

[INTERMISSION VII]

[Hey guys. Welcome to Intermission VII. I hope you enjoy it. It was written mostly by a text generation tool, with a seed started by me and then steered gently because if you don't point it in the right every now and then it will just stall out and not tell a story, but most of this really was generated by a program. I had a lot of fun putting it together. Hope you enjoy. WOE.BEGONE season 4 will continue next week. Without further ado, he's Intermission VII.]

[INTRO THEME PLAYS.]

The year was 2048. Edgar and I were enjoying an early retirement. We were free from WOE.BEGONE, free from the horrors of time travel after all of those years. Those years don't mean much when it is trivial to cut through them like butter. Regardless, we found respite in our little corner of time. We were retired, safely, in each other's company, happily ever after.

Our games of Shadowrun were winding down. Edgar and I sat at a small table in the den of our spacious home. On one side of the table was a large, curved glass tank full of wolverines. I thought we'd have another quiet night at home, keeping ourselves occupied, passively watching the wolverines as we did most evenings. It's a shame. The world, our place in space and time and the time travel technology that brought us together and threatened to tear us apart had other plans for us.

Wolverines. I had them in mind, the wolverines in the tank, before Edgar said a word.

"We have to fix this," Edgar said. "We need to stop the progression of time from that point and have it reset." He showed me a printout of our "scans," the memory dumps of the cellphones we'd brought with us when we attempted to travel. The cats we used for communication and transportation had triggered the alarms that we had no real expectation would be triggered. The program on the other side of the computer screen outlined the steps we needed to take to restore things to the way they were. I looked at it for a few minutes, then pointed at a few spots on the paper.

"These can't be right, Edgar," I said.

"I know. That's why I'm trying to convince you to let me do the honors." He waved his hands around in frustration. "You're going to have to trust me. These numbers..." He gestured at the screen, a few cells blinking red. "These aren't doing what I want them to."

"You'll have to do more than that, Edgar," I said. "More than you're currently aware of, to be precise." I reached into his pocket and pulled out something. I brought it to my nose and sniffed it. "What have you got there?" I asked. "It smells like pepper," he replied. Edgar tried to explain to me. Time was coming to an end. The wolverines were going through their last throes of their lifecycle. I could feel it.

"The situation is untenable," Edgar said. He smiled a sly smile at me. "You are going to have to go back to 2040, back to Oldbrush Valley, or what was left of it. Charlie will be there, waiting for you."

I nodded solemnly. He was right. He pushed the button and I felt the old familiar feeling of time travel. I was in 2040. I was among the dilapidated walls of a long abandoned building inside of Oldbrush Valley. It felt like home in the worst way. I had traveled back in time for the first time in years. Charlie was there to greet me, that old familiar smile of hers.

I didn't know what to say to her. We sat in silence for a few minutes. I didn't know what to say, I didn't know what I was going to say.

"Tell me about this, Charlie," I finally said.

Charlie is a feline person of indeterminate gender. Her name is Laurie, but she's known to call herself Charlie. She is always warm and friendly, almost childlike. I would say she is a misfit. It would be more accurate to say that she is an outsider. Her father was the sheriff. The lives of her and her mother are poor. Both her parents died before she was old enough to leave the home. She looks a bit like an old lioness, dark and fierce. The ideal cat, actually. She is not always sweet.

"What's the damage?" I asked. "How can I help? How's O.V.E.R.?"

She was silent for a moment, licking her paws.

"Well, it's all right," she said. "It's just a little crazy." She rubbed her head against my leg. "Most of the day is shot to pieces."

"Well, we have to try to fix it." I rubbed her chin. "Edgar is in my earpiece. He says hi."

"There's not a thing I can do. It's too far gone." She stopped rubbing my leg. "I'm not sure what to do, you guys."

"I know Charlie. I think that's why I'm here. The doc told me you were sent here to help us stop the timeline from getting altered. Who's wrecking the timeline? Hunter? Anne? CANNONBALL?"

"Maybe Hunter, but it's all too confusing to sort through, Edgar," Charlie replied. She sounded exasperated, which was rare for her.

"That was the big question," I said. "He said the same thing when we met in 1885." I paused. "So, what do we do?"

"Edgar, you are a feline. All I know is that I'm not going back," she said.

"She doesn't have a choice, Edgar," I said. "The Eternals won't just sit back and allow her to lose the life she's spent so much time fighting for. She'll be asked to save the timeline. Is anyone doing the WOE.BEGONE challenges? I've cut my arm off before for the sake of winning WOE.BEGONE. I guess I'll do it again. Are we playing the game again?"

"No, Edgar." She hung up.

“What do we do now?” She came over to me and sat on my lap. “Do we just wait for someone to finally get us out of here?”

I kneaded her belly. She purred loudly.

“No, Charlie,” I said. “I have a plan. There is an old veteran and a time traveler out there somewhere. This ship will try to help them figure out how to get things fixed. They can be us, we just need to find them.”

She snuggled in my arms. She’s a cat. I kneaded her belly. She purred loudly.

“Now, where do you think we can find the Flinchites?” I asked. “If I remember correctly, they owe me a favor or two... or ten.”

Charlie laughed. “The Flinchites are wherever you are,” she said.

“Of course they are. Where can I find Hunter?” I asked.

“He’s a bit ahead of you,” Charlie said. “He’s out in the woods with CANNONBALL. They must be looking for something. CANNONBALL has a flare gun and Hunter is using his power to protect him. They aren’t close enough to see you, but they might hear us. Maybe we should go help them.”

“Mike,” she purred. “That is one dangerous group.”

“The Flinchites? Yeah,” I replied.

She shook her head and growled. “I do not like talking to them,” she snarled.

“Ty is alright,” I assured her. “The rest of them I could do without. But still, let’s find them. Lead the way, Charlie.”

Charlie found Hunter and CANNONBALL camped out in the woods. They’d been gone for a couple of hours, and had split up in search of something.

“You found them,” I said. “Are they in trouble?”

“Sort of,” she said. “They’re looking for a device. It isn’t doing what it should be doing. The portal is malfunctioning,” she growled. “You need to go.”

“Charlie,” I said, exasperated.

“Go!” she growled. She leapt from my lap and into Hunter’s arms. “Hunter!”

“Hey, cutie,” Hunter said.

“Omigod,” Edgar exclaimed into my earpiece.

“Look, the 4 of us need to find the Flinchites ASAP,” I urged the group. “Between myself, Charlie, CANNONBALL, Hunter, and Edgar in my earpiece, we have everything that we need to restore order to the timeline. Let’s fix the dimensions. We need to find the Flinchites.”

“Not so fast,” Hunter said. “You’re right, Mike. But the Flinchites are a very bad group, one that we shouldn’t tangle with. If we bring them here, it will bring chaos to this universe. If we don’t, we may have no Earth.”

“When are we supposed to meet?” I asked.

“Tonight. After sunset.”

“Of course,” I said. I picked up my car keys. “Then I’ll be heading back to the lab. Hunter and CANNONBALL, if you can’t fix the time portal, give me a call. I’ll come by and help you if we can. You know my number.”

Night came, after sunset. Charlie and I met Hunter and CANNONBALL at the rendezvous point. Ty Betteridge, the Flinchite, showed up only minutes later. He looked younger than I remembered even though I had seen him since this time period. Time travel will do that.

I sensed that this was a very important night, but was reluctant to get into it. We headed into the woods to a place Hunter called the Lost Woods, a sort of maze-like forest. We sat on rocks near a tall cliff and the five of us shared the small flare gun.

“So,” Hunter said. “I’ve come up with a plan.”

“Is it possible that all of this was simply a dream?” I asked.

“It would explain a lot of things, but probably not all of them,” Hunter said. “Things have happened that cannot be explained. There is new activity in Tier 3. The time travel technology at the center of O.V.E.R. is active again. We are looking at some bad ramifications.”

“Do your guys know anything about this, Ty?” I asked him.

“Yes,” Ty said. “It was just discovered a few months ago. There was a massive fire in Vermont. I was at the home when the first alarm sounded. My son was home, playing in his room. I think he must have been under some sort of trance. I was pulled away from the home before I was able to make a rescue, or contact others. I would have been safe there. My daughter was taken with me. Somewhere far from here, in the presence of another time traveler.”

“Another time traveler? Who do you think it is? Do you think that it’s Anne?” Hunter asked.

“Yes,” Ty replied. “I’m sure of it. But I can’t find her. No matter how hard I try, I can’t locate her. And I’m not sure if it’s due to my lack of cooperation.”

“Do you know where your daughter is?” I asked him.

“I have a pretty good idea,” he said.

“And what is it?” Hunter asked him.

“Inside Tier 3,” Ty said. “At the center of O.V.E.R., the reason we are all here.” All of us looked down at the ground as he said this.

