

## EPISODE 52: Calculating

[Hey guys. Welcome to the first episode of 2022. Hope you enjoy it. And if you're enjoying the show and want to support it, you can do that on Patreon at [patreon.com/woe\\_begone](https://patreon.com/woe_begone). Being a patron comes with a bunch of perks, but the one that I want to highlight this week is the new single from the upcoming season 3 soundtrack release. It's called "Can I Stay Here Awhile?" and it is based around an instrumental from episode 36 of the show and the lyrics are about the events of that episode, with Mike staying at Matt's house. Check out it. [Plays clip]. Get that and more at [patreon.com/woe\\_begone](https://patreon.com/woe_begone). A special thanks to my 10 newest patrons: Jeremiah Easley, InstaVoid, Froggee, TTT, Jude L, El Addams, Brandon Stines, Lilith B, John Williams, and Terri Nelson for supporting the show. Enjoy.]

I don't think that it is an insult to my prestigious colleagues and cherished loved ones to say that we had no idea what we were doing when we founded the Base. We all brought some form of expertise, but none of us had ever run an organization of any type, much less a time travel organization that was murderously at odds with who knows how many other time travel organizations. Anne had organized a book club in college and she did seem to be the one most capable of putting a plan together and acting on it, but those two things might not be related. She seemed to know best about what foundations were needed to get things started, though.

It was her house that we were living in, after all. Most of us were going home to sleep, but we spent most of our free time there. She had found a landlord that didn't mind getting paid in cash and was good at not asking questions. Anne having relocated and not working at O.V.E.R. like the rest of us, we were the ones who provided said cash. We were happy to do so, though it was a fairly large residence, meant to house many people if necessary with extra room for offices and experimental facilities and 4 hamsters...3 hamsters. Money was tight compared to our ambitions and everyone had a different threshold of what they thought was appropriate to contribute. I basically forked over my whole paycheck to her with the understanding that it meant that I had already paid for my share when we all went in on pizza.

Speaking of O.V.E.R., things continued to get stranger following the aftermath of the destruction of 357A, something that I had recently learned I was part of the cause of. Following the Flinchites' orders, I had pointed a device's antenna into Tier 3 and delivered backward through time whatever sort of information resulted in the explosion. Whoops! I can't say that I was too concerned with that, not with the impending founding of the Base at hand right after I did it. I don't care and am sometimes directly antagonistic toward the goals of O.V.E.R. They are literally the United States government and I only have contempt for them in that regard. The only reason I was concerned about 357A is because I suspected that Flinch or whatever technology Flinch was using was inside that building, explaining why O.V.E.R.'s security software ceased working when it happened. With the Base, we had something with similar (but seemingly lesser) power but with direct control: the Calculators. While I would rest easier knowing where Flinch was and what his intentions were, the Calculators gave us complete autonomy from him. Ryan never had that. The Arbiters did, though, and they were the ones who stole WOE.BEGONE from him. Or, at least, they stole it from the ones who stole it from him. It's hard to suss out everything that happened there, especially with Ryan still MIA and potentially deceased. It's possible that the Arbiters used their access to Flinch to reverse-engineer a parallel technology that allowed them to no longer rely on Flinch. That would explain how they were able to operate

WOE.BEGONE while I was playing, disguised as Donny Evans and that's my best guess as to what the Calculators are.

Ty Betteridge was visibly missing, following his death inside of Tier 2, by the way. O.V.E.R did a press conference and everything. They didn't confirm his death, but they also didn't cover up the fact that he was no longer showing up to work. Hunter had extracted us from the situation using the emergency button, something that he was able to do thanks to his Tier 2 training. I don't understand the specifics and I don't think that he did either, but I think the button is just a marker, emitting some sort of frequency so that it could be triangulated later. Hunter had to fill out a ton of paperwork and we had to help him detail every little aspect of the night in question, right down to placing events on a map of Tier 2. I don't know about O.V.E.R.'s awareness of the situation, whether it is partial or total, whether that paperwork was accepted by the organization or digested by an automated process that automatically spat out what we were hoping to achieve. Other Hunters Hartley running cover for us inside of O.V.E.R. only convulted the truth farther. Regardless, most of the damage seemed to have been fixed, with the notable exception of Ty Betteridge having gone missing. It was unclear whether he was alive or dead and what that state of being meant for the Ty that I knew. Sometimes altering past events had a direct effect on the person and sometimes it was as though they weren't connected at all. I had not learned how to tell the difference yet. I did not know if the Tys were connected.

