

## EPISODE 7: THE MECHANIFICATION OF THEORY: A PLAUSIBLE METHODOLOGY FOR RETROCAUSAL INFORMATICS

[Hey, guys. Hope you all had a good holiday season. If you like the podcast, you can now support it on patreon at [patreon.com/woe\\_begone](https://patreon.com/woe_begone). I'm planning lots of bonus material, art, music, early episodes, episode instrumentals, and even a dramatic reading of the PNWS parody, DOGCATCHER. Thanks to Risky Coffee, Plumule, and Your Name for being my first patrons. Without further ado, enjoy the show.]

“There is a flowering plant in a folding chair sitting in front of the door. You know that the flower is poisonous but you think that it is beautiful. Your cat died from eating the leaves of the plant, but you can't manage to resent the plant. It was only protecting itself. Throwing it out doesn't bring her back to life. Big pink and white flowers. It deserves better than to be plopped down on top of a folding chair. You think that it is beautiful. Sitting it on a chair makes it less beautiful. It makes the chair less functional. Big pink and white flowers. Poisonous.

I am on Proxima B, 4.2 light years from earth. That's  $2.5 \times 10^{13}$  miles. I have extended a pole from my house to your house, 4.2 light years long. I push on my end of the pole and it moves the pole. It moves it closer to your house. My movement results in the pole moving in your house instantly because the pole is rigid. I am communicating to you faster than light. We've solved faster than light travel, you and I. Pop by Proxima B sometime. It's just like home.

But nothing is perfectly rigid, outside of a thought experiment. 4.2 light years of atoms stacked on top of each other, some of them are bound to betray you. The pole wavers and falters. It takes 4.2 years for the movement to reach you. The pole snaps in two in the middle. It drifts away from your house, into space. I'm sorry. Nothing is perfectly rigid. I miss you.

There is a flowering plant in a folding chair sitting in front of the door. You know that the flower is poisonous but you think that it is beautiful. You see the cat's face in the pink and white patterns of the beautiful flower. You call your boyfriend at work and tell him that you're buying an end table for the plant. He says he wishes you would throw that stupid thing out. You tell him that I am on Proxima B, 4.2 light years from Earth and my communication pole broke. Big pink and white flowers.

The table does its job. It stands rigid and stark white in your doorway and keeps the potted plant on top of it. The flowers can be beautiful now, without distraction. You cannot find your resentment. I push on my end of the pole, thoughtlessly, knowing that if I am communicating with someone it can't be with you. The pole pushes back at me. Faster than light communication. May I ask who is speaking, please?”

That's what theoretical physicist Aliza Schultz wrote back to me when I emailed her asking about her involvement with a mysterious and bloody game. This is WOE.BEGONE.

[Intro theme plays.]

The story of WOE.BEGONE is told in order, with an occasional musical interlude. If you are new here, start back at episode 1. When you get back, you'll know who Aliza Schultz is. But you won't know what that email means. I mean, I sure as hell don't.

So, you guys are pretty caught up to where I am now. That means that each week I will be pretty much just telling you what happened to me that week and I'm going to have to be a little careful about it because things... are... happening!?! This place has been a dumping ground for my speculation, but if I speculate too long about what's going on out here in public, I'm basically asking the people that I'm speculating about to please not be duplicitous and use what I know against me. Don't worry, this all

still won't make sense after I've confirmed my suspicions, but I will say it with an air of confidence so that you all think something very clever just happened.

Email correspondence with Aliza was going interestingly, but not exactly productively. The email that I read at the top of the show was a response to one that I had written asking about her academic work and if she knew anything about the potential of changing the past using current technologies. As you can see, she addressed exactly zero of my questions. So I wrote her back and I was a little more blunt this time.

"Ms. Schultz, I have reason to believe that you played a game called WOE.BEGONE and that you may have been manipulated into forgetting that you played it. Does this ring any bells?"

She replied, and I quote:

"There is a ghost who sits on my chest at night. It doesn't hurt. He is not hurting me. He doesn't weigh anything. I think he's lost. He's lost or he doesn't know why he's here. He speaks to me but he doesn't make any sense. He says things like "sometimes she has good days, but it's mostly bad recently" and "it's hard to tell if she even knows that we are here." I tell him that I wish I knew who he was talking about. He is lost and she is lost, too. They are not lost together. I wish he wouldn't sit on my chest anymore, not because it hurts me but because he is the one who is hurting."