“So, how do we break into a top secret government facility, like old times?” Charlie asked.

“We won’t break into anything,” I said. “I can’t remember the exact procedure. It was all encrypted on our time machine, remember?”

“Alright, then,” Hunter said. “You don’t remember? It’s simple. We just fly the machine, kind of like our spaceship, through the Portal. It will remain inert until it passes through the Portal and reaches the base. Once it is inside the base, we hijack it and just fly it straight in. If it’s the real deal, they will be prepared for us.”

“Well, if we need someone to pilot a spaceship, I think we all know just the woman to do it,” CANNONBALL said.

“Really?” I groaned.

“Are you going to make me say it?” CANNONBALL asked. “Who else could get the job done?”

Marissa looked as strong and full of life as ever in her spacetime suit. She was easily the most accomplished spaceship time pilot the world had ever known, which was impressive even though there weren't that many of them. It was weird to see her older, wrinkles daring to make themselves known on her face. Marissa was more than just a pilot, though. She was a friend. Marissa was my ship. She might as well be my mom.

“What's going to happen to the others?” Marissa asked.

“They will be assigned to another base, I'm sure,” I told her.

“Alright. Well, the good news is, your daughter will get to stay with you,” Marissa said. “She will have a nice quiet life, hopefully.”

“And if she doesn't?” CANNONBALL asked.

“Then I don't fuckin' care,” she snapped back. “Are we going to ram this spaceship into Tier 3 of O.V.E.R. or what? Come in, come in, meet the crew,” she said. “I'm sure you remember them.”

She ushered us into the ship. “Hey, Chance. Hey, Shadow. Look at what I found on the side of the road. Five sorry ass time travelers looking to get into Tier 3.” Chance and Shadow laughed heartily. They were beaming when they saw us.

“You people don't know how to plan anything,” Chance said. “I swear to god, sometimes I get the feeling you just roll the dice and then just follow them.”

“Well, we kind of planned it that way,” I told them.

“We do have a time machine, you know. We can just dump you at the base. Get back in your ships and go back to your own time,” Chance suggested.

“I know,” I said. “It's not that I'm eager to see the reawakening, it's that I don't want to see the future. Like we don't know what kind of damage will be done.”

“We know what will happen, we just don't know how badly,” Shadow said.

“I just think we're too young to be dealing with this shit,” Marissa shot back. “But we're here, so let's deal with this shit. Like old times,”

“Like old times,” Hunter said.

“Let's blow up Tier 3 all over again,” I said.

“Let's do it!” Charlie said.

Marissa hit a series of buttons on a control panel. The ship lifted into the air and traveled instantly through time and space into Oldbrush Valley. It focused its lasers at the building at the center of Tier 3 and fired. Smoke poured out, as did a handful of people.

“Punished Hunter,” I snarled. “I knew that he would be involved.”

“Fuck yeah, I'm with you!” Chance said. “I'll get in on this.”

"So what's the plan?" I asked.

"It's simple," Marissa said. "Get in that base. Save the kid. No questions asked. Make it fast. You will have to kill some people. They will have warned the civilians."

"Kill, huh? Well, I ain't afraid of some rich little brat," Chance said.

"I've killed my fair share of people," I said. "Leave the dirty work to me." All 7 of us got out of the ship and marched toward the building in formation. Punished Hunter was waiting for us there.

"I thought I killed you," Punished Hunter said.

"You did," I replied.

"You killed all those people. I thought you were the one who killed the little boy," Punished Hunter said.

"He was a little boy, Hunter. A martyr. He deserved to die," I replied.

"What would I know about that?" he asked.

"You know that he was right and you know that he was wrong," I said.

"He was a fucking idiot," he snapped.

"That doesn't matter. The only thing that matters is that the mayor lost his son. He's taking it hard. I think the government is trying to blame you for it."

"I don't give a fuck what they do," he said.

"Well, we're going to get in that building and do what has to be done. I have a retirement to return to," I said. "I am so sick of this time travel bullshit."

"It's more fun when I'm beating the shit out of you," Punished Hunter said.

"Take it out on somebody who cares," I shot back.

"Like, Hunter? He's such a scared little boy!" Punished Hunter said.

"Scared little boy?" I asked.

"He sure is. He thinks you killed those kids," Punished Hunter said.

