

WOE.BEGONE Episode 90: Are You Ready To Go?

UNKNOWN MIKEY

Hey, uhh... so I know that I can't outsmart you. Or say anything that you haven't heard before. Or really anything that you're not thinking right now, but I've got to try, right? So, uhh... I was minding my own business. I can't speak for the rest of them, hell do whatever you want with them, I don't care. But we were actually minding our own business. We were traveling across Illinois, trying to visit all of the locations from the Sufjan Stevens album, *Come On Feel The Illinois*. We actually found a list of all of the places on Google Maps from someone else who had already done it, so it wasn't that hard, actually. A lot of road tripping. We were trying to get away and what better than a roadtrip? And the soundtrack chooses itself, obviously. On trips to further away destinations we put on Age of Adz or Seven Swans or Carrie & Lowell, depending on the mood. Illinois can be...
mundane and beautiful and beautiful in its mundanity.

Contenting. The whole experience was contenting. I wanted to live in those moments forever. But now I'm in this one. [Pause.]
You're going to throw me in there with the rest of them still, aren't you?

MIKE

Yep. Sorry.

UNKNOWN MIKEY

I tried.

MIKE

You did.

We hear a metal door creek open.

MIKE

In you go.

We hear a metal door shut.

MIKEY

That's a shame. That one seemed really nice.

MIKE

Well, he can hang out with the Mike that did a roadtrip based on *Michigan* while we get ready.

MIKEY

That's a much sadder Mike.

MIKE

Agreed. He seemed pretty resigned. After you.

We hear another door open and shut. We hear an inordinate amount of reverby background chatter.

MICHAEL

Was that the last of 'em?

MIKE

The last from the list.

MIKEY

Who's doing the honors? Michael?

MICHAEL

Well, Mike's going home after this. I say he gives it one last hurrah. Mike?

MIKE

[sighs.] Someone's gotta do it. Hand it over.

MICHAEL

Give 'em hell, Mike.

MIKEY

Be nice.

MIKE [MEGAPHONE]

Ahem. Attention! Hey.. uh hey! Mikes!

The MIKES go quiet.

MIKE [MEGAPHONE]

Quiet! You know what's going on. You know why you're here. And you know what happens next. And you know not to try anything too clever. If things deviate from the plan too much, Michael will gladly burn this warehouse to the ground with all of you inside. You had your fun. At our expense, I might add. The fun is over.

Sorry. You all see the station in the front of the room: the chair bolted to the ground, the metal support poles, and our good friend O.V.E.R. Mike. I need you all to form a single file line leading up to the station. One by one, you will sit in the chair, place your feet on the red Xs and hold onto the blue dots on the metal supports. Red Xs, Blue dots. Repeat that back to me.

ALL

Red Xs, Blue Dots.

MIKE

Very good. We will carry out this process 31 times, until all of you are consolidated into O.V.E.R. Mike here. When you become consolidated, please remember that O.V.E.R. Mike is restrained, so you will also be restrained after you are consolidated. Do not panic. Thrashing about might cause you to injure yourself. This whole process has been engineered to minimize injury. You will be disoriented briefly, but it is important to relax.

MIKE

We will conduct a brief health check between consolidations, but the process will move quickly. There are 31 of you and we would like to finish within the next 6 hours, which means that you will have about 5 minutes of recovery each. The better you cooperate, the quicker this will go.

MICHAEL [NOT MEGAPHONE]

And if you ain't cooperatin', I got Sly's shotgun right here. Don't forget we're doin' you gentlemen a favor. We coulda turned y'all into pink mist and that would be the end of things.

MIKE

He's right. Now, without further ado: you have your instructions. Please form a single file line. And don't do that

thing where nobody volunteers to go first. You're already here.
If you could escape, you would have done so already. Don't put
off the inevitable. Are we clear?

ALL

Yes.

MIKE

Perfect. Let's get started. Everyone in a single file line.

We hear the mass shuffling of feet.

MIKE [OFF MEGAPHONE]

Looks like we're ready. Everything still looking good in the
Edgar warehouse, Mikey?

MIKEY

Yep, looks good.

MIKE

And with Base?

MIKEY

Uh huh. They've got eyes in the sky. Looks like they're
cooperating this time, though.

MICHAEL

Let's get the job done, boys. Time to get this over with.

MIKE

Let's do it.

INTRO THEME PLAYS.

It felt like a privilege just to see Innocent Hunter again.
He was the same Hunter Jeremiah Hartley that I knew, the one
that I had left behind as I drifted further and further into my
own pursuits. He had the same spark of goodwill in his eye that
I remembered. The same one that led me around O.V.E.R. when I
had just started and didn't know anything about anything. The
same one that showed up to help when I got attacked by the bear.

I almost teared up seeing him, not accompanied by the other Hunters for once, not in an antagonistic position. It felt like the good ol' days, inasmuch as such a thing ever existed. He joined us at the kitchen table, his affability undercutting the seriousness of why he had interrupted my meeting with Chance. I put on even more coffee, resigned to never sleeping again.

"You're lucky this bozo wanted to send me those little notes," Hunter said. "That's what tipped me off that you two were up to something together." Hunter looked him dead in the eyes. "I knew that you had a sore spot about Cole. Figures that when you and Mikey here finally teamed up, the first thing you'd do is try and rescue him. I did some recon on a hunch and- oh boy. One thing you fellas gotta understand is that you can't just pop in somewhere. It's like diving into a pool. No matter how slick you think you are, you're going to make a little splash somewhere."

"You're saying that O.V.E.R. has something that tips them off when someone is traveling in their vicinity," I said. "I should have known. When we raided the Flinchite compound, our arrival set off an alarm."

"And O.V.E.R. isn't as willing to entertain you as they are," Hunter said. "Now, I'm not saying don't go after Cole. I'm saying that maybe you need a little more help than you thought you did to get it done."

"Are you volunteering... yourself?" Chance asked. "What do the other Hunters think about this?"

"The other Hunters aren't exactly the Mike Walters Fan club," he said. "What they don't know won't hurt them." He winked at me. "That being said, it is important that they don't know. Because what they do know will hurt you."

"I don't want to get you in trouble," I said.

"Then don't. Simple as that," Hunter said. "All you've got to do is follow my instructions exactly and we'll be just fine. And your buddy here can help out, too. What are we calling him?"

"O.V.E.R. Mike is fine," O.V.E.R. Mike said. It wasn't fine, because at this point Mike and Michael had an O.V.E.R. Mike of their own, but that wasn't a subject to be hashed out in front of Chance and Hunter.

"What are you going to do that we wouldn't be able to do?" Chance asked.

"Well, both of you- all 3 of you, I guess- are low level tier 1 peons. I've got a fancy Tier 2 badge that I can use to get into all of those secret areas that you keep sneaking into. The difference is, nobody would bat an eye if I used them. Nobody's going to investigate suspicious use logs or anything like that. So, I can hop in there, do some "security work" and hop right back out. No sweat."

"But you said that O.V.E.R. can detect if someone travels, right? Won't they be able to track whatever you're doing, too?"

"The difference is that I will be taking a legitimate security measure," Hunter said. "When they see the activity, they'll say "Ope! That's what Hunter Hartley said he was going to do. Guess he did it.""

"But you can't just grab Cole that way, can you?" Chance asked. "O.V.E.R. is the reason that he is gone to begin with. Surely they would have something to say if you intercepted them."

"Which is why that's not what I'm doing," Hunter said. "You two had it most of the way figured out, actually. It's just that you didn't have the authority to do what you were doing, so some folks started looking into it and they didn't like what they found. You can get away with a lot here at O.V.E.R. All three of us know that. But you can't get away with everything and the thing that O.V.E.R. hates most is when folks like you two get to meddling with what O.V.E.R. themselves are trying to do. I have insider expertise. I'll just shift the plan around a little and we shouldn't have any problem staying out of their way."

"And I'm the meat shield, I take it?" O.V.E.R. Mike asked.

"You are an important moving part," Hunter said. "Having four of us makes things a lot easier than just three. The more things going on at once, the better." Hunter's indirect answer was duly noted.

"Then we can get to making the working plan now, can't we?" I asked.

"Oh yeah. Do you have anything drawn up?" Hunter asked.

"I had just busted out the pen and paper when you got here," I replied. I pushed the post-it notes and pen over to him.

"Post-its? Mikey, O.V.E.R. hands out stationary like it's candy on Halloween. All you have is post-its?" Hunter asked.

"I don't know what I did with the O.V.E.R. stationary," I replied. I noticed that Hunter had begun to write while speaking, not drawing attention to the fact that he was writing at all.

"What's-" Chance trailed off.

"What are we going to do?" I butted in, attempting to fill the empty air. "It sounds like you have to do all of the hard work, Hunter."

I looked down at the post-it note in front of him. Hunter had written only two words: "Punished Listening." He looked at us and then down at the note.

"You're going to have to be very careful," Hunter said. "But it's not my intention to take this project away from you. You're still in charge. I'm just here to provide some guidance. To keep it from going how it was going to go."

I took a post-it and wrote a note: "Punished stopped us?" Hunter looked at the note and nodded.

"Let's get started, then," Chance said. "It's already late. The midnight oil is burning."

We planned until the sun came up and the three of us had to depart for work, writing up decoy plans with one hand and real ones with the other.

SCENE TRANSITION.

