

EPIISODE NINETY FOUR - WHY DID EVERYONE PHYSICALLY RECOIL?

Original transcript edited by Theo

[BEGIN Episode 94.]

INTRO: Hey, WOE.BEGONE! Michael here. I've just got a few things to plug before we get started. I hope you enjoyed the beat tape and the episode of Movies with Michael that I dropped in the feed this week. And if you want more episodes of Movies with Michael, you should consider supporting the Patreon at patreon.com/woe_begone, where, in addition to early access to episodes, instrumentals, soundtracks, Q&As, director's commentaries, and more, \$10 and up patrons get Movies with Michael, Episode Three of which is coming soon. Now is also a good time to sign up for the postcard tier at \$15 and up in order to receive January's postcards. People are getting their December postcards right now, and it's been a lot of fun watching it unfold in the Discord. Special thanks to my 10 newest patrons: [REDACTED] for supporting the show. Enjoy.

[Warning: This episode contains a description of death. Listener discretion is advised.]

MIKEY *[narrating]:* You know, I thought that I would be spending more time in O.V.E.R. after the Mustardseed affair? At first, I was sorta dreading it. There's a reason that we created O.V.E.R. Mike and Mustardseed in the first place, and that was that work at O.V.E.R. was work, and work sucks, I know. Edgar and I didn't want to have to do our O.V.E.R. duties and keep up appearances while we were trying to devote all of our time to important work that we were doing at Base. But... then I got all settled in, and things clicked into place, and it wasn't that bad actually. It reminded me of the good ol' days, walking around the valley, doing my patrol route. It... definitely isn't healthy to romanticize my early days at O.V.E.R. as "the good ol' days." I've talked about this before; my brain is constantly trying to trick me into thinking that if something happened a long time ago, then that thing was good. Remember back in the day, everyone was happy and safe, and I was cutting my own limbs off for the sake of entertaining a gamerunner? Good times. That's why they call 'em the "good ol' days." You know, and not the "good old days"? They had to chop the "d" off of "old" in order to win a mysterious and violent online game, so... now it's just the good ol' days.

The key difference between now and the good ol' days being, of course, that I was housing a stowaway in my cabin. I didn't have the nerve to kill O.V.E.R. Mike, or to consolidate him, so he became my little secret. A secret that I managed to keep, mind you, even though Chance, Hunter, and Cole were now keeping it with me. I think that they didn't care enough about the situation to rat me out to Base? O.V.E.R. Mike was my little pet project, and they didn't want anything to do with it. Which was fine with me. O.V.E.R. Mike had earned some of my trust for helping us rescue Cole, and I was considering letting him do some of the O.V.E.R. work if he continued proving himself. Who knows, maybe I could muster up some courage from somewhere? And go to Base, and tell them that O.V.E.R. Mike was alive, and that we should try having O.V.E.R. iterations again... Maybe. As I said, O.V.E.R. is nice, but it would also be nice

to be able to stay at Base whenever I needed to, and not have to travel there every time we needed to have a meeting.

And traveling to Base for the sake of a meeting is where our story begins. Marissa had been kidnapped, Michael went to the Flinchite Compound to ask them for help because they were the only ones that we knew that knew how to track a disappearance through time. And Michael had written up a report of what he had learned, and left it at Base. I did find it odd that he seemingly didn't want to be there in person, but Michael's an odd duck. If you remember, he's... a cowboy of me. So odd behavior is expected. If he started being exceedingly normal, that would be alarming. Like if he showed up to Base one day with a shaved face, and he's like in a suit and tie... Well, no, that's actually— That's still sort of weird? We don't wear formal clothes at Base; that's more of a Ty Betteridge thing. But if he did, I don't know, some normal thing, I would be alarmed. Why can't I name a single normal thing?

Here's somethin' normal for you. The cold open's done. We're meeting at Base to figure out what to do about Marissa.

And this is WOE.BEGONE.

[Opening theme plays.]

MIKEY *[narrating]*: It was a more intimate meeting at Base. Edgar, Anne, Cole, and I were seated in the living room, debriefing from the EdMan and MDawg debacle, and trying to decide where to proceed from there. EdMan and MDawg themselves would have to be placed on the backburner for the time being, seeing as how we had an ongoing kidnapping. EdMan and MDawg themselves were plenty suspicious, but there was no time to deal with them now. I hoped that our visit didn't scare them off, but Matt was still in Vancouver and keeping an eye on them. A more subtle eye, I hoped, since he had admitted to hiding in their bushes during our meeting.

I invited Cole to this meeting in hopes that his expertise would be able to help us complete the mission. I told him that there was no expectation, and he was free to say no, but he was quite enthusiastic. He showed up prepared. He even had notes that he had taken to present to us. I was impressed, but I think that he was just bored in hiding? There hadn't been very much for him to do. He helped us organize the mass consolidation, but other than that, he had been laying low, and a lot of laying low means not doing much. And so he leapt at the chance to get out of the abandoned warehouse and see Base.

"Michael's not going to be here?" Anne asked.

"No," Edgar replied. "He sent a report of everything that he learned from his visit to the Flinchite Compound, so we should be fine; he just didn't wanna be here."

"Asshole's at August's house, I'm sure," I said.

"Now, I don't want to be too judgemental," Edgar replied. "Michael was willing to go into the Compound for us. He got us some of the information that we desperately needed. So I think it's alright if he wanted to go home to his boyfriend." I bristled at how casually Edgar used the word "boyfriend" to refer to August, a level of understanding that I was not yet comfortable with.

"So what's the gist of that report?" Anne asked.

"Long story short: Ryan's back," Edgar said, "And Ty confirmed for us that Ryan has Marissa."

"Then they can trace Marissa like they traced Mustardseed, right?" I asked. "We know where the tank was when it was transported."

"Unfortunately, the Flinchite's tracing capabilities have been compromised, and Ryan's have been amplified. It's not going to be as easy as asking them for some coordinates this time," Edgar said.

"How fucking convenient," Anne said, brushing back her hair behind her ears. "This is all according to the Flinchites, right? Ryan being back is a, what, a tall tale to get us off the trail of what they're actually up to? I don't buy it."

"It could be," Edgar said. "But we're really flying in the dark here. We don't have many other options except to cooperate with them. And they're offering their resources, where applicable. They're trying to help us find Ryan, so I don't understand what their motivations are if they're playing both sides of the game."

Cole sat quietly, listening, occasionally jotting things down. "Edgar and Anne are going to like him," I thought.

"Let's assume that we're not being deceived, and it is truly Ryan," I said. "Why would Ryan kidnap Marissa?"

"Maybe he just wanted a tank," Anne said.

"Surely it would be less hassle in the long term to find a tank that doesn't have Marissa in it," I said.

"Then maybe he wanted to announce to us that he's back?" Edgar said.

"That, or maybe he wanted us to come looking for him, in which case we're doing exactly what he wants us to do," I said. "Though we need to look for him whether that's what he wants or not. We can't just ignore this; he stole an *entire Marissa*."

"Marissa has weapons," Edgar said. "Maybe he's trying to arm a team? Make something more legitimate than WOE.BEGONE? Something like the Flinchites Compound?"

"No, he can get weapons. He can duplicate things just like we do," I said. "But Marissa has one thing that you can't just buy or duplicate or steal. Marissa has a patrol route that goes directly in front of Tier Two."

"That's really smart, Mikey," Edgar said. "We should explore what Ryan might want to do inside of O.V.E.R. using Marissa's access."

"I don't think that we should wait until Ryan is inside of O.V.E.R. and using this access to begin doing something," Anne said. "By then, it will be too late to mitigate something. We need to track them down. How do we track Marissa down when she could be anywhere in space and time, and the Flinchite Compound is no help?"

"We could try to do a correction on the initial event at Edman and Mdawg's house," I suggested.

"That won't work," Edgar said. "I got a message today from some iteration where we tried that. Quote: 'Don't do a correction on Marissa; huge waste of time,' and then a Base Message Confirmation Code; it's legit. Something to that effect. So... I'm afraid that we actually do need to track her down."

"Okay, no correction. Now what?" Anne asked.

"Uh... Cole's here. Cole's got notes. You wanna take it away?" I asked.

"Uh... sure. Uh, thanks for having me, everyone. I'm Cole. I think we've all met, but maybe just once? I'm Chance's friend? Oh, and I understand how some of the back end of this O.V.E.R. Security stuff works."