Which, fine. Those are definitely words arranged in an order to communicate a thought. But if that thought is supposed to be a response to my questions, I don't get it. I decided to dig through her old blog posts to see if I could find anything that was more coherent and less poetic. The older the posts, the more lucid she seemed to be, but also more difficult to understand because her work is so far beyond my comprehension. I eventually stumbled onto a post that seemed to point me in the right direction: "The Mechanification of Theory: A Plausible Methodology for Retrocausal Informatics."

In *The Machanification of Theory*, Aliza Schultz lays out what she considers a plausible methodology to achieve retrocausal informatics, obviously. And by that I think she means turning theoretical physics into a practical tool that can be used to communicate across space and time. You're probably wondering: "isn't this just some quantum entanglement junk science bullshit?" I say that because she spends 3 whole paragraphs assuring us that this isn't quantum entanglement junk science, so it is apparently quite important to her.

I think... I *think* the idea is that quantum particles can be sent back in time, hence "retrocausal" and it is possible to determine a set of probabilities of how that particle will react, so by improving our models of the probabilistic behavior of these particles and learning to narrow down those probabilities, we can affect the past by sending these particles back into it.

That is to say, we can affect the past such that in the past that particle existed. That's about as exciting as creating a different universe where you didn't lose that band tshirt that you liked so much in high school. A curiosity, but not something that can be used to do very much. Most things are tremendously larger than a quantum particle, pretty much by definition. If you want to, for instance, prevent a handsome podcaster from dying in a home renovation accident, you're going to have to move something macroscopic around back in time. And even if you could do that, there still could be a probabilistic range of effects. What if whatever you sent back in time to save the handsome podcaster with the luscious hair and deep hazel eyes and a comforting, sometimes sultry voice-- what if you sent something back and you accidentally slammed his head into the saw blade instead? Now he's extra dead and not nearly as handsome.

Aliza says that's not really a problem. In fact, she says that you are *going* to do that, from a dimensional standpoint. Whatever can happen under the laws of the universe... universes will happen as an effect of you sending something back in time. You merely just have to hop over to the universe where that thing already happened.

You know, just pop on over to the dimension where you didn't lose that band tshirt you liked so much in high school How hard could it be?

So, I know what you're thinking. Second time this episode, I'm a genius. If you have to hop dimensions in order to get the effects of this retrocausality, why don't you just find a dimension where the beefcake podcaster didn't die and just hop over there? There are two answers. One is that if you don't change things backwards in time, you aren't saving any extra Mike Walters...s. Another is that we don't really have any way to narrow down our search results in finding those dimensions in which I didn't die. It would be infinitely harder than finding a song based on the first lyric of the first verse.

So, how do we view our multidimensional effects across dimensions? With Phantom Cords. I don't really understand the "how" of this, but Schultz proposes a way to attach a metaphorical cord to the particle or object we are sending back in time so that we can hold onto one end while the other end splinters off into all of our relevant dimensions. There is a lot of math here, but mostly she wants you to know that this is not quantum entanglement, which cannot create information and is instead its own thing. The methodology for creating a machine that could do this is outlined with a lot more computer engineering than I know and says that a current supercomputer could crunch a sufficient amount of numbers to get this going. She said that in 2005. My understanding is that the PS5 has about 10 times as much computing power as a supercomputer from 2005.

She even has a section devoted to retrocausal travel of biology, noting the "teleporter problem" in which the type of teleporter commonly described in sci-fi would kill anything put through it by ripping apart its molecules and reconstituting it on the other side. She describes a teleportation in which is a "retrocausal pocket" exactly the size of the object in question can move through spacetime to its desired location. It sort of reminds me of the Infinite Improbability Drive from Hitchhiker's Guide. This is important if you want to actually be in the dimension where the thing happened that you wanted to happen.

