

EPISODE 27: Hey, Hunter! It's Mike Walters.

[The sound of keys tapping on a keyboard.]

Okay... okay... and then I drag this here... and put the number in here... and all of the fields are filled out... I am double-checking... triple-checking... Okay... Am I sure I want to do this? No, but I don't have much of a choice at this point. Okay. Remember your breathing. Okay. I have to do this. It's the only way. 3... 2... 1... and Enter.

[Silence]

Did... did it work? I... does it show me anywhere if it worked? I don't see anything. Would it be on the ma—oh shit. Shit. You've gotta be fucking kidding me. No, that's not where I selected. No, it was supposed to be over there. But that dot means... Uhh... uhhh !!! Uuuhh... how do I undo!? Is there an undo button? Fuck... uh... Edit -> Undo? No? Fuck. Control-Z. Stupid outdated technology. Don't freeze on me. No. [Frustrated groan.] Uhhh. [Mike rattles the keyboard.] Goddammit, I just made everything so much worse. AAAHH!

Alright, Mike. Time to calm down and fix this. Okay, so he was right there, so maybe if I just put that into the first field and here for second field he'll... okay, here goes nothing. Enter.

[There is a splashing sound indicating an enormous amount of water. Mike screams.] No... the computer! Fuck. It's already fried. I gotta get out of here.

[Mike unlocks his phone and dials a contact. Faint ringing sound.]

C'mon, pick up the phone. [Silence.] Ugh, seriously!? You're going to make me have to call you again? Your ringer had better be on. C'mon, wake up! You lousy sack of--

Hey, Hunter! It's Mike Walters. How's it going? I'm sorry to call at such a late hour but I have an emergency and I was hoping you could help me out? I... uh... you are going to be really mad at me and I am not going to have an explanation that you find satisfying, so I'll just say it. I accidentally teleported Edgar into the middle of the Pacific Ocean. I'm... yes, I'm in Tier 2. I broke in through 116E. You can try me for my crimes later if you want to. I'm not done pissing you off. Please save your criticisms for the end.

So, after I accidentally—and I feel that I cannot emphasize this enough, accidentally—teleported him into the Pacific Ocean, I of course tried to teleport him back by just switching the coordinates but I ended up teleporting a chunk of the Pacific Ocean into the building I was standing in. I guess it doesn't work that way or I just messed it up. All of the computers in the building were destroyed. The whole place is trashed. Do you know how—look, Hunter, we don't have time to talk about that but yes. I am the one who put the bear in the other security building. Excellent detective work. That's all in the past, though. Edgar is going to drown if I don't do something and I don't have the slightest clue what to do.

Yes. Yes, I understand that you don't understand what to do either, but as long as I'm confessing to stuff: I know about the other two of you, the ones who are

inside of Tier 2. I'm sure you've gotten to know them better these past few weeks. Can you get me in contact with them? Do they know... stuff? Like, can they help me?

Yes, yes. No, I'm sorry. Look, I know that you should turn me in to O.V.E.R. but we both know that you're not going to do that. Whatever the three of you have going on is related to what I'm doing. I'm not saying that I'd rat you out if you ratted me out, but I'm also not not saying that. Sorry, that was cruel. Flies with honey and all that. No, it's a saying. You attract more flies with honey than with vinegar. You're a fly in this metaphor. This is not important.

Just give me one of their phone numbers and I'll be out of your hair. I can even lie and say I got the number from somewhere else, but I need help. I don't know anyone else in Tier 2 and Edgar is floating in the middle of the ocean. Please? For Edgar? C'mon Hunter, *please*. I have to save him.

[Pause.] Mmm-hmm. Got it. Thank you so much, Hunter. You are literally a lifesaver, a mensch. I'll make this up to you somehow, some day. I promise. I don't know how, but I'll find a way. Thank you so much. I'll talk to you in the morning about how things end up going. I've got to go save Edgar now. Love you. Uhh... that was weird. I didn't mean to say that. I gotta go, clock's ticking. Okay, bye.