"So that's the plan? O.V.E.R. Security?" Anne asked.

"Potentially," Cole continued. "What Michael described this other compound having, the tracing capability? I think that with some cajoling, I could get a similar output from Security, since we know her location. But if that compound's having problems with it, I'm not sure that I won't just run into the same trouble. I just... don't want to make any promises?"

"Oh, by all means, promise away," I said.

"But there's also the problem of the location of the Security software," Cole said. "As you know, the software is inside of Tier Two, and, even worse for me, Tier Two is inside of O.V.E.R. And, according to you all, the reason I am here is because O.V.E.R. successfully killed me. So I don't believe that it would be a good idea for me to set foot inside of there. And, unfortunately, there's

no way that I could teach you how to do this in a timely manner. There's too much to learn, and too much that I won't know until I get a good look at it."

"We'll steal a computer, then," Edgar said. "It wouldn't even be that difficult. I have codes to Tier Two via 116E. We could slip in, make it to a security building, use the Calculator to move a computer out so no one would see us lugging it around, and then come back. That sort of thing is pretty routine at this point."

"It's not that easy, I'm afraid," Cole said. "We need more than the computer. We need the intranet that the computer is on. The program's only doing part of the work."

"Then we'll get the intranet," I said.

"Well, that's— That's not really— Mike, do you know what an intranet is?" Cole asked.

"If it's a thing that O.V.E.R. has, then we can take the thing," I replied.

Cole shook his head. "We cannot take the thing..."

"Oh! Uh, Panther!" I interjected. "Didn't we steal something... digital from the Boulders? O.V.E.R. Mike was there?"

"Yeah, we sure did, Bear," Edgar said. "Anne and I poured over it a few times, actually, but we couldn't make heads or tails of it."

"So they're Bear and Panther," Cole asked.

"Yes, and they're gross about it," Anne said.

"Can I see this... whatever it is? This thing from the boulders?" Cole asked.

"Yeah, sure thing. I've got it on a backup drive somewhere," Edgar said. "Let's move this conversation into my office, and we'll have a look at it."

Edgar led us all into his office, which felt too impeccably clean to actually be a place where a human being got work done. He pulled a box of hard drives out of a filing cabinet, and picked one with a date range that contained O.V.E.R. Mike's excursion into Tier Two. He plugged the drive into his laptop, brought up the relevant files, and gestured to Cole to sit in the office chair.

"Is this anything?" Edgar asked.

"It's not nothing," Cole said. "The signal-to-noise ratio isn't very good at all? But I understand what some of this is, and this is... intriguing, to say the least. How did you get this?"

"We had O.V.E.R. Mike shock himself at the Boulders with the... um, a thingy? From 116E?" I explained.

"We have a whole procedural writeup about it in our records if you'd like to see that," Edgar said.

"I very much would," Cole said. "This is... something."

"Will it be enough for what we need if we can get you a computer from O.V.E.R.?" I asked.

Cole furrowed his brow. "Again, I don't want to make promises, but the potential is there. Like I said, it's not nothing,"

"And, worst case scenario, now we have an O.V.E.R. computer. We can always keep working on it," I said.

"And this data's finally good for something, so O.V.E.R. Mike didn't sneak into Tier Two and shock himself in vain," Edgar added. "May he rest in peace."

I shot a glance at Cole. He was looking back at me, as well. My eyes pleaded with him: "They don't know about O.V.E.R. Mike. Please do not tell them." It felt like in elementary school, when you would go over to a friend's house, and they would lie about how they got an A on the math test, but you know that they got a D, and all of a sudden you have to lie, and you're not prepared for this, and they're having something weird for dinner like liver and onions, and you just wanna run away? Tell them I got an A on the math test, Cole?

"Rest in peace, O.V.E.R. Mike," I concurred. Cole gave me a very slight but knowing nod.

"If we get this up and running, this will be way more powerful than those handheld units," Cole said. "From what Chance has told me, this operation seems to be structured around time travel? But you guys should know that time travel's the shallow end of the pool here. There is a lot more going on than that, especially deeper into O.V.E.R."

"Yeah, we have some experience with the other stuff from the Flinchite Compound," I said. "And they're working on medical applications of the technology. Things like restoring limbs and treating wounds, even very fatal ones."