I woke up with the unique grogginess that comes with knowing that you are waking up to hard work that you don't want to do. I had made it home from my patrol route and crashed immediately into my bed, barely having the awareness to set an alarm for that evening. My phone frustratingly announced that it was 7pm. Time to make good on my promise. Time to rescue Cole.

I bounced my leg while I sat at the kitchen table, waiting for Chance to show up. O.V.E.R. Mike sat across from me, sipping his coffee, occasionally asking me to stop bouncing my leg. I slouched in my chair, dreading what might go wrong that evening.

Knowing that the plan had gone wrong before and that Punished Hunter had caught wind of it and was attempting to sabotage us left me in low spirits. Innocent Hunter's arrival, on the other hand, seemed to even things out a bit. Hunter and I made for a strong team. It had been ages since I had him to lean

on and I had some faith that he would get us through this, just like he used to. The uncertainty of it all grated on my nerves. Still, we had a plan. Hunter had approved this plan. And Hunter knew better than we did.

Chance arrived about 20 minutes after I woke up and the three of us left my cabin for the mission at 7:30 on the dot, to coordinate with Hunter. We couldn't be in direct contact with him, so it was important that everything be precisely timed. After confirming synchronization with Chance, he set off on foot for his part of the mission, which took place in the current time. O.V.E.R. Mike and I used the Calculator.

We arrived in the past, inside of O.V.E.R., fifteen minutes before the chain of events that would lead to Cole's disappearance. We were outside of what would eventually be my cabin, since it was unoccupied and would serve as a discreet and convenient place for us to arrive. We immediately split up, with O.V.E.R. Mike and I taking alternate routes toward the building Cole was scheduled to enter, trying to avoid anyone learning that there were multiple Mikes at this point in time. I took the lefthand path and O.V.E.R. Mike took the right. I had to take the long way around and move much faster, but eventually the path looped around, so both directions led to the building in question.

I bolted around the path to get into place, adrenaline not allowing me to slow down. It was important both that I take the long route and that I get there first, due to the way that everyone would be positioned during the event. I successfully beat O.V.E.R. Mike and Cole to the building and found a hiding spot in the shadows along the far wall and waited.

Seconds passed, perhaps a minute. I could see Cole approaching from afar. I pulled out the Calculator and readied it. Closer. Closer. Closer.

A yell broke the relative silence in the Valley as Cole approached the door to the building. "Cole! Don't do it! Don't go in there!" O.V.E.R. Mike cried out.

"Who the hell are you?" Cole called back. He sounded afraid. His back was to me.

I waited for him to step on the threshold between the building and the path. His right foot halfway on tile, halfway on packed dirt. An exact coordinate.

"You have to stop!" O.V.E.R. Mike cried. Cole took a fumbling half-step away from the strange man. His foot was halfway into the doorway. I pushed the button on the Calculator. I felt as though I saw a second Cole not far away for a split second before he vanished, but that was impossible. It would have been much too fast for the eye to see. Cole was cycling through randomized secure locations in an instant and would be transported to a safehouse in our present before it could register to anyone.

And it was in the same instant that I had iterated Cole that O.V.E.R. Mike had vanished. The security team doing its job, as far as anybody could tell. A legitimate breach taken care of by the appropriate authorities. As far as O.V.E.R. was concerned, Hunter Hartley had neutralized a threat.

Also, in that very instant or in the very next, Hunter, having successfully accomplished his security mission, had left the security building and returned to the other Hunters. Where he had never truly left, having iterated himself for the sake of an alibi, to demonstrate to the other Hunters that he was not participating at all. Chance, manning a separate instance of the security program, waited until an exact second where the iterated Hunter was due to be in a specific location inside of the building with the other Hunters and successfully consolidated the two Hunters back into each other, leaving no trace that he had ever been anywhere else. Mission complete.

I was half-expecting the meetup at the safehouse later that night to be a complete disaster. People missing or halfway consolidated or captured by antagonistic forces. But not this time. Thanks to Hunter, we had done it. Hunter, Chance, O.V.E.R. Mike, myself, and Cole. All in an abandoned warehouse. All safe. No one the wiser, at least so far. I had made good on my word. Cole was alive. Confused about where he was and why, but alive.

"You must be Cole," I said.

His first words to me: "No, really. Who are you?"

SCENE TRANSITION.

We hear warehouse ambience: booming reverb in an empty space.

MIKE

[Sigh.] One more to go. How are you holding up, O.V.E.R. Mike?

Silence.

MIKE

Hey! Hey! Blink 3 times if you're still hanging in there. I know that it's a lot. It's been a long day. Hey!

We hear light slapping of the face. O.V.E.R. MIKE groans.

MICHAEL

He's just tired. Right, O.V.E.R. Mike?

