

EPISODE ONE HUNDRED AND FOUR: THE EASY PART OF THE HARD PART

Original transcript edited by Tony

[BEGIN Episode 104.]

INTRO: Hey guys, quick plugs. First off, I wrote a 14 track album in February in honor of February Album Writing Month. A few of those songs have made into the show but there are even more of them over on my SoundCloud. There will be a link in the description. And if you want to watch me write music, you can do so over on Twitch over at twitch.tv/woebegonepod, where every Sunday evening I write an episode soundtrack and then relax and hang out and play video games. We've got a really cool chill community over there and I don't even get mad at people when they convince me to pick the wrong place in GeoGuessr. Again that is twitch.tv/woebegonepod and again, I am not mad. Please do not write in the paper that I got mad.

INTRO: And if you'd like to support the show, you can do so on Patreon over at patreon.com/woe_begone, where you can get early access to ad-free episodes, instrumentals, soundtrack albums, Q&As, director's commentary, postcards, Movies with Michael, and more. Last week, I uploaded a remake of the first episode of the show, Participant Observation. It is a modern take on the classic episode with new writing and new details and new music. So, check that out over on the Patreon at patreon.com/woe_begone. Special thanks to my 10 newest patrons: [REDACTED] for supporting the show. Enjoy.

[Footsteps through gravel.]

MIKE *[panting]:* Mikