

## Gettin' Lifted: The Elevator Game

First I think I need to lay some groundwork and set out some caveats.

To start with, I'm not really a true crime guy.

But given this subject I'm going to have to dip my toes in, and as always, I offer my sincere, preemptive apology.

I have to taunt the true crime fates because when I was researching my topic, almost every blog post, article, or anonymous experience I could find mentioned the death of Elisa Lam.

So I have to unpack a little bit about who Elisa Lam was, and why her tragic death is so closely tied to the online paranormal world.

Elisa Lam was a 21 year old college student at the University of British Columbia.

In early 2013 Lam decided to take a trip down to Los Angeles.

She arrived in LA on January 26th and eventually made her way to the **Cecil Hotel**.

While she was there she was initially placed into a shared room, but was quickly moved to a private room because she was leaving notes telling her roommates to "go away" or "go home" and was requiring passwords for them to enter the room.

Lam was in daily contact with her parents, and was expected to leave the Cecil Hotel on January 31, but when they didn't hear from her, her parents became worried.

On February 1st, Elisa Lam was declared a missing person and her parents came to LA to aid in the search.

For nearly **two weeks** there was no trace of her, and on February 13th, with the goal of drawing more attention to the case, the LAPD posted **the last video** they had of Elisa Lam.

The video would form the basis of many theories surrounding the mystery of her disappearance.

If you haven't seen the video it shows Elisa Lam entering the elevator, she presses a couple of buttons but the doors don't

close, for the next 90 seconds she walks around the elevator, appearing to try to hide in the corner, peering through the open door, appearing to talk, and even leaving the elevator.

When she then returns to the elevator, she appears to press every button, and then exits the elevator while talking and waving her arms in front of her.

The internet began to attempt to explain this strange behavior.

Some speculated that she was on drugs.

Some speculated that she was being stalked.

And a few weirdos started saying she was playing a South Korean game that was transporting her to the otherworld.

But put a pin in that for now.

On February 19th, Elisa Lam's body was found in a water tank on the roof of the Cecil Hotel.

It was not immediately clear how, or why, she ended up there.

Her death was ruled an accident on February 21st.

An autopsy report confirming this was released in June.

While this did nothing to stop the conspiracy theories about her death, I'm inclined to agree that it was accidental.

Elisa Lam was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and had a history of not taking her medication.

Her toxicology reports confirmed that she was underdosing her medication at the time of her death.

There was also evidence that she was experiencing some difficulties with her bipolar disorder at the time of her disappearance.

There were the notes and passwords with her roommates at the Cecil Hotel.

There was also an instance where she announced she was "crazy" in the lobby of the hotel.

And she was removed from a live taping of Conan O'Brian for disruptive behavior.

Elisa Lam's family have also said that she was known to hallucinate and harbor delusions of paranoia and persecution when she was not taking her medication.

She was hospitalized at least once for such an episode.

Law enforcement's theory is that Lam's hallucinations caused her to fear for her life.

She was staying on the top floor of the hotel and was able to climb to the roof.

The water tanks on the roof were open, and investigator's believe that she may have wanted to hide from her perceived stalkers.

Once inside the water tank she was unable to climb out and eventually drowned.

It is a tragic and preventable death. Elisa Lam needed support and was not able to receive it in her final days.

To quote one of the internet researchers featured in Netflix's *The Vanishing at the Cecil Hotel* "Now I realize that the way to honor her is to accept the truth, that this was a tragedy of an accidental death."

There is a lot to say about the death of Elisa Lam. I certainly do not want to appear to be minimizing her death, or stigmatizing mental illness.

It is a tragedy, but it is an accidental tragedy, one that is ultimately explainable, not that this lessens the pain and suffering of those who are affected by it.

With as much as there is to say about the case itself, the conspiracy theories are also telling.

Over time the theory that she was on drugs began to blame the Cecil Hotel's proximity to skid row.

The theory came to be that she was either given or spiked with dangerous hallucinogens by an unhoused person.

This theory relies on the dehumanization of unhoused people and adds a little bit of reefer-madness style panic about hallucinogens.