"I'm not the one that killed those kids. I don't have to protect him because he's a coward," I said. "He always wanted to prove himself. To be the best. He wanted to prove himself with me. Now he can. I won't get in his way. Hunter, fuck this dude up. The rest of us will head inside."

Without hesitation, Hunter leapt at Punished Hunter, like he had been waiting his whole life to do so. We could hear the pained wails of their fighting as we made our way into the building, unable to tell who was winning the fight.

Inside Tier 3 building 225B, we found the mayor, his wife and a few of his staff were dead. They had been either beaten or tortured. Hunter had a chair thrown at his head, but he continued to fight.

We were joined by CANNONBALL and Trapper and I quickly worked out our attack strategy. With two big guys like us, we could overwhelm Punished Hunter and run him out of the building. Trapper and Chance would hold him while Hunter and I ran in to rescue the little girl.

Hunter was a violent man. I had a hard time telling him and Punished Hunter apart. We stormed our way into the center of operations. The place where it all began. The place that the time travel emanated from in the first place. It was the first time that any of us had ever seen the source of all time travel and we were all there to experience it together.

“Holy shit,” Marissa said. Ty’s jaw dropped. We were all in awe. In the center of the room was the device that made all of time travel in the entire universe possible. It was an ominous being, so large that it filled up most of the room. The device glowed a vibrant green as it looked down at us, like it was preparing to destroy us all.

A single alien, in a slinky, black-and-red outfit that was barely recognizable as human, the alien was looking at the device. It stared at it as if it was staring into the eyes of God, waiting for God to speak. The silence was deafening.

“What’s happening?” I yelled at the alien.

The alien looked at me. It looked exactly like the alien we had faced before, only its eyes weren’t completely white. They were a disturbing, deep red and it looked as if it were studying me as it stared into my eyes.

“Hello, my children,” it said. “What brings you to this place?”

“Brother, it seems like you’ve been waiting for me to show up,” I said.

“Yes, I have. You’ve come a long way. You’ve learned much about me. I am not what you thought I was. I am a Being Of Uninterrupted Time. But you may call me Flinch.”

“No fucking way,” Ty said, breaking his normally formal demeanor.

“You’re Flinch!?” CANNONBALL shouted. “Holy fuck. I wish Ryan were alive to see this!”

“What? What’s the big deal?” I asked. “I thought you guys were fucking crazy?”

“No,” Flinch said. “We’re not. But that doesn’t change the fact that we are going to fight each other.”

“I thought we were supposed to have a meeting!” Hunter said. “This isn’t good!”

“I have arrived at the meeting,” Flinch said. “I hope you understand. But please, don’t fight. It will be brief.”

“Are you okay?” I asked Hunter, as he struggled to stand up, blood leaking out of his mouth. “I could kill this fucker with my eyes closed.”

“You cannot do that,” Flinch said. “I have access to all of time. Even if you did, I could reset this moment until you failed.” He was cold and clinical, like a robot.

“I’m not sure I like your attitude,” Hunter said.

“You have the will to fight,” Flinch said. “You cannot deny that. But you are still my children. I wish you all the best. It will not be long until you fight again.”

“Why are you here?” Ty asked. “Why did you come to this event?”

"You cannot deny that I have built this machine," Flinch said. "What I wanted was for you to be together in it. But it is my duty to protect my greatest creation, not tell you that I built it."

"What do you mean?" Trapper asked.

"This time travel object is my greatest creation," Flinch said. "And it is here inside of Oldbrush Valley. And now I am going to use its powers of time travel in order to make sure you never find it. You are destined to fight each other, and it is not the time to start." "This is bullshit!" I shouted. "You're not here to make sure that this goes well. You're here to stop us."

"I am here to stop you," Flinch said.

"You can't do that," I said. "You can't take that away from us!"

"I can do whatever I want," Flinch said. "You will fight each other as I tell you to. You are angry, not confused. This is not a game. The consequences of losing this time machine could be devastating."

"What if it's not our time?" CANNONBALL asked.

"Then I will reset it," Flinch said.

Just then, the whole building of 225B began to rumble. Not even Flinch looked like he knew what was going on. Suddenly, the building rose off of its foundations. The universe swirled around us, finally the building crashed back down in a different location: a nearby mountain. Then the mountain fell away and the sky was empty. The aftermath of an explosion.

Standing in the void with a triumphant grin on her face was Anne. "You weren't going to have a reunion without me were you?" She asked. Flinch looked terrified. He eyed the time travel device, his greatest creation.