Edgar knew Ty. They started work at O.V.E.R. around the same time and were on friendly terms. Edgar described him as "exceedingly normal," which I agree with on the grounds that I found him to be a decent and unassuming person to interact with, though the Ty that I knew was considerably older than the Ty that Edgar knew. It remains unclear how he managed to be both an Arbiter and an O.V.E.R. employee and then later a Flinchite, though I assume that manipulation of spacetime was involved. Dude had a lot going on. Maybe it was a mistake to think that all of these groups are merely unrelated and only at odds with each other out of a selfish drive to power. After all, if everyone involved teamed up, all of us would have a fuckton of power, barely limited by the power of everyone else in the group. One World WOE.BEGONE. United in absolute power over time and space.

But until that beautiful day comes, it's just my friends and I at the Base, fiddling around with some technology that we stole off a corpse. We desperately wanted to know what made them tick but were terrified of taking them apart because we didn't know if we could reliably put them back together again. At that point, we were just lucky to have two of them again, narrowly avoiding a Mike Walters getting killed in the middle of nowhere North Dakota in the process. Luckily, there was a knight in shining armor to come save the day. This is WOE.BEGONE.

[INTRO THEME PLAYS.]

I woke up in Edgar's arms, sort of. I was still in the house outside of Rugby, North Dakota, head on a pillow that Mike and Michael had found for me, some superficial wounds patched up but head still throbbing, mind still in a non-understanding haze. I didn't really "wake up," per se. It was more like I was able to focus for a moment and understand what was going on. When I could see through the haze, Edgar was there. I wasn't really "in his arms" per se, either. He must have seen the blood and the bandage on my ear and realized that I had taken some blows to the head. He would have had to walk right past the shattered earpiece in order to get to where I was laying, as well. He had all of the information that he needed to know that it

would be unwise to move me. He was knelt down, one hand on my shoulder, when I came to. He had a gun in his other hand. Still, I felt comforted knowing that he was there.

With my newfound lucidity, I raised my head up. Last I remembered, Mike and Michael were still in the house. Where did they go?

“No, no! Don’t move, Mikey,” Edgar said, putting pressure on my shoulder to keep me from getting up.

“Mike and Michael were here...” I said, laying my head back down.

“Oh, Mikey,” he said. “That was just a dream. Michael, The Tin Man, The Cowardly Lion, none of those are real, babe. You bumped your head real hard in that tornado.”

“He’s real,” I groaned. “He’s so frustratingly real. Ugh. Let me sit up. I’d prefer to sit up.” I reached out my hand. Edgar took it and helped me get into a sitting position. “I’m going to be fine. I was just stunned for awhile. The earpiece broke. I couldn’t contact you.”

“I can see that,” Edgar said. “We’re going to have to put ideas for backup communication in the manual when we make it. Concussion safety, too. You’ve been hit in the head way too many times in the last few weeks. He is dead though, right? The guy we were after? I saw a lot of blood when I came in.” He looked around the room.

“Yeah, yeah,” I said. “He brought a knife to a gun fight, thankfully. Where are Mike and Michael?”

“Haven’t seen them,” Edgar said. “They were actually here?”

“Yeah, they bandaged me up.” I replied, gesturing at my leg. Michael had cut my pants from around the wound, leaving me with half-jorts. This was disappointing. You mustn’t get blood on your jorts while you are cutting them.

“Did they take the body with them?” he asked.

“I think so? I don’t know. I’m sure they said but I couldn’t focus,” I said. The whole incident was a blur. I almost believed Edgar when he said that it was a dream.

“Do you remember anything they said?” he asked.

“Not really. Maybe it would come back to me if someone reminded me. Michael telling me that I’d be alright. Maybe something about corrections? I don’t remember and my head is still throbbing. It hurts to think,” I said.