The theory that she was murdered also became less benign when it found a target in a death metal musician named Pablo Vergara, who goes by Morbid, based on his staying at the Cecil Hotel in 2012 and being, well, a death metal musician.

Morbid's music was taken off of Youtube, his accounts on social media were banned, and he was publicly labelled a murderer, his career was halted.

In a 2021 interview, Vergara said that he has not made any music since 2013, but that he still receives regular death threats, he also says that the constant cyberbullying led him to attempt suicide.

There are many other conspiracy theories, there are many lives who have been impacted by these theories and there is a lot more to say.

But instead, pull that pin and watch me jump on the ghost grenade.

That's right, it's a pivot. I can only sustain thinking about actual tragedies for so long.

It's time to talk about the **elevator game**.

So JD, do you have any experience playing ritual games? Like a Bloody Mary, Light as a Feather, Three Kings?

**Ritual games** are a mainstay for the paranormal minded.

They promise the ability to glimpse another reality, contact spirits, or transport players to another dimension.

The elevator game is one of these dimensional transport games, apparently sending players to somewhere called the "other world."

I found a lot of sources saying that it originated on a South Korean website in 2010.



Its popularity on the English-language internet came from its quote-unquote "connection" to the death of Elisa Lam.

There are many different descriptions of the rules of the game.

I'd like to break down one version of the rules for you:

- Find a building with at least 10 floors.
- Make sure to be alone and that no one else joins you in the elevator throughout this process, **otherwise, you must start over.**
- Press the button to get to the fourth floor. **Don't get out.** Then go to the second floor, sixth floor, second floor, and the tenth floor. **Do NOT get out on any of these floors.**
- Then, go to the fifth floor. There, a young woman **could** come into the elevator with you. **Do NOT speak or look at her, even though she may look familiar.**
- Then, press the button for the **first floor.**
- **IF** you press the button for the first floor, but the elevator goes to the tenth floor, remain on the elevator, **you're still in the game.**

- **IF** you press to go the first floor, but the elevator goes **to the first floor**, then exit the moment the doors open. Do **NOT** speak or look back.
- Once you reach the tenth floor, you can choose to get off or stay. **IF** you choose to get off, the woman may ask you a question and even call your name. Do **NOT** answer her.
- Now, you have reached the **otherworld**.
- Electronics will not work in the **otherworld**.
- The otherworld is identical to our world, except all the lights will be off, it is always night, and the only thing you will be able to see from the windows is a glowing red cross in the distance.

To return you must:

- Go to the same elevator and press the same buttons in the original sequence.
- When you reach the fifth floor, press the button for the first floor. The elevator will again begin to ascend to the tenth floor. Press any other floor's button to cancel the ascension. You **MUST** press the button you use to cancel the ascension **BEFORE** you reach the tenth floor.
- After you reach the first floor, check your surroundings carefully. **If anything seems off—even the smallest**

**detail—do NOT exit the elevator.** If you detect something wrong, press the whole sequence of buttons again until your surroundings look as they should. Once you are confident you have returned to your own world, you may safely exit the elevator.

If you dare to read the instructions or want to read more of a detailed account I recommend checking out Lucia Peter's post on the elevator game on her blog *The Ghost in my Machine*.

The rules vary, and as you may be picking up from summary, it's pretty convoluted.

Also, you may also have noticed that if anyone gets on the elevator when you're trying to reach the otherworld you have to restart the ritual all over again.

It's pretty ungainly and hard to do, generally speaking if you're in a 10+ story building there's going to be other people who want to use the elevator while you're acting like a goth Buddy the Elf.

More rounds of the elevator game end with getting escorted out of the building than in the shadow realm.

My fear of awkward social interactions is enough to keep me from ever trying this game.

But difficulty is an important factor in **ritual games**, aside from bloody mary, there's usually plenty of steps and pitfalls to having a "**successful ritual.**"

I'd like to read a quote from a Quora response as to whether or not the Elevator game is real:

From my personal experience, I don't know if it is real or not. Because **as soon as I pressed 5th floor from the 10th floor, this is true that a woman had entered the elevator** & as per the instructions, we shouldn't engage with her at any cost. I am an introvert & I don't talk with strangers unnecessarily. The woman also didn't talk with me. She was standing at her place. I didn't look at her but yes she was wearing a kurti (long dress) type. I pressed 1st floor from 5th floor & the elevator went to 1st floor instead of 10th floor... the elevator reached to the 1st floor & as soon as the gates of the elevator opened, I left the elevator and didn't look back.

