

Free Fall

y John Haley

“Stand up, buckle up, shuffle to the door; jump right out and count to four...” That is about all that I can remember from one of those catchy melodies we used to sing at Uncle Sam’s summer camp for wayward youths, more commonly known as U.S. Army basic training. The Drill Sergeants must of all had car stereos, because they liked to here music whenever in transit. It did not matter if they were in their Ford F150's on their way to a favorite fishing hole, or running next to a platoon of twinkie eaters in the 98° heat of Missouri. They liked their tunes. So when out of range of their radios, they relied on the twinkie eaters to serenade them. That particular verse was from a ballad about airborne troops parachuting out of a plane. Yours truly never had a chance to jump out of any planes, but that is what this particular story is about so I thought I would lead off with it.

Parachuting has become a popular recreational sport these days. It has attracted the attention of Ambrosia’s fearless leader, Andrew Welch. Although we all hope the boss man enjoys his time off, the office staff was a little apprehensive about Andrew leaping from a plane at 10,000 feet. Most of the software that Ambrosia supports has been developed by Andrew alone. Likewise, most of the new products in the pipeline are being written by Andrew. “Cajun,” Ambrosia’s official Sorcerer’s apprentice, is just getting into coding. So if the big guy’s ‘chute doesn’t open, it could have serious repercussions on all of our paychecks.

So while Andrew prepares himself for jump day, the rest of us are busy on the contingency plans. Our first thoughts were towards preventing him from being able to make the jump. Straight forward plans would not work. Go try and tell your boss not to do something he has been looking forward to for months. Not really feasible.

So after much thought it was decided to inflict a small, non-life-threatening injury to prevent any larger disaster. Again, the straightforward approach would not work. So we studied Andrew for weaknesses. The obvious solution was his Harley. If Andrew were to get into a minor “accident” with his scooter, he would be forced to put all his energy and financial resources into mending himself and his beloved Harley. In order to prevent serious injury we would have to strike when he was not moving at a high rate of speed. This is a lot harder then it sounds. Andrew likes high rates of speed. But he would be forced to slow down for any speed limiting curves between his home and the office. So every night “Cajun” and I would spread sand over every curve

between Andrew's place and Ambrosia Central. Motorcycles do not like sand on curves. Before long the route started to resemble a beach. After mildly injuring five other motorcycle riders, two motorcycle cops and a paper boy our plan finally paid off. Andrew came through the office door limping, bleeding and carrying Harley parts. Sweet success.

Not so. The injuries were far less serious than hoped for and Andrew did not even consider delaying his parachute appointment. On to plan B. If Andrew was going to be stubborn and insist on jumping out of the plane, we wanted him to have the latest in safety technology. Especially a helmet to protect all those future Ambrosia titles. So we commissioned a contest at the local Junior High School. Students were asked to design and build a protective capsule for an egg. The finished project, with egg passenger secured inside, would then be dropped from the top of the four story school.

Although none of the students were able to walk away with their egg intact, there were those that looked less scrambled than others. Ambrosia has commissioned the young designer that showed the most potential to design the official Ambrosia helmet. Initially this protective headgear would be used to save Andrew's pumpkin, but later the Ambrosia helmet would come in handy to shield one's eyes during office naps.

The finished product was fashioned from an alloy made up of paper mache, duck feathers and egg cartons covered with tin foil. The chin strap was a sturdy velcro sneaker flap and it was lined with styrofoam packing peanuts. After a few flight trials (dropping the head piece with Hector in it out the office window) the helmet was monogrammed with a large red letter "A." We also affixed a small sticker reading "If found with head intact, please return to Ambrosia Software, P.O. Box 23140, Rochester N.Y. 14692." Unfortunately, the helmet was damaged beyond repair in the christening ceremony when we crushed it with the celebratory bottle of champagne. Don't worry, we'll dig up a Skoal cap or something.

On to plan C. To be prepared for the worst, we have taken a few precautions. We shall empty the office aquarium and refill it with Snapple Sports drink and Guinness. These are the two fluids that keep Andrew's brain functioning. Then "Cajun" and I will follow the plane with Andrew's jeep. In the back we will be carrying a cooler filled with ice. If Andrew's chute does not open we will attempt to salvage what's left of his brain. We shall bring it back to the office and throw it into the aquarium. Drop a SCSI cable into the tank and voilá, Andrew is directly linked with his Quadra. We are actually expecting an increase in productivity. Of course we do not want this to happen, "Cajun" & I are just trying to be on the safe side.