Hey, Hunter! It's Mike Walters. You know, from Tier 1—Sorry, I promised my source that I wouldn't reveal where I got your number from. [Pause.] No, it wasn't from another Hunter Hartley. No, it wasn't from the Tier 1 Hunter, just... something has happened. I made a huge mistake and someone is in danger... is this the one with the scar on his face or the other one? So, Mystery Hunter. Forget I said that. That's nothing. Let me fill you in on what is going on.

So, you know that night that you saw someone coming out of 116E and when they saw you they ran away? That was me. I don't know if you knew that or not. Oh... of course you did. It was probably pretty easy to figure out. My point is that I've been breaking into Tier 2 for that long. The night you saw me was the first night that I did it. I suspect that you have some understanding of why I did it. You're the one who was playing WOE.BEGONE, after all. You're the one who sprang that trap on me and got me shot. I still don't understand what you're trying to do, but you aren't exactly innocent, either. So cut me some slack on these transgressions and I'll look the other way on yours.

There's this guy that works the front desk at 116E named Edgar. You've probably met him. I made friends with him, since 116E's back door opens into Tier 2, so I could sneak in without having to use the main gate. I was getting the door code from him and coming back after he went home for the evening. I got sloppy and he caught me tonight, so I panicked and ran back inside of Tier 2. I think he tried to follow me but I lost him pretty quick. He might not have left 116E at all. I don't know what all he has access to. Maybe he's not allowed to leave 116E. I mean, it hasn't stopped me, but he's a more principled man than I am. Plus, he doesn't seem to be wrapped up in any seedy conspiracies.

From there, I just ran from building to building, breaking into any building that seemed easy enough. It took a few tries and I took some risks that almost got me caught by security, but I eventually found a building that I could get into that also had the security program. Oh, right, I know about the security program and I

used it to save myself from the bear attack. But the bear destroyed that office so I didn't know where the security program was anymore, so I had to find another building with the right software. So that's how I got the idea to teleport him to keep him from catching me.

I didn't want to teleport him into the middle of the Pacific Ocean. I wanted to teleport him to like... Hardley, Nebraska or something. Somewhere it would take him a long time to get back from. I just wanted to buy myself some time. But I guess I got one of the numbers flipped in the coordinates when I put them in? There's a world map in the program but you have to punch in the coordinates to anywhere outside of Oldbrush Valley manually, I assume because it's intended for internal security use only. So when I put the numbers in I must have made a mistake. I double and triple checked the thing but I was checking against the wrong number, I guess. And now Edgar is in the middle of the ocean and I need your help.

I destroyed the building that the computers were in while trying to get him back. I got hasty and tried something that I didn't know enough about and flooded the whole building. So not only is Edgar stranded, I also can't use the computer that I started this whole mess with to clean it up. Yeah, that's what that sound was. I didn't realize it was that loud. I'm sure security is all over it. I'm hiding behind a building right now.

Edgar is going to die if we don't do something to fix my fuckup. I know that dying isn't the most insurmountable problem in the world anymore thanks to the whole time travel thing, but it still sucks to do. I hate dying. I don't know if you've ever done it, but—[pause] Oh, so you know that it sucks. I don't actually remember any of the times that I died, but that's actually the worst part about it. Point being: I don't want Edgar to die, I have botched this situation incredibly badly, so if you could troubleshoot this situation for me and make it so that Edgar is off my back but isn't in the middle of the ocean, that would be highly appreciated.

It's been... geez... it's been a long time at this point. I don't know how well Edgar can swim. I know you're supposed to float on your back for as long as you can but that's a lot harder than it looks. And I bet it's freezing cold, too. Edgar might already be dead. I need to save him. I don't think I get to go to heaven if I just let him drown—yes, I *know* that there's no way in hell I would actually go to heaven, I was being poetic. I was appealing to your better judgment. Please, Hunter. Just tell me where another building is with the security program and what I have to do to get inside.