So, that's promising. It seems like it lays out completely all of the tools that would be necessary in order to make a game like WOE.BEGONE happen. It takes the Charles Thibbideau hypothesizing and turns it into a way to actually do it. The WOE.BEGONE gamerunners wouldn't even need to go into the dimensions that they were changing unless they wanted to. They could be sitting in a world with a dead Mike Walters running things remotely. Or they could pop into a dimension, do what they want, and find their way home with the Phantom Cord. They have complete control over the destiny of the universe, with only their imagination holding them back.

...And that for every universe, there is a set of WOE.BEGONE gamerunners in that universe that have their own plans and those plans might be different than the ones who are doing this. Maybe even possessing the technology and not using it to play a game at all.

But isn't this all a little too easy? CANNONBALL has been sitting on this for years and just casually dropped it into a conversation we were having about something else. Well, maybe "casually" is the wrong word. He might as well have just blurted out "LOOK UP ALIZA SCHULTZ SHE'S A WOE.BEGONE ADJACENT PERSON." Looking back, it was not subtle. He wanted me to discover *The Mechanification of Theory*. It definitely lends credence to his idea that it is possible to harness the technology at the core of WOE.BEGONE. It also explains why he cares more about the technology than the prize. The prize is worthless compared to the now very real possibility of making this machine. There is even a publicly available document laying out what you would need in order to do so. Sorry, Matt, but it's true. This is a cosmically large reward. My human brain isn't even sufficient to understand the possibilities. I certainly wouldn't use it to run a stupid little game.

My mental limitations are definitely a problem here. What if this is all just a red herring? I can read over *The Mechanification of Theory* and smile and nod and get a hypothetical idea of what she is saying, but someone with a physics background could BS me and I'd never even know. And that's if she's trying to BS me and not a delusional woman whose mind left her a long time ago. Her current writings suggest that she has been declining for a long time now, so why not back in 2005? It looks real

to me and something is definitely actually happening in my actual life that is described in this document. I'm not being microdosed with LSD by someone who is manipulating me or something stupid like that. The laws of casual relationships are being warped around me based on a set of tasks that I am being given by a mysterious group. I would have to deny a lot of my experience to come to any other conclusion. So, if a group of people is running this game, they have a technology that is the same as or similar to the technology laid out in the document. This technology must be borne from a methodology and this one seems as sound as any, certainly more realized than Thibbideau.

So why didn't CANNONBALL lead with this? He's known about this for years, purportedly, and yet he hasn't built the machine and he didn't mention it to me until I was already through with the third challenge. He could have easily linked me to this public website the first time that he made contact with me. It could have been the only thing that we talked about instead of laying out ideas about how the game works and the point system. The point system doesn't matter by comparison—well, I say that as someone who is comfortably in the lead. It may just be that he wanted it as an upper hand in the game, but then he never should have offered me the breadcrumbs. If Schultz is right, then CANNONBALL has basically given me a roadmap to victory. There's got to be an angle that he's coming from that I can't yet understand. It's suspicious, I tell you.

After reading the document, I sent CANNONBALL an email from my new burner email. I titled it "aliza schultz" in all lowercase since his thing seems to be all uppercase everything and I didn't want to step on that. I told him I wanted to meet with him ASAP, today if possible. He emailed me back a reasonable amount of time later and told me to meet him at the coffeeshop in an hour. Date number three.

After the break, I'll tell you what happened between me and CANNONBALL on our date.

[Break music plays.]

CANNONBALL and I both showed up right on time for our meeting. His disposition felt a little bit different, but it was hard to tell how. His expression seemed- happier and more confident? Something like that? Shit-eating. Like he was happy that I called this meeting because I had followed his bread crumb trail. It was difficult to detect, but I swear he had a shit-eating smirk that snuck out from time to time.

"So you found some interesting stuff on Aliza's blog, huh?" CANNONBALL asked.

"The Mechanification of Theory," I responded.

"That's a good one. It almost tells you all that you need to know," he said.

"Can you tell me about what Aliza was like when she was playing WOE.BEGONE?" I asked.

"Sure. BOBCAT was her call-sign. I noticed that you still don't have one."

"Well, I called myself Mike Walters in the podcast. Not much I can do about it now," I replied.

