

Episode 79: Mutiny

I am on record as a staunch proponent of coincidences. Not everything is connected, nor can it be. Sometimes things just happen. I could walk out the door right now, walk down the driveway and into the road and get hit by a bus. Well, maybe a bus is a poor choice of example. Oldbrush Valley doesn't have much of a public transport system and we are in an even more secluded part of the valley than, say, the center of town or O.V.E.R. So, not a bus. But maybe I'd get attacked by an elk? Yeah, that sounds much more plausible for out here. But still a coincidence!

Time travel in the form that we have access to can serve as a protective barrier between the user and coincidence. If I were attacked by an elk, I could drag myself back to Base and issue a correction to ensure that I don't go outside at that particular moment. Coincidence soundly avoided. And for the most part, there doesn't seem to be any sort of cosmic penalty for issuing these sorts of corrections. So, sometimes things just happen, and sometimes they don't, and nobody is keeping score.

I bring up coincidences again, as I have in the past, to bolster the idea that something that has happened is not mere coincidence. The metric by which I determine if something is a coincidence is not prone to false negatives. So, getting more to the point: O.V.E.R. has returned to the Tier 2 security system technology to perform tasks within their compound. The technology that was seemingly lost, or damaged, or stolen with the destruction of 357A has returned, an occurrence that I had not thought possible. If this technology were able to be taken away in the first place, my reasoning went, then that meant that it could never return. Since this technology is capable of preventing the theft from happening in the first place, if O.V.E.R. could successfully hold onto the technology, then it would look as though nothing had ever happened to an outside observer. And yet, here we are! Which means that the components of this particular event contain unknown elements that I was not accounting for in my reasoning, which shouldn't be that surprising in retrospect. I'm literally just a guy.

It was OVEdgar that spotted the return of the security program, while he was working at the interfacing building 116E. Not being privy to most of the going-ons inside of Tier 2 proper, it was actually menial conversation between guards that he overheard that clued him in. Things like: "Ugh, I can't believe that we have to learn that whole program all over again," or "Yeah, I know. It sucks and it's always freezing. Leave it to the government to make a load of crap, am I right?" and "I heard that they took it away because people were moving animals around without permission," and "Oh, I'm sorry I can't concentrate the guy behind the desk is too cute I can't—I can't even think straight," maybe they didn't say that last one but, uh, they were thinking it.

OVEdgar asked O.V.E.R. Mike if that sounded like the security program to him and he agreed. The animal in question was likely the bear that he had placed inside of a security building to stop it from attacking him. The employee mistakenly thought that is why the technology was taken away, and not the uh, the whole building that blew up. Maybe he thought that was a coincidence.

Meanwhile, the Mustardseed occurrences were ramping up. Mysterious messages, then recording from timelines that no longer existed, what appeared to be a smear campaign to turn the Base against me by using, admittedly, accurate representations of my words and actions which resulted in me leaving Base to stay with Mike and Michael for some time. Time that was cut short by what I can only describe as a chaotic series of corrections, the revelation that Michael's Edgar was dead, and the potential of death for Edgar from this time period by way of Michael accidentally striking him with an axe. My Edgar. Mustardseed was slowly and methodically accelerating, with no end in sight, leaving us terrified at how they might further escalate.

I went home the morning after the attack from Mustardseed. That's what it was: an attack. And they had hurt Michael quite severely in the process. Mike stayed behind to make sure that Michael was okay, despite the urge that I know that he felt to run back to his Edgar himself. The incident made two things clear to me: firstly, that I needed to get back to Base and begin reconciling with Edgar immediately and secondly, that none of us were safe in any way.

Edgar, of course, had no knowledge of being spirited away to Latvia in the middle of the night. I told him what happened the second that I arrived and he... didn't seem as rattled by it as I thought he would be. Maybe he was being strong for the sake of keeping me strong, I don't know. I didn't tell him that Michael's Edgar was dead. Another thing that I cannot imagine ever telling him. One more for the pile.

We convened a meeting to decide on what to do next. If Mustardseed could move Edgar, then we were not safe at Base. Mustardseed had access to us and was likely watching us, even now. "Isn't that potentially true of anywhere though?" Marissa asked. She was right. The Base was not special in this regard. If Mustardseed had the ability to correct and iterate and observe us, then squirming out from under their grasp would not be as easy as walking out the door and picking a new location. We might even be gored by a proverbial elk while setting up a new Base.

Edgar, being of an analytical mindset, suggested new protocol designed specifically to deal with travel while being monitored. I watched him discover on his own the protocol that I had already witnessed while working with Mike and Michael to correct the tragic night in their apartment: a database of secure locations that could be transported to at random. An enormous database of places that we could go in quick succession that would be nearly impossible to track us through, that we wouldn't be directly choosing in the moment. I watched the concept be born as it escaped his lips: "Randomized Secure Coordinates." RSC. What Michael had called "Random Safe Coordinates", but with an accent. This was the concept that the corrections team had been using that night that they were trying to evade Mustardseed. The idea had propagated from this point. But it hadn't fully worked that night—Mustardseed still got the jump on them—still I was able to see its merits. The RSC scrub, as they called it, had successfully prevented the second corrections team from issuing their correction in a more convenient manner. It wasn't a cure-all, but it was something. Something already well-known to Mike and Michael, another tool in their arsenal that they could break out whenever it was appropriate.

We also discussed coincidences at this meeting and there was a unanimous conclusion: it was not a coincidence that the increase in severity in the Mustardseed attacks occurred as O.V.E.R. was getting its security program back online. It was unclear how they were related, but their timing seemed to point to each other. They were, at the very least, correlated.

Edgar, not merely being content with inventing the concept of an RSC scrub in this meeting, responded to this correlated issue with equal methodical enthusiasm. He had a plan. A plan that involved me traveling into O.V.E.R. for a field mission. A plan that involved interfacing with the O.V.E.R. team and filling out a bunch of boring paperwork. Nothing intensive, just passing down some directions to them, at least in theory.

Cue the paperwork music. Did you notice the theme hadn't played yet? This is WOE.BEGONE.

[INTRO THEME PLAYS.]

OVEDgar's cabin looked like a hybrid of my cabin and Edgar's cabin when we lived at O.V.E.R., with none of the trademark Mike Walters messiness included. There were movie posters on the walls, clearly O.V.E.R. Mike's idea, which were framed, clearly Edgar's idea, which stood out against Edgar's typical orderly minimalism. There was a vanilla candle burning in the corner of the room and light, unobtrusive music playing when I went to visit them. It was a sunny, picturesque day and cool enough to leave the windows open. The cabin felt like a loving home.

"I spend most of my free time here anyway," O.V.E.R. Mike explained to me. "Putting up a couple of my own decorations just made sense. And Edgar here keeps me in line, so I don't trash the place."

"It's a little bit cramped, but we make it work," Edgar added. "We've applied to transfer over to one of the Tier 1 couple's cabins, but they haven't gotten back to us yet. They always get snatched up quick whenever someone moves out."

"Uh, you might want to hold up on those plans," I interjected. "I'm not here just to see how the two of you are doing."

Edgar rolled his eyes. "We know," O.V.E.R. Mike said, a severe look on his face. I could feel the hospitality drying up. "You never stop by to see how we're doing. So, what do you want this time?"

"As you know, we've received your report about the security program becoming active again. Base thinks that this is related to the Mustardseed case going on currently," I said.

"I'll take your word on it," Edgar replied. "We don't know very much about the Mustardseed thing."

"The return of the security program coincided with an especially brutal attack on that front," I explained. "That's wh—"

"That's where we come in, babe," Mike interrupted me, taking Edgar's hand in his own. "Sorry. Go on. This is where you are going to want something from us, right? So, what is it?"

“First off, you should know that this is Edgar’s plan. This isn’t just me putting you in the hot seat on some whim. We all talked about this together,” I said.

“Everyone but us, you mean,” O.V.E.R. Mike shot back. “That’s the price of getting our lives back. Nobody cares what we think.”

“Right so, everyone but you decided that the two of you should apply to the Tier 2 versions of your jobs,” I said. “We decided that was the best route to take to ensure that we have eyes wherever we need them to be. If the security program is operating again and it has to do with Mustardseed, then we need to be able to see what’s going on inside of Tier 2 if we are going to get to the bottom of the Mustardseed fiasco. Breaking in and sneaking around isn’t going to cut it anymore. We need better access.”

I could see Mike’s grip tighten around Edgar’s hand as I spoke. Edgar grimaced and looked at Mike.

“We don’t want to,” Mike said.

“Don’t want to? You are here because a connection to O.V.E.R. is advantageous for us to maintain. Without that advantage, you are a resource drain on Base and a liability regarding our attempts to operate covertly. If you refuse assignments, there is no way to justify the existence of a Base O.V.E.R. program. If you don’t want to participate in assignments, that is your decision to make, but Base will make our own decisions as well. And Base has decided that it would be in our best interests for you to be consolidated back into me and my Edgar in the event that you make that decision,” I said.