What do you mean you don't know where any of the security offices are? Don't you work in security? Okay, I get that patrols are different than corrections but you don't coordinate at all? Jesus, Hunter, why didn't you tell me that when I started telling you the story? I know that I am talking way too much and not letting you get a word in, but you should have interrupted me. Who do I need to talk to? Does Punished Hunter know? Uhh, strike that, I don't have time to explain that. Does the Hunter with the scar on his face know where I can get my hands on the security program? Oh, so he does. What's his phone number? No, tell me his phone number. This is important, asshole. A man is going to die because of something that I did unless you give me his phone number. I can't have that blood on my hands. Metaphorical blood, I don't think there's much blood involved in drowning. I guess

he could be eaten by a shark. Even more reason to give me that fucking phone number.

Uh huh. [Pause] ...0815... Got it. Thanks. I hope we can get better acquainted under better circ—Hey! You hung up on *me*? Rude.

Hey, Hunter! It's Mike Walters. We met in the dark awhile back. I feel like I'm having déjà vu. I'm in a bit of a pickle and your compatriots weren't very much help. A man is in danger and I need some Tier 2 technology in order to get him to safety. I know it's late, but this really can't wait until morning. Yes, I am standing in Tier 2 right now. I need to teleport a person. I don't know where he is, so I guess what I really need to do is teleport myself away from Tier 2 so that I don't teleport him into the Pacific Ocean in the first place. Yes, the Pacific Ocean. Yes, he's drowning. Can you help me or not? I've been jerked around already tonight and the more I get jerked around, the longer Edgar has to swim.

[Pause.] Okay, so the thing about that particular building and the Pacific Ocean is that they have a lot in common right now. I tried to teleport him back and I guess he moved or something, so I teleported a whole bunch of seawater into that building on accident. The computers are all fried. Yes, all of them. The whole place is fucked. I don't think you understand how much ocean water I crammed into that tiny building. Did you not hear it? There is no chance that any of those computers still work. I need a different place.

No, you have to be wrong. There has to be another place. Okay then, can I get into Tier 3? No, I'm not joking. Can I get into Tier 3? Okay, fine, I guess I'm not going to try to break into Tier 3, then. But you didn't have to laugh at me. I got into Tier 2 just fine didn't I? Except the night that you caught me but all the other times have been smooth sailing.

There is? Yeah, I can break a window, no problem. I'll just wrap my fist in my balaclava. Who needs a badge when you have a fist? Yes, I'm wearing a balaclava. There's a lot of security showing up at the Pacific Ocean building, so that distraction should buy me some time. So it's just like 116E, right? A building on the border of the two tiers. So there's Tier 3 stuff in there? Wow. But I won't have to actually get into Tier 3, correct? Good, good. [Pause.]

I... suddenly don't know if I feel comfortable with that anymore. It makes sense. This is Tier 3 we're talking about, after all. Of course they shoot first and ask questions later. Would you save me if they killed me tonight, Hunter? [A long pause.] Would you? No, I get it. You're scared of them. I'm scared of them, too. I can't even imagine what they are capable of. They might have ways of ensuring that I get gone and stay gone. There might not be anything that you can do if they kill me for breaking into that building. It's just a risk that I'm going to have to take.

It's just a risk that I don't have to take if I don't want to. I can back out. I can let Edgar drown. Die. I keep saying "drown" because it allows me not to think directly about him dying. Which is what he is doing right now. He is going to die if I don't do anything. It might already be too late. I won't ever know if I was too late. If it works, neither Edgar nor myself will be able to tell the difference. But I'm not going to back out. I'll do it for Edgar.

[Pause.] No, you *didn't* ask, Hunter, but if I'm going to do this I am going to have to talk myself into it. So you get to be an unwitting bystander to my monologue. Now, tell me how to get to this building. The stealthy way, if there is one.

Hey, Hunter. It's Mike Walters. I'm in. I don't think anyone saw me. I found a window around the side, so it was easy to break it without getting noticed. I cut my hand up pretty bad. The balaclava wasn't much help with that. But the cut and the broken window will both go away if I do this right. Which one of these computers do I use? Oh, the one at the desk with the flowers on it? Alright, I'm here. It's asking for login credentials. Okay, and the password? Alright and... it looks like I'm in. And... here's the security program. We're really doing this. Fine, I'm really doing this. Your name gets left out of it.

...And the program has frozen. There we go. This stupid program doesn't even have the decency to run smoothly. Okay, it's up and running now. All that's left to do is carefully—very very very very carefully—move me around. And hopefully I don't end up in the middle of the ocean. I'm only going to click things inside of Oldbrush Valley. I learned my lesson.

Okay, there's where I was the moment before I broke into 116E. I was so young then, so naïve. And... scroll, scroll, scroll... *there's* my cabin. And... *that's* the time that I was there. That should do it. I'm about to push the button. Thanks for helping me tonight. That's one less death to feel guilty about. Have fun with your memory of this phone conversation that never happened. I'm pretty sure that shit's about to get really fucky on my end. I am not looking forward to it. But thank you for this, Hunter. I know that all three of you went above and beyond for me tonight. I know you're frustrated with me. And I also know that I want to get out of this awkward conversation so I'm hitting the button now. Bye--- [There are some noises.]

Oh shit. Oh thank god. And also oh shit. I'm... where... I'm... it's dark. Phew. Safe and sound and I only feel like I got hit by a truck. And it's... I'm back in time. I am... standing on my bed. Great job, Mike. God, my shoes are gross, too. But it's done. I guess more correctly it's not done. I didn't do it. I... Edgar... [Mike unlocks his phone. There is a brief pause.] Please be there.

Hey, Edgar! It's Mikey. Oh, that's funny. What are the odds that you would be thinking about me when I called you. I was just thinking about this afternoon, how you didn't want to get dinner. I was being weird and I didn't tell you why and I just wanted to call and say that I'm sorry. I should have been more honest about my feelings. I know we haven't known each other long but I think that I like you more than anybody else out here and I would hate to ruin that because I don't know how to talk about my feelings.

It wasn't even about you. I got in a big fight with two of my friends and I was still sour over it. I've been in so much worse than verbal arguments out here before. You know that. You've seen me with my shirt off. But it got pretty nasty and it put me in a foul mood for the rest of the day. I could tell that you were looking at me all afternoon like "what's your problem?" and you probably thought that it was about

you. I know that I would have thought it was about me. I just didn't want to go to bed without telling you that I'm not mad at you. You haven't done anything wrong. Ever, as far as I can tell.

[Pause.] I appreciate that. I know you're not perfect, either. It was just a compliment.

Oh. I guess that makes sense. You know you're breaking my heart, right? Kidding. I'm kidding. I get it. I guess it could look weird that I hang out with you at work so much. You're protecting highly confidential information, after all. I wouldn't want you getting in trouble with your boss because you were hanging out with me instead of getting your work done. Not that you aren't getting your work done. But even if you weren't, capitalism places a false moral value on being productive. I know, you told me that you hate when I ramble about politics. Sorry. I'm just rambling in general. I'm just trying to say that I get it. We can still get dinner together, right?

Well, that's all that I care about. If you're happy, I'm happy. [Pause.] Well, then I'm happy. Yeah, I had better get to bed, too. It's getting late. [Pause.] Okay, well it's late for me. [Laugh.] I'll text you in the morning. I'm glad you aren't floating the middle of the Pacific Ocean... that's a saying that we have back in the old country. [Pause.] The old country, ты не знаешь? Что я жил в казахстане? Я там убил медведя руками. That's okay, we're still getting to know each other. I'll spin you a yarn about it tomorrow. я рада, что ты не плаваешь в тихом океане. I need to get to sleep or I'll be completely useless on my patrol. Спать устали игрушки книжки спяь! Da da da da da! Some of us actually have to walk around, you know, not just sit at a desk all day. Alright, I'll talk to you tomorrow. Mmm-hmm. Love you, too. Alright, bye.

[End theme plays.]