“Well, that’s probably for the best, isn’t it?” Edgar asked. “Propagation and all that. What you don’t know can’t hurt you. Those guys are from way further out than we are. They’re sorta dangerous in that way. They could say something that seems obvious to them and it could change everything for us, for better or worse with no way to tell which way things would go.”

“I remember Michael yelling at Mike. Mike was gonna use the calculator, I think. To send me back to Base,” I said.

“What’s the problem with that?” he asked.

“I think Michael was afraid it would drop me on the ground and I wouldn’t be able to catch myself,” I replied. “He showed up after Mike, to correct his correction.”

“Oh, well, there goes my plan, too,” he said. “I was going to swoop in, kill the guy myself if I had to, grab the calculator, and get both of us out of here.”

“Well you mistimed your chance to save the day,” I said. “So, you can put your gun away. I killed him.”

“Oh,” Edgar looked startled. “I guess I can. I forgot that I was holding it.” He holstered his weapon. “How long do you think we need to stay here? You know, before you would feel comfortable traveling back?”

“A few hours, I think,” I said. “Just long enough that if I fall then my legs won’t crumple underneath me. It’s disorienting, even when I’m healthy and prepared for it.”

Edgar looked relieved. “A few hours? Thank God. I was scared you were going to say a few days. You are going to have to rest for a few days when we get back, though.”

“What about the Base? What about O.V.E.R.?” I asked.

“The Base can wait for you. No one is going to get mad that their friend is too hurt to do time travel espionage. We are going to have to figure something out with regards to O.V.E.R., though,” he replied. “Not necessarily because of this one incident. You’ve been out of commission before and taken time off, no questions asked. I think they’re scared to fuck with you after a bear mauled you half to death on their property surrounded by their guards who could have done something to stop it. That’s a lawsuit waiting to happen and their profile is already embarrassingly high thanks to 357A. But between you getting injured and spending all of your time at the Base, we’re going to have to figure something out with regards to working at O.V.E.R. I’m going to have to figure it out for myself, too. But that’s a guideline for future Edgar to work into his future manual.”

“Is future Edgar a cowboy?” I asked.

“Psh! I wish!” he chuckled.

“You really don’t,” I replied. “Hey, do you think that you could do me a favor?”

“Anything,” he said.

“Can you clean up the blood? The body’s gone, but anyone who steps foot in this house will know there’s been a murder here,” I said.

“I’m on it.” He looked around again. “I’m on it as much as I can be. I don’t know that I’ll be able to do any good with bloodstains in carpet. But I’ll try.”

“One more thing? Can you help me up into the kitchen chair? I’m tired of being on the ground,” I said.

“Sure thing.” He helped me into the chair. I was feeling stronger and likely didn’t need his help, but it was nice to have him beside me just in case.

“Huh! Didn’t even notice that before,” Edgar said, looking toward the center of the kitchen table. “Guess you didn’t imagine Michael being here after all. Unless the guy who owned this place also had a thing for black felt cowboy hats.” Sure enough, there was a black felt cowboy hat in the center of the table, next to the Calculator.

“Mike was wearing it,” I corrected him. “Remember? He was wearing it when he warned me, too. I thought it was Michael. You heard all of this on the earpiece?”

“Oh,” Edgar paused. “Yeah, I remember now. Mike was wearing the cowboy hat. And he left it here?”

“That doesn’t seem right. Michael said that he came here to get his hat back. I’m sure that was a joke. Well, mostly sure. It’s hard to tell with all of this. But he wouldn’t just leave it here,” I said.

“Hmm,” Edgar said. He picked up the Calculator and started pushing buttons on it, going through menus. I couldn’t tell what he was doing. The Calculators were complex and dangerous and I didn’t want to be the reason for a catastrophic failure, so I hadn’t messed around with them much. “Yep, I thought so,” he said after a few seconds. “One of them used the Calculator in here. It’s in the usage log. I mean, I assume that it wasn’t you that used it and the target was dead before the time logged. Mike and Michael duplicated the hat. A parting gift, I guess.”