“Did Edgar make you memorize that drivel before you came out here?” O.V.E.R. Mike asked.

“I had to repeat it back to him before I left but that’s not the point,” I said. “He’s right. We can’t just let you roam around out here with nothing in return to Base. So, I’m here to tell you that you are applying to work inside of Tier 2.”

“Or you’ll consolidate us and keep trying until you get a Mike and Edgar who will do it,” Edgar snarled back at me. His demeanor had changed entirely since the beginning of the conversation. He was sharp, prickly, defensive.

“It’s not like that,” I responded.

“It is exactly like that,” Edgar replied. “You and my Mikey are the same person. Almost the same person. I know what Base does to you. I know what this whole thing is capable of making you do, and it is heinous. It turns all of you into desperate, cornered animals all of the time. You would just as soon kill us and start over if we refused your orders.”

I blushed. “Nobody is suggesting that,” I said. “Just consolidation. You’re here to do a job. And Edgar, you’ve consolidated before. Nothing bad happened, right?” I was referring to the incident after Rugby. I was supposed to be the first consolidation experiment, but Edgar beat me to it. That was his prior experience.

“Not that time,” Edgar said. “But we know now that it is more dangerous than we thought. Mikey and I have heard stories and we aren’t even allowed to know most of what goes on. I’m sure that what you’ve heard is even worse.”

“Why are you pushing back so hard, anyway?” I asked. “This doesn’t even seem like that big of an ask. Last time I gave you a mission, I made Mike shock himself at the boulders for us. That seems way worse than filling out a bunch of paperwork and applying for a *better* job with *better* housing that pays better. I don’t understand why the line in the sand is getting drawn right here.”

Mike and Edgar exchanged glances. They had clearly spoken to each other about how this was going to go before I got there. This was going to happen no matter what I’d asked them to do.

“We want our lives back,” Mike said.

“Tier 2 is dangerous, Mike,” Edgar said to me. “You’ve been in there before. You have some idea of the kinds of things that go on in there. Tier 1 is child’s play. It’s a diversion. It’s security theatre. Nothing ever happens out here. Tier 2 is where all of the messy stuff happens and you’re asking me and Mikey to go stand in the middle of it for you. We are settled down here and we like it. We’re *safe*. And you are asking us to give that up, and for what? So that you guys get some information that you can use at Base, and we get jack shit? You get what you want, and we live in increased danger for no benefit. And then we wait for you to show up again and make things worse.”

“Edgar... the whole reason that you exist at all—”

“I don’t give a *fuck* why I exist,” he growled at me. I was blindsided by the bile and swearing. There was a fury inside of OVEDgar that I don’t know that I’d ever seen in my own Edgar. It disarmed me. This was Edgar, after all. Edgar was saying these things to me. And it hurt as much as if my Edgar was saying them to me. I felt guilty. I couldn’t look him in the eye.

“Isn’t there a deal with the Hunters, anyway?” O.V.E.R. Mike asked. “Like wouldn’t we be more likely to have to interact with them if we worked inside of Tier 2?”

“We would,” Edgar replied. “So, you would be undermining your own missions if you gave us that order. And it would be a shame if they were to find out about the *other* operations that you have going on at Base. The one involving *them*, for instance. So, no, Mike. We are not going to work in Tier 2 for you. Turn around and go home. The answer is no.”

“You don’t want me to leave,” I said. “If I report back that you are refusing an order then we will consolidate you. And then you’ll be part of the Edgar that’s working at Base. The dream of living a peaceful life inside of O.V.E.R. would be dead. Working in Tier 2 isn’t nearly as far from away from what you want as being back at Base is.”

“If you don’t leave, I will kill you where you stand and send Mikey in your place,” Edgar said sternly. He was looking me directly in the eye. His hand was resting on his holster. This didn’t feel like a bluff. This didn’t feel like an empty threat.

I was dumbfounded. Edgar had never spoken to me that way. Not even anything approximating it. My hands were trembling. I looked at Edgar. He was seething. He looked as though he might catch fire any second. His hand stayed at his holster, like he was actually willing and prepared to draw his weapon on me at any moment if I didn’t leave. His eyes were so hateful. It hurt to look at him. I averted my gaze again.

I swallowed hard. “I’m uh... I’ll... I’m gonna go...” I said. “I don’t understand—”
“Go,” Edgar said. I left the cabin, tail tucked between my legs, and returned to Base.

[SCENE TRANSITION.]