"By the force, I hate you! You are all dead! I will rebuild you in the next place!"

"That's not the point, Anne," I said. "How do we know that this is even possible? How do we know it's not just a big trap? "

"They will not be a trap, Gossamer," Anne said. "I did not erase this timeline. I just changed the path we would take."

"But you told us that this wouldn't work!" Ty exclaimed.

"No, I said I wouldn't take them in my time machine," Anne said. "That is the only change. The rest of the timeline completes itself. That machine, the one from 225B, is inert now."

Flinch looked horrified and defeated. "You destroyed my masterpiece!" he wailed. "I built this to end our existence, you idiot!"

"I will not destroy you," Anne said, her eyes blazing. "Now come, we must find a safe place." Anne walked over to the device and picked it up. It crumbled into nothing in her hands, like dust. "Let's get out of here, Mike. I thought you were supposed to be retired." Together, we all walked out of the building for the final time.

As we walked to the skytrain station, we debated on what to do next.

"We have to do something," CANNONBALL said. "What if he's right? Maybe we are all dead. What will happen to Trapper and the Rangers?"

"Look," Trapper said. "Don't you think that this is a good thing? I mean, you can't get rid of Flinch. He's the only one who can be a problem here. And what about the Rangers? What will they do when he's not around? You've seen how good the Ranger training is, CANNONBALL. The Rangers will always be there to enforce the spacetime portal."

"I think that means that everything will be alright," Ty said. "The Flinchites will help as well."

"What is a Flinchite without Flinch?" Shadow asked. We all laughed. I looked down the tracks of the skytrain station. "Sorry, guys. This is my train, the one bound for 2048. Back to peace and quiet and Edgar. I'm going to miss you guys. I forgot how much I loved being around all of you."

"You won't be alone, Zipper," Trapper said. "I have two extra tickets."

"That's... alright, Trapper," I said. "This next chapter is something I have to do on my own, just me and Edgar."

We waved goodbye as the skytrain took off.

The next thing I knew, I was back in my house with my wonderful husband and my tank full of wolverines, who were doing much better. The trip had worked exactly as planned. I kissed Edgar on the cheek and he smiled.

"I have missed you so much," I whispered into his ear. "I can't wait to go back."

He chuckled. "But not too soon."

We both looked up at the sky. It was dark, and the stars seemed so near. "What's the time?" I asked.

"It's about 1 a.m.," Edgar said. "I have to get up at six to get to the gym. The wolverines are going to need extra exercise."

"Okay," I whispered. "I'll see you then."

"I love you, Edgar," I said, my eyes filled with tears.

"Love you too, Anne," he said. "I'll see you in a couple of years, Anne."

"Love you too, Edgar," I whispered back.

We both kissed, and my tears stopped. I had everything I could ever want. And I had my best friend back, where I had always wanted him.

CANNONBALL and Flinch and the Rangers were safe.

"Hey, Edgar," I said. "Why don't we just go out, like old times. We used to do so much together. Tomorrow, maybe. I'll take you to the mountains."

"Yeah, I'm down with that," Edgar said, as we both smiled, looking at the stars.

I took Edgar's hand and squeezed it. "Do you remember that time we saw the Northern Lights?" I asked.

"Of course I do," Edgar said, and gave me a squeeze.

"That's why I think I like your dad better," I said, looking up into his eyes.

"I think you're crazy," Edgar laughed.

"Not so, Edgar, not so." I chuckled.

We went inside and went to bed. The wolverines mewed contentedly in the tank. I was tired.

But at least we were going to make it back to our friends in the other world.

Tomorrow, we would finish the book. Tomorrow, everything would be back to normal.

"Just one more thing," I said to Edgar. "Could you promise me one more thing?"

"Of course," he said.

"Will you never leave me again?"

"I promise."

This time, our kiss was long and hard and filled with emotion. I promised myself that no matter what, I would always love Edgar and the Rangers.

As the kiss ended, I felt something against my lips.

"He's going to kiss me," I said to the tank.

"Yeah, yeah," CANNONBALL muttered. "He's already done it once tonight."

"And he's going to do it again," Flinch said.

I looked around, but nobody was paying attention to us.

I pulled up the covers and we fell fast asleep. This was our first time out of retirement but it would be far from our last. Little did I know that Flinch was already planning something diabolical, a scheme to bring all the Rangers together, without me, my Ranger friends, or the Green Lanterns.

But that's a story for next time.

THE END.

[END THEME PLAYS.]