller haystacks, each requiring a separate form.

A strange mixture of frustration and fascination took hold. Noah recognized that half these complaints could be solved in seconds if employees would just talk to each other. But the system insisted on "proper escalation channels."

**One might assume that common sense would prevail—that the simplest path to resolution would be the best. But as you have no doubt gleaned from Noah's experiences, dear reader, simplicity has no place where illusions of busyness reign supreme.**

---

## The Unwanted Innovation

By late afternoon, Noah's creative itch grew impossible to ignore. While other CEB staffers had left for a coffee break—oddly, the team took them in regimented shifts—he opened a new spreadsheet on his computer. He started coding simple macros to route complaints automatically based on keywords. For instance, “coffee machine” or “break room odors” would instantly tag the item as Category D.

No phone calls, no printing, no walking piles of paper around. Everything neatly labeled, escalated, and tracked in real time. He figured Ms. Burgess might appreciate fewer steps.

A sudden voice behind him nearly caused him to knock over a cup of pens. “What exactly are you doing?”

Noah spun around to see Ms. Burgess's frown. *How do they always sneak up like that?* he wondered. He gestured to his screen. “I'm—uh—trying to streamline the complaint process. That way, we don't have to chase so much paperwork.”

Her expression morphed into something resembling horror. “Streamline? That's not how the Reliability Machine designed it.” She pointed at the binder. “Those steps are there for a reason, Mr. Barrow. If we eliminate them, we risk *misclassification*. Or—” she lowered her voice, as though divulging a terrible secret, “—we might look underworked.”

“But we could solve issues faster,” Noah offered weakly, hoping for a shred of support.

Ms. Burgess snapped the binder shut. “This *is* fast, Mr. Barrow. It's *thorough*. It ensures reliable documentation—*human* documentation. The Machine values our manual oversight.”

**Of course, the Machine had never said any such thing directly, at least not to Noah. But in the labyrinthine world of TranSys Global, one does not question the accepted interpretation of the Reliability Machine's will, lest one find oneself out of a job entirely.**

With a tight-lipped nod, Ms. Burgess tapped her watch. "Your break ended three minutes ago. Finish your shift properly and we'll forget this happened."

Noah could only nod, swallowing a sigh. He'd discovered that "trying to help" in this peculiar institution was akin to stepping on a rake—well-intentioned, yet certain to backfire.

---

### **Closing Time and a Small Revelation**

Late in the evening, Noah filed his last complaint escalation for the day: *A dispute over who owned a certain yellow stapler*. He decided to take the scenic route out of the building, partly to clear his head and partly to avoid running into Ms. Burgess again.

He passed floor after floor, glimpsing various departments he hadn't even known existed: the "Clipboard Quality Assurance" team, the "In-House Fragrance Committee," the "Window Blind Adjustment Panel." Each had employees diligently laboring at tasks that seemed marginal at best.

A faint echo of *why* tugged at his thoughts. *Why* was all of this so vital to TranSys and the Reliability Machine? Why not adopt even modest improvements? His mind drifted back to rumors, half-heard and half-suspected, that the ultimate goal was never efficiency at all. Perhaps "reliability" had been a polite term for something else. For the first time, the word "redundancy" flitted across his consciousness—though he wasn't sure where it came from.

**If you, dear reader, sense that Noah Barrow was skirting the edge of some deeper truth, you would be correct. But truths in this corporate labyrinth are buried under layers of plausible deniability and motivational posters. One does not simply discover them without paying a steep price.**

Under the fluorescent lights of the nearly deserted lobby, Noah paused at a display lauding the Reliability Machine's achievements: "*Keeping Humanity Indispensable—One Task at a Time.*" The tagline struck him as strangely hollow. A notion formed, ghostly at first: *What if the Machine's real achievement was keeping everyone employed, whether or not there was meaningful work?*

He rubbed his eyes, deciding he was too tired to indulge such thoughts. Perhaps he just needed sleep. Yet, as he exited the building and the glass doors slid shut behind him, the question still echoed in his mind. Little did he know, dear reader, that his curiosity would lead him deeper into the web of pointless tasks and unspoken truths than he ever imagined.

End – Part 3