“Unbelievable.” My Edgar angrily flipped through a binder containing all of the notes about the O.V.E.R. iteration crew. “So, they’ve gone completely rouge, right? There’s no other explanation. Complete subordination. Unbelievable. I can’t believe that *I’d* act that way. [Sigh] I suppose that’s what we get for not doing routine checkups on them. They grew apart from us and aren’t interested in a reunion.”

“We messed up when we gave them everything that they could have ever wanted,” I replied. “I’d be lying if I said that I didn’t get it. Imagine it, Edgar. None of this. No Base, no Hunter, no Mustardseed, no Ty. Just you and me, cuddling up next to the fireplace every night. Not a care in the world. Existing, paying no mind to the passage of time. Not needing to be anywhere or to be anyone, just you and me. That’s what they have. I wanted it for us, too, remember? And then we waltz in from Base and disturb the peace. I get it. And I guess that’s why I couldn’t do anything but turn tail and run. I’m sorry, Panther. I failed the mission.”

“The mission isn’t over yet, Bear,” he said. “And I get it, too. But they can’t just do that. Base is in danger and the O.V.E.R. team could help and the whole reason that the O.V.E.R. team exists is to help with this exact sort of thing. It’s not fair to us for them to mutiny like that. Plus, no one makes my Mikey Bear cry and gets away with it.”

“I didn’t cry,” I replied.

“Mikey, your face was puffy, and your eyes were red when you got here. I made you cry,” Edgar said. He stood up to join me on the other side of the desk.

“It wasn’t you it was OVEdgar,” I cried.

“I should have gone with you. At the very least, I should have been in your ear for support. I’m sorry, Bear. I wasn’t even thinking of this as a mission. I didn’t think that they would have any issues with complying. I should have considered it and taken steps to mitigate it. I’ll do better next time”. He was sitting beside me now, arm draped over my shoulder.

“That’s a very Edgar response to this situation,” I teased him.

“That’s why you love me,” he replied. “Now then, let’s get this O.V.E.R. team situation under control, okay?”

“What do you have in mind?” I asked.

“Just follow my lead,” he replied. He stood up, walked over to the locked safe in his office and put in a code. The safe unlocked and he pulled out one of the Calculators. He entered some coordinates and times into the Calculator. Then, he returned to his desk and opened a drawer. He shot me a sly grin as he pulled a cowboy hat out of the drawer. The same cowboy hat that Michael had left behind for me at Rugby.

“Do you have to wear th—” Edgar pushed a button on the Calculator. We were gone before I could register my complaint.

It was night when we arrived at O.V.E.R. We had traveled through time, which surprised me because I knew that Edgar liked to keep things as contemporary as possible to avoid complications. Edgar had a look of determination on his face. I had never seen him out in the field like this.

Edgar pulled his keychain and located the key for his O.V.E.R. cabin. It hadn't occurred to me before, but of course he had a key to the cabin. It was *his* cabin. He quietly opened the door and led me inside.

The cabin was silent. I caught a glimpse of a clock. 2:30am. The dead of night.

"His gun is on the coffee table. Grab it," Edgar whispered to me. I did as he said. It turns out that even Edgar is prone to leaving dangerous things lying around.

"Are you ready?" he asked me, tilting his head toward the bedroom door.

"Edgar, do we really have to d—"

Edgar kicked the door open, both his kick and the door hitting the opposite side of the wall making loud noises. It was dark but I could see both O.V.E.R. Mike and OVEDgar bolt upright upon hearing the sound.

Edgar flipped on the overhead light. The two of them squinted at us, disoriented. Edgar had his weapon drawn on them. I held OVEDgar's gun in my hand. I didn't point it at them. It felt like overkill.

"Don't move," Edgar said, sternly. "Don't reach for the gun safe. Don't do anything. Hands where I can see them." O.V.E.R. Mike and OVEDgar put their hands up.

"Gun safe? I have the gun," I said.

"That's O.V.E.R. Mikey's gun," Edgar said. "His is in the safe."

"You went home and tattled on us?" O.V.E.R. Mike asked.

"I went back to Base and reported on the mission status," I corrected him.

"And you thought the best option was to show up and point a gun at us while we're in our pajamas?" OVEDgar asked.

"You caught Mike off-guard this afternoon," Edgar said. "He thought that since you were part of our *team* that you would be amenable to our mission goals. I don't blame him. But for some reason we are doing things the hard way. Do I have that right?"

"We aren't doing any things any way," OVEDgar shot back. "We made that clear when we spoke to Mike."

"And I am here to make it clear that that isn't really an option," Edgar said. "You work for us because you are iterations of us. You work for Base and if something needs done inside of O.V.E.R. then you do it. This is non-negotiable. We are as generous with you as we possibly can be. We leave you alone as much as possible. Do not test our trust and our generosity and our patience by making a fuss when what we're asking for is so small."

"And if we don't comply, then what? You're gonna shoot us?" O.V.E.R. Mike asked.

"I do have a gun pointed at you," Edgar replied.

"Bullshit," O.V.E.R. Mike said. "Sorry, Edgar. I know you. I'm in bed next to one of you right now. There's no way on Earth that you are going to shoot us."

“Try me,” Edgar said.

Just then, we heard movement inside of the cabin. I turned around and drew my gun... O.V.E.R. Mike’s gun... so my gun? I drew the weapon and pointed it into the darkness. After a few seconds, a figure emerged. It was... Edgar. Another Edgar. Another iteration of Edgar, wearing the same cowboy hat.

“Edgar,” Edgar called out to my Edgar. “Don’t shoot. I’m here on correction duty. The situation really gets away from us if you kill them. I repeat, do not kill OVEdgar and O.V.E.R. Mike tonight. Not with a gun or with anything else.”

I looked at O.V.E.R. Mike and OVEdgar. They were watching this unfold in front of them, a silent shock on their faces.

“Ugh, really?” Edgar said. He lowered the gun.

“Yes, really. I didn’t travel here for shits and giggles. So, you aren’t going to shoot the O.V.E.R. team?” The new Edgar asked.

“No,” Edgar said.

“You are entirely devoid of intention to shoot them no matter how the rest of the evening goes?” he asked.

“I am entirely devoid of intention,” Edgar said.

“Then the correction is complete. Thank you for making it was an easy one. Y’all take care now.” The new Edgar tipped his hat and left the cabin.

“Did he just say, ‘Y’all take care now’?” I asked. I was not ready to confront the reality of cowboy Edgar.

Nobody answered me. The room fell totally silent for a beat. I could hear the crickets outside.

“You were really going to shoot us,” OVEdgar said.

“You really *did* shoot us,” O.V.E.R. Mike said. “If someone came to correct you, then that means that you really did it in the reality that he came from.”

“That’s right,” Edgar replied. “And I’d do it again, too. And he didn’t tell me not to kill the two of you, just not to do it tonight. I didn’t want it to come to this, but it has. So, you will either cooperate or we will do this again sometime. Do you understand?”

O.V.E.R. Mike pulled OVEdgar closer to him. I could see that he was trembling slightly.

“Yes,” OVEdgar said.

“Tell me that you understand in a self-contained sentence and then tell me what you are going to do,” Edgar said.

“I understand that I am to follow orders under penalty of death,” OVEdgar said.

“O.V.E.R. Mike and I are going to begin filling out the paperwork to apply for Tier 2 positions first thing in the morning.”

“Glad to hear it,” Edgar said. “Mikey will help you with that. Does 8 a.m. work for you?”

“Works fine,” OVEdgar said. He was complying, but I could hear him gritting his teeth.

“8 a.m.?” O.V.E.R. Mike and I groaned simultaneously.

“Yes, 8 a.m.,” Edgar repeated. “It’s settled. Mike let’s get out of here. We’ve done what we needed to do.” And, just like that, Edgar turned to leave the bedroom and gestured for me to do the same. I followed. Edgar put the coordinates into the Calculator, and we were back at Base in the previous afternoon, as though nothing had ever happened.

[SCENE TRANSITION.]

Edgar was unable to contain his laughter when we returned.

“I can’t believe that worked! I was sure that OVEdgar was going to catch on,” he said.

“Catch onto what exactly?” I asked.

“That wasn’t a correction,” Edgar said. “You didn’t think that it was odd that he didn’t see or hear him pop in? It’s because he didn’t travel with a Calculator. Mikey, that was *me* from later tonight. I drove there and acted like it was a correction, like I actually shot them. Or I’m going to drive there? However you wanna say it. I wasn’t going to shoot them! One of them is me and one of them is you! There’s no way I could shoot them. How could I look that cute little Mikey Bear in the face and pull the trigger?”

“Many people have had far fewer reservations about that,” I said.

“I know,” Edgar said. “But I love you, Mikey. That’s the difference.”

“I love you, too, Edgar,” I said.

“I’m done with work for today,” Edgar said. “Do you wanna snuggle up on the couch and watch a movie?”

“More than anything in the world,” I said.

And so, we did. We snuggled up on the couch and watched The Big Lewbowski and lived happily ever after. Well, we didn’t, but it was an enjoyable evening.

This has been WOE.BEGONE. Next time: it looks like it’s all coming together. Thanks for playing.

[END THEME PLAYS.]