"Oh well. Anyway, BOBCAT found the game a long time before I did. She never told me, but I think that the gamerunners reached out to her directly and asked for her participation because they were familiar with her work. She was interested in the technology, of course. Once she saw what it was capable of, she knew that they were basing it off of her work and she wanted to know everything. Unfortunately, the gamerunners aren't exactly forthcoming with how to put together whatever device they are using, so she frequently grew impatient with them. She did not have the heart or the stomach to pull off any of the challenges after the first one, which was a major problem for her."

"How did you meet her?" I asked.

"Back then, her blog had a bunch of references to WOE.BEGONE in it so I actually found her via a google search. There aren't that many intersections of "real time travel" and "challenge to cut your own arm off" so it showed up at the top of the results page if you just googled what happened in

the challenges. She avoided the name for the most part, so as not to draw the kind of attention that gets you punished.”

“So you talked about the tech together?” I asked.

“At length. At least to the length that my high school education could reach me,”

CANNONBALL said. “BOBCAT was way smarter than me and way more resourceful. We discussed building a machine but I don’t have any coding knowledge or anything like that, so it’s more like I talked with her about her building a machine. We were still pre-planning when I was doing the third challenge and that’s the last time I ever saw her. She lost while I was in prison.”

“How did she lose?” I asked.

“She couldn’t kill someone,” he said. “I knew that there was no way that she could kill anybody, which means that it was only a matter of time before someone else started taking the game seriously and passed her. I figure there’s probably dozens of people that we don’t know about that play the game up until the second or third challenge and then drop out because they can’t handle the game for what it really is. The gamerunners have only ever told me when my place changed and only told me your name because you passed me up for first. It’s impossible to tell who else is playing and how well they’re doing.”

“So what did they do to her when she lost?” I asked.

“I don’t really know. I can still remember her, I’m sure that’s on purpose. They want you to know what happens if you play the game and lose. By the time I got out of prison, she wasn’t nearly as sharp as she used to be. I don’t think that’s a coincidence. I sent her an email to test whether or not she remembered me and she clearly didn’t. I could tell from her blog that she had lost because all of the posts about WOE.BEGONE were gone and she was posting stuff that was markedly different.”

“By different do you mean that she was posting incoherent poems?” I asked.

“Yep. That’s what I got back when I emailed her, too,” he said. “It’s like they gave her a frontal lobotomy. The university she worked at played it off as an older professor whose mind was drifting away naturally, but I don’t think that she progressed in any natural way. Her family keeps her at home most of the time now because when they let her go out she usually wanders into traffic.”

“So you don’t think that she was maybe beginning to get senile when she wrote *The Mechanification of Theory*?” I asked.

“Definitely not. There was so much light behind her eyes back then. I went to her house and pretended to be her plumber in order to get a better look at her and she just looks... gone. It’s incredibly sad. I think they mutilated her brain.”

“So if we lose, do you think they’ll do that to us?” I asked.

“Without a doubt,” CANNONBALL said. “That first prize couldn’t matter any less at this point.”

That would happen to Anne, too, if she dropped out of the game. Fuck. I hate playing two games of WOE.BEGONE at once. I made a mental reminder to tell her about this as soon as this conversation was over.

“So have you tried to build a WOE.BEGONE machine?” I asked.

“Have you tried to build a car? I mean, I don’t know you that well, but just looking at you...” he trailed off. He meant to say that I’m too handsome to possibly stoop to the lowly, dirty world of automotive mechanics.

“Is it not possible?” I asked.

“Not without BOBCAT, at least it feels that way,” he said. His expression changed briefly when he said this. “Clearly someone else did it, but I haven’t found anyone since that had what she had.”

“But that’s still your plan,” I said.

“That’s the only way I can see myself winning WOE.BEGONE,” he said, “So I either make this machine or I lose.”

“But how are you going to make it?” I asked.

“We’re going to find someone else that’s really into retrocausal informatics,” he said.

“...And who also is capable of building a real machine that can do this and is willing to work with people who are playing a bloody time travel game,” I added.

“There’s a reason that I haven’t got it done yet,” he said. “Information is not enough to solve this puzzle. Charles Thibbideau had access to the information, but he didn’t have the technology to realize that information. It didn’t even exist yet. Now it clearly does. And if it does exist, then there is a way to get access to it. The fact that we are even having this discussion is proof of that. I don’t think it’s magic and I don’t think that the WOE.BEGONE gamerunners are a caliber of genius that is outside our reckoning. I think we can actually get our minds around this and our hands on it.” He leaned back in his chair and took a sip of his coffee as if he were quite pleased with himself.

“Well, that’s that then, I guess. We’ll just have to keep digging.”

“There’s one more thing that I want to talk about,” CANNONBALL said. “I’ve narrowed down 2<sup>nd</sup> place to one city, [REDACTED].”

“How’d you do that?” I asked. I tried to look calm but I’m really bad at acting like I’m not nervous so I probably didn’t succeed.

“There was a cop that reported missing only a couple days before the scoreboard updated. Nowhere else in the United States has a similar case. It almost immediately went cold and closed, too. Smells like a completed challenge number 3 to me.”

“How are you gonna narrow it down from a whole city full of people?” I asked.

“I have ways,” he said. His eyes narrowed.

“What is that supposed to mean?” I asked.

“Didn’t you go to the University of [Redacted]?” CANNONBALL asked.

“So? I’ve lived here for ten years,” I said. Shit. Why do I still have a Facebook page?

“I’m not saying that you know something that I don’t, but I can imagine a possibility where you are involved with this second person in some way.”

“Why would I get someone else that I know to play the game?” I asked. “That would reduce my chances of winning.”

“I’m not saying that I suspect you of anything. I am just careful by nature. If I suspected you of something, I’d keep it close to the chest instead of telling you. So I’ll wait and confirm some of my suspicions before I jump to anything crazy.”

My bluff had been thoroughly called. I thought about telling him then and there, but I held my tongue. It was important that he not have this information. If he did something to Anne in order to get me to cooperate with him I would never forgive myself and it would absolutely work. Ugh.

“Alright, well let me know what you find out. I think I’m going to be spending most of my time combing through the Schultz blog.” I said.

“Sounds like a plan. I’ll see you next time one of us makes a breakthrough,” he said. “One last thing. “There is a lighthouse we leave untended,” CANNONBALL said. “It operates on its own. If it goes out, none of us know how to fix it. You’d be surprised how quickly the water becomes shallow on your way onto shore.” That’s the last thing that Aliza Schultz ever said to me.” And with that he stood up and left.

Uhm... did anything about that conversation sound suspicious to you? I don’t know. CANNONBALL claims to have a high school education and a brain injury, but he doesn’t really talk like it. He keeps leaving clues for me to put together on my own. He gets special messages from the gamerunners that I’ve never gotten. Anne’s never gotten them either. I don’t know what his angle is, but there is an angle. He knows something that I don’t. He has some sort of access that I don’t have. Is he really even losing the game or is that a ploy?

I didn't have long to think about it because as soon as I got home I got a text from WOE.BEGONE. Attached was a photo of Matt. Remember that guy? Seemed like he would be really important for a second but then everything else got in the way. The message said: "Glad you agree that there are more important things than the prize. Time to do away with yours. Once he's gone we can really get started on what this is all for. -W.BG."

...Really? I'm supposed to kill Matt? But I don't wanna kill Matt! I like him. I had just gotten used to him being alive again. Oh shit. If everyone gets the same 4<sup>th</sup> challenge, that means that Anne will get this challenge too, and I'm her prize. But if she doesn't kill me and someone surpasses her in the game then I die. And if she kills me, I die. People die when they are killed. Did WOE.BEGONE just kill me?

...Did CANNONBALL say that he already did his 4<sup>th</sup> challenge? Did CANNONBALL kill his wife? Why didn't he warn me about this? Has he "gotten started on what this is all for"? If he knows something like that, why won't he tell me? Maybe that's why he's so withholding. Something after challenge 4 gave him some information that he doesn't want me to have. Maybe that means he has access to the technology? Or limited access?

All of this answered and more, on the next episode of WOE.BEGONE. I'm kidding. You're pretty much up to speed at this point. I don't know what happens on the next episode of WOE.BEGONE either.

This has been WOE.BEGONE. Thanks for playing.

[End theme plays.]