I understood immediately. Michael. He was planting the seed. When we first met, he told me: “you turn into me. Remember that,” but he never indicated how I was going to turn into him,

where the thought processes that led into lifestyle choices first began. The incipient urge to become a cowboy. Here in good ol' North Dakota. That fiend.

"Throw it in the trash," I whined.

"Aw, I think it's sweet," Edgar said. "You guys are usually so mean to each other. I think we should take it with us. It's a bad idea to leave trash at a crime scene, anyway. We're taking it with us."

"Fine," I conceded.

"Why are you guys so mean to each other, anyway?" he asked.

"Because we hate each other," I explained.

"I don't get it," Edgar said. "Even with the Riga Mikes, it's not like you're that different from each other."

"So you see the problem," I replied.

"Ugh," he said. "I surrender, baby bear. You rest here for a bit. I'm going to see what my cleaning supply options are. Maybe get some transported from Base if I have to. In fact, let's just do that. The less evidence the better. That's something to stock up on, too. File that thought away for later. Rest here awhile. Or you can go get in the bed."

"That would feel weird," I said.

"Yeah, I agree. But whatever you want to do. Get some rest. Shout if you need anything," he said and kissed me gently on the cheek, he went into the other room and began attempting to clean up the scene.

I wavered in and out of focus while Edgar cleaned the living room. I could hear him talking to Base on the earpiece, but I couldn't make out any of what he was saying. At some point, I heard cleaning supplies drop into the room and land with a clatter. I could hear scrubbing and could smell bleach from the other room. My brain flitted around random thoughts and half-dreams. Occasionally, I would come into focus and feel angry, though I couldn't remember what I was feeling angry about. It was miserable and confusing and I was elated that I wasn't going to have to figure out how to get out of North Dakota on my own as I had originally thought. Edgar could have me out in a few hours. It might have actually been days had I waited until I was confident that I could take the truck. I felt protected. Warm and cozy, despite everything. Love is a hell of a drug.

A little over 2 hours passed with little fanfare. I knew it had been 2 hours because I could see the time change on the stove and the microwave... and the coffee machine. Kitchen appliances are hell-bent on making sure that you know what time it is but not too well because each of the appliances showed a slightly different time. Snapping to attention, I heard a loud sound but couldn't figure out what it was. It sounded like it was coming from outside. I could hear Edgar rustling in the other room. It sounded like he locked the door. He barreled into the kitchen.

"Someone outside?" I asked.

"A bunch of someones," Edgar said. He looked panicked.

"Are we going to shoot them?" I asked.

"We don't stand a chance, Mikey. I don't think you understand. There's like 6 guys out there. At least. More were still pulling up," he said. He grabbed the Calculator off of the table. "Are you ready to travel?"

"No," I said, knowing that it didn't matter.

"Well, too bad because it's go time," he replied.

“Did you get the blood cleaned up?” I asked.

“Yeah but the carpet is bleached white where it used to be,” he said. “Doesn’t matter now, anyway. No time. No time. Fuck.” He pushed the buttons on the Calculator frantically. “Piece of junk.”

“Get us out of here,” I said.

“Working on it, babe,” he said. I heard a window break.

“Close enough,” he said. He grabbed the cowboy hat off the table and put it on his head. “We’re riding out of here, partner.”

“Please don’t,” I said.

“Hold on tight,” he said. He grabbed me around the shoulder, pushed a button on the Calculator with the other hand, and we were gone.

Edgar and I reappeared at the Base, only a few inches off the ground, the sensation akin to trying to step up onto a step that isn’t there. I landed and immediately sat down, worried that my knees would buckle if I tried to stay standing. After a few seconds, Edgar managed to adjust from the travel and helped me onto the couch. “Can someone get him some water and an ibuprofin?” Edgar asked. I couldn’t see who was in the room to respond. A minute later, Edgar came back into the room with a glass of water and an ibuprofin and sat them on the coffee table in front of me.

“Thanks,” Edgar said.

“No problem,” Edgar said.

I closed my eyes in dismay. “When were you going to tell me about this?” I asked.