MIKEY

Are we sure about that?

MIKE

Yeah. Blood pressure and pulse look normal. He's just tired. I'm tired, too, and I haven't consolidated 30 times today. He's going to be fine. Might take a couple days for him to get up and about after this. But Cole and I ironed the whole thing out. This isn't like when we had to consolidate me inside of the compound.

MICHAEL

Welp, let's get a move on, then. Get in the hot seat, final Mike.

MIKE

Last in, last out, huh?

UNKNOWN MIKEY

I guess so. Be honest. Are we going to be okay? Or is this just your way of disposing of us?

MICHAEL

I ain't makin' promises. There's a lot of time packed into O.V.E.R. Mike now. But I been through more time than that and I turned out fine.

MIKE

Debatable.

MICHAEL

Well, it's this or nothin'. I still got the shotgun if you'd prefer that way out.

UNKNOWN MIKEY

No, no. I'll comply. I'm ready. Do it quick.

MIKE

Great. See you on the other side, Mike. Consolidating in 3... 2...
1...

We hear the time travel sound.

MIKE

See? Not bad, right?

MIKEY

That's all 31 of them.

MICHAEL

Sure is.

MIKE

Mike, you still good in there? Nod yes for me? [Pause.] Great. That's a wrap, guys. Project O.V.E.R. Mike was a success. We can move on to the next phase. All we have to do now is get him cleaned up and get him home. Mikey, have you heard from the Edgar warehouse?

MIKEY

Looks like they got done before us. All's good there as well.

MIKE

Fantastic. I trust that Base has his accommodations all set up?

MIKEY

Yep.

MIKE

And this Mike gets my room. Michael, you keep a close eye on him, okay?

MICHAEL

Eyes are peeled, partner. [Sniffles.]

MIKE

C'mon, Michael. We've been preparing for weeks. You knew this day was going to come. We were going to get everything accomplished eventually.

MICHAEL

I know. But you sayin' he could have your room made it real. I ain't ever gonna be ready, partner.

MIKE

I know. Come here, big fella.

We hear a hug, MIKE pats MICHAEL's back.

MIKE

We did it, Michael. And Satellite Base is going to be stronger than ever. And I get to go be with Edgar. It's the closest thing we'll get to a happily ever after.

MICHAEL

Cherish it, Mike. It ain't forever.

MIKE

Nothing is. Mikey, I need you to take care of this new Mike and the cowboy for me, alright?

MIKEY

Can do.

We hear them embrace as well.

MIKEY

I'm happy for you, Mike. I'm happy for us.

MIKE

I'm happy, too.

MICHAEL

..We'll still talk, right? When you get a chance?

MIKE

Every chance I get.

MICHAEL

And you'll come visit and be on Movies With Michael?

MIKE

I didn't say that.

MICHAEL

You didn't have to. I can see it in your eyes. They're sayin'
"Paul Blart Mall Cop 2."

MIKE

Don't ruin the moment.

MICHAEL

It's time, ain't it?

MIKE

It's time. I'm heading out. Take care of yourself, Michael.
Don't be a stranger. Mikey, it's been real. Not always fun, but
it's been real.

MICHAEL

You take care of yourself, too, Mike. I'll see ya when I see ya.
Don't be a stranger now, ya hear?

MIKE

Wouldn't dream of it. Oh-

Another sudden hug.

MICHAEL

[Sobbing.] Don't be a stranger. I mean it, pilgrim.

MIKE

You have my word, Michael.

MIKEY

Are you ready to go?

MIKE

[Deep breath.] I'm ready. You wanna do the honors, Michael?

MICHAEL

Can't. Mikey.

MIKEY

Sure thing. Bye, Mike. Be safe out there.

MIKE

You, too. Bye, Mikey. Bye... Michael.

MICHAEL

Bye... Mike. Goodbye.

MIKEY

[Deep breath.] Alright. Sending Mike home. Initiating transport
in 3... 2... 1...

We hear the time travel sound. Everything is quiet.

MIKEY

You gonna be okay, big guy?

MICHAEL

Don't feel like it now, but yeah. Hurts, but he deserves it.
I've healed before, I'll heal again. You wanna take us home,
Mikey?

MIKEY

Yep. We'll get back to Satellite Base and get Mike here settled
in.

MICHAEL

Not Mike.

MIKEY

Then what, Michael? We've sorta run out of nicknames at this point.

MICHAEL
M-Dubya.

MIKEY

Okay. We'll get MW settled in and get started on the new chapter of the Satellite Base.

MICHAEL

Yup. I ain't ready but I ain't ever gonna be. Bring us home, Mikey.

MIKEY

Initiating transport in 3... 2... 1...

We hear the time travel sound.

END THEME PLAYS.