So I don't know if it is real or not. Maybe that woman was just a normal woman only because she didn't try to engage with me. Also, though I didn't look at her directly, there is a mirror in the elevator & I mistakenly looked at that mirror for 1-2 seconds, she was looking like a normal woman

only. She was not even looking at me, she was looking at her purse. She was carrying a small purse also.

I think this quote illustrates pretty well how the elevator game and many ritual games work.

If the elevator works as intended when the first floor button is pressed, your only safe option is to get off of the elevator at the first floor.

To an outside observer it's a pretty benign interaction, but to the ritual player it's heart pounding action.

There's also this quote from a post on Thoughtcatalog, in which an anonymous poster describes their experience playing the elevator game.

I didn't hear anything at step six when I hit the button to take the elevator to the tenth floor. Then I started step eight and I fucked up completely.

A woman did get on at the fifth floor. The problem is that I never had an opportunity to not look at her because I was looking at the lights above the doors telling me which floor I was on and it startled me when the elevator suddenly stopped. By then I was already looking at the door and she was getting on.

This was so stupid of me. It's so obvious that I should have been facing the corner where the elevator buttons are, not staring at the lights telling me which floor I was on the whole time.

The post is called: **I Played The Elevator Game And I Did It Wrong, The Woman Followed Me Back**. I've included a link in the sources for this episode.

But I will be spoiling it even more than the title already did, so if you want to read it, hit pause.

The post does a good job of showing another important part of building a ritual game.

Generally, beyond logistic difficulties, a big part of how these ritual games spread is by people telling you not to play the game:

**From the post:** "Please, do not play this game. It will be the end of you. "Otherworld" isn't something to be fucked around with like a hobby or a spooky thing to try on a dare."

Rituals and games have a lot of crossover, in both cases, you are committing to viewing reality for a set period of time through the framework set out by the rules of the ritual or game.

A person running around a baseball diamond is not exciting unless you understand the rules of baseball.

Pressing a set of elevator buttons is not exciting unless you understand the rules of the elevator game.

Likewise they both require specific interfaces, for example, a basketball court, a baptismal pool, or an elevator.

The combination of the cognitive frameworks, and the shared interface, is what makes the game, or ritual, meaningful to participants.

Rituals and games are a rare part of our lives where everything within the ritual or game space has meaning.

It's part of why athletes get so superstitious, within the space of the game, it makes sense that wearing the wrong colored socks can make you lose a match.

It's also why breaking the rules of the ritual or game can have dire consequences, to test this, consider grabbing a soccer ball during a match, grabbing a baby during a baptism, or, as the anonymous author of the elevator game post chose to, assault the lady who got on the elevator.

Within the space of a ritual game, actions and events have a greater symbolic weight.

If you're playing the elevator game then every bump, every flickering light bulb, every stranger who enters, heightens the experience of... riding in an elevator.

I think the experience of this symbolic weight is what we get out of playing ritual games, even if we don't get what we're promised on the internet.

We can go all the way back to ol' Emile Durkheim and think of it through the lens of the sacred and profane.

Durkheim wasn't talking about doing a paint job after a crunch wrap supreme, although that could definitely fall under profane.

Dirty D was describing a dichotomy between two types of human activities, the profane, which he viewed as everyday activities, think of driving your car to work, cooking dinner, binge watching television.



Then he contrasted everyday life with the sacred, which consists of activities outside of the mundane flow of everyday life.

The sacred offers participants the opportunity to pierce the veil and gain a new understanding of reality.

I think that this drive towards transcendence is what motivates people to participate in ritual games.

It is the opportunity to experience the sacred, to step into a time and place where everything carries meaning and significance.

Within this ritual space there is also the opportunity to shake our world-view, to expand our understanding of reality and our place in it.

And that's why, no matter how many times you're warned, if you want to play the elevator game, you're gonna to play the elevator game.

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