Cole's eyes lit up. He looked directly at me. "That's extremely interesting. And this is Ty Betteridge's people?"

"That's right," I said. "The Flinchite Compound."

"That's extremely cool," Cole said. "I pitched the idea of medical use to my superiors, and never heard anything back. Of course, O.V.E.R. might be dabbling in this in some section I don't even know exists."

"So, what do you say, Bear? You wanna go with me and pick up a computer tonight?" Edgar asked.

"You're going out in the field with m-me?" I asked.

"Sure, why not?" Edgar said. "We're both going to be inside of O.V.E.R. anyway. I've got the code; it shouldn't be any trouble. Let's do it!"

"Hell yeah," I said. "Just don't interfere with my intricate and well-practiced spycraft."

"If you exhibit any, then I won't," Edgar said.

"So it's time to pull off the h/[Bleep censor.]t of the century, huh?" Cole added.

It felt as though the air had been sucked out of the room. I could feel my face going pale. My mouth was slightly agape; I'm... getting a little choked up now, actually. Cole looked confused.

"Why did everyone physically recoil?" he asked. "Did I... say something wrong just now?"

"You did say something wrong," I blurted out.

"It's okay, honey. He doesn't know," Edgar said. He walked over to me, and put his hands around me.

"You're damn right, he doesn't know," I said.

"I'm... sorry?" Cole said.

"...That's alright, Cole," I said. "But we don't use the... the h word... here. Too many terrible memories."

"I understand," Cole said. "Well. I don't understand, but I won't use that word again."

"That's all I ask," I said.

The night was cool, calm, and peaceful, much akin to a night that I believe that I am correct to remember fondly: the night that I had to touch the doorknob of the red flag cabin. A night where everything went smoothly, and all was on track. Unless I'm misremembering, and that was also the night that I got attacked by a bear.

Edgar and I made it through the front gate, waving to Troy on the way in. We began walking toward the cabins.

"Do you think he's actually terrible at his job, or he's playing dumb for some reason that we've just yet to discover?" Edgar asked.

"I am truly of two minds about that," I said. "He's a little too slow to catch onto things sometimes? It's suspicious, like it's an act? But I can't, for the life of me, tell what the act is *for*."

"Well, if his act lets us do whatever we want, then he can keep it up," Edgar replied. "It's worked out for us so far. The other day, he asked me about a story that Mustardseed told him? About a conversation that Mustardseed and O.V.E.R. Mike had? And I had to improvise., but Troy didn't seem to pick up on me having no idea what I was talking about. Oh! We're at your stop, babe." We were standing in front of my cabin.

"Yep. I'll grab my stuff, and I'll meet you at your place in about an hour?" I asked.

"Works for me," Edgar said. He kissed me on the cheek. "Love you, Bear."

"Love you, Panther." And with that, he was off down the trail. I fished my keys out of my pocket, and made my way inside.

I could tell that something was amiss from the moment that I opened the door. The air had a foulness to it that I couldn't quite place. Still and heavy. I couldn't hear anything at all. Not especially surprising; I had ordered O.V.E.R. Mike to be deadly quiet, and, as a result, he spent most of his time in his room with headphones on. But it felt inhumanly quiet. Quieter than a person was capable of being. I turned on the light.

In the living room chair was O.V.E.R. Mike, slumped backwards, head pulled back, his eyes gray and distant. He was dead. He was covered in his own blood, which was presumably emanating from a large slit across his throat. The blood had spilled down onto the chair and then the ground, coating the whole area. O.V.E.R. Mike lay there completely limp, gone.

I suppressed an urge to vomit, and quickly made sure that the blinds and curtains were drawn. Friends had been known to peer in my windows before. I walked over and checked O.V.E.R. Mike's pulse. He was obviously dead, but if it were me, I would want someone to check before giving up. There was, in fact, no pulse to be found, but I did notice that he was still around body temperature, and that he had not yet begun rigor mortis. O.V.E.R. Mike hadn't been sitting here all day. This had to have happened recently.

This was a message. It had to be. We were in O.V.E.R. There's time travel technology all over the place, and anyone who would do something like this to me has access to that. They could have transported O.V.E.R. Mike anywhere that they wanted to. They didn't have to make a big scene in my living room with buckets of blood. Someone wanted to tell me that they knew about O.V.E.R. Mike. But who? And why? Was this Ryan? Was he sending me a message about trying to find him? Was it important that this happened on my way to a mission to steal a computer to track him down? Why O.V.E.R. Mike?

I didn't have time to ponder any of these questions in depth, because, as I said, I was on a mission to steal a computer and track down Ryan. And... I could tell Edgar or Base. They thought that O.V.E.R. Mike was already dead. They would be furious at me for lying to them about that, for introducing a new liability unbeknownst to them that could lead to outcomes like this one. And I couldn't attempt a correction. Edgar had the Calculator.

...Base wouldn't kill O.V.E.R. Mike and leave him in my living room to punish me for lying about him, would they? *[Pause.]* No, no! No... I don't like that I even considered that.

I did the only thing that I could do. I threw a sheet over O.V.E.R. Mike, checked the rest of the house to make sure that the killer wasn't still there, packed a bag with all of the stuff that I needed for the mission into Tier Two, and I left, making doubly sure that the door was locked behind me.

And a few minutes later, I was standing outside Edgar's cabin, mentally reset and ready for the mission. If anything, it was useful to get my spycraft muscles warmed up. I had to be cool, calm, and collected, even under extreme circumstances, even when I had just seen the corpse of a man who was me. I was a brick wall of stoicism.

Edgar came out of his cabin with his backpack full of gear, locking the door behind him.

"Mikey Bear, what's wrong? You look like you've seen a ghost." Maybe not a brick wall of stoicism? But I felt the urge to vomit again, and I didn't! So I had *some* composure.

[Stammers.] I... Uh— N-No ghost," I said. "I was just t-thinking about what Cole said, and it made me nervous. I don't like that he used that word. There's a reason we don't use that word, babe; it's a bad omen."

Edgar chuckled. "There's no such things as bad omens, babe!" He gently rubbed my shoulder. "Now, are we gonna steal a computer or not?"

"Hell yeah, we are, Panther," I replied. We made our way into Tier Two.

[Closing theme plays.]

FELIX *[narrating]:* This morning, my mother called me before work. This was no great surprise, as she calls me *every* morning before work. She's really quite clingy. She never got over the fact that I left our little town in the southeast of England as soon as I could, and went off to university as far away as possible. I wanted a bigger life. I couldn't bear to hang around any longer. The only exciting thing that ever happened in my town is the very public rumor that an exceedingly minor member of the royal family once disgraced himself in the local pizza restaurant.

But there's a downside for moving away from home. It means that your mother wants to speak to you *all* the time. And after university, I moved really far away. To the other side of the continent. So she wants to speak to me *all of all* of the time. And so she calls me every morning before I start work, which is just super.

This morning, I had nothing to tell her, absolutely nothing. So she started getting all worked up about a new story that's been taking the U.K. by storm... Turns out that about a month ago, a body washed up on the coast of Wales on some rocks just outside of a town called Holyhead. A teenager, apparently; the police tried to identify him. But he wasn't on any of the records. No fingerprints, no D.N.A., no dental records. Just a run-of-the-mill corpse. My mother muttered something about the tidal floods from Ireland washing it across the sea, but... I lost the will to live. A couple of weeks later, some fishermen found another body in exactly the same place. Slightly older man, maybe in his 20s or 30s. But this is when my mother got really excited. Because the police did all the same tests, and... this time, there was a match. A D.N.A. match with the teenager who'd washed up before. One-in-a-billion, apparently... And now. Yes. That's right, a few days ago, they found another washed-up old corpse. This time, an elderly man. Again, with identical D.N.A. The tabloids have been going crazy. Holyhead started attracting all sorts of weirdos. Most people think it's just some kind of hoax. I told my mother not to believe everything that she sees on the Internet.

In truth, I just didn't want to discuss it with her. No one really likes talking about their job with their parents. Especially parents who gossip too much. But happily, just as she was getting into her flow, my boss called me over the tannoy. He always has excellent timing. I just wish he wouldn't call me Fe. "Fe" is short for Fiona! And my name is not Fiona. My name is Felix.

And this is WOE.BEGONE.

[Closing theme plays.]

CREDITS: A special thanks to Ben Rowe for writing and recording and starring in that monologue. Love you, Ben.

[END Episode 94.]