“Well, we had to get you out of there somehow,” one of them said. “Marissa’s on another project securing assets for us and Hunter is at O.V.E.R., so it was just me here to save you. I couldn’t take the other Calculator from the Base, not with one of them still potentially missing. And if I ended up in trouble out there with you, there needed to be someone here to bail us out.”

“So, if something went wrong when you came to get me you were going to send another Edgar to come save us and... leave a third Edgar here to provide support?” I asked.

“Why not?” an Edgar asked. My eyes were closed again. I couldn’t tell which one. “There are three of you that we know of, aren’t there?”

“But what are you going to do now?” I asked. “Are there going to be two of you now or...?”

“We’re going to consolidate,” the Edgar wearing the cowboy hat said, matter-of-factly.

“Consolidate!?” I was surprised. “No, no, no. Edgar. I was supposed to consolidate first, to make sure that it was safe for everyone. We still haven’t done with anything other than Princess Daffodil. I know the last experiment failed before we could try it, but--”

“Mikey, Mikey,” he interrupted me. “What is this sacrificial lamb nonsense?”

“It’s the concussion,” Cowboy Edgar suggested. On a long enough timeline, everyone becomes a cowboy. Truth hurts.

“Could be the concussion. Mikey, the reason you were going to be the first one to be consolidated wasn’t because you’re disposable. It was because you were the first one out in the field. And you were the first one out in the field because I love you and I trust you to get the job done. You’re why we’re all here,” Edgar scowled. I had hurt his feelings.

But he had made me a sacrificial lamb. He sent me on a dangerous mission without warning me what it was about. I nearly died and it felt like a punishment for fucking up the previous mission, even though on that mission one of me actually died. I listened to me die, my

final breaths resounding in my ears along with the gunshots. I heard me hit the table and sputter blood. I suspected that the Calculator I was sent to retrieve was the same Calculator we had lost, even from the moment that I had been told what I would be retrieving, but I hadn't been certain. It wasn't until one of the Edgars seemed to refer to the Calculator that I found in Rugby as "the other" Calculator that went "missing" that I was certain. I left all of this unsaid as I lay there on the couch, head spinning and throbbing, irritable thoughts growing and cascading, hot water for me to stew in. I lost track of the world for a moment.

"Fuck," I finally groaned. Both Edgars moved toward me to hold my hand, but I batted their hands away. "Fuck," I reiterated, taking a moment to catch my breath. "I'm okay. Don't touch me right now. I'm okay. Just a headache. I'm sorry. You're right. If you want to consolidate, that's your choice."

"It's not really a choice," one of them said. "There isn't room for both of us here. And it's not fair to send one of us away."

"I know," I said, resigned.

Some time passed. I don't know how much. I didn't sleep while I was on the couch. I laid there with my eyes closed, thinking about everything that had happened. Thinking about it gave me a headache, but any mundane thought would eventually lead back to thinking about it and then another failed attempt to push it all down. At some point, the Edgars came back into the room and gently stirred me from my spiral.

"We're ready," non-cowboy Edgar said. "But we can't operate the Calculator while we do this. We need your help."

Edgar hung up the cowboy hat on the hat and coat rack in the living room. They handed me the Calculator and led me into a side room that they had cleared out just for the occasion. The room was completely empty. It was an interior room, so it didn't even have a window. It reminded me of the transport room in the Flinchite compound. There was nothing that could accidentally be moved, or worse, consolidated. There were two Xs in the center of the room. The Edgars stood there, one on each of them.

"We are ready when you are," one of them said. I could no longer tell which one was a cowboy. They both took long deep breaths in anticipation.

I looked at the Calculator. There was code on the screen, variables that I didn't recognize nor understand. I couldn't double check their work. I couldn't catch an error, if one existed. I couldn't save them if something went wrong. I had to trust them, even if trust wasn't something I felt overly capable of at the time. I raised the Calculator, pointed it at them, and pulled the trigger.

Joking. It's not a gun. You don't point it at something and shoot laser beams at it or whatever. I pushed a button, but that's not as dramatic.

This has been WOE.BEGONE. Next time: the consolidation. Thanks for playing.

[END THEME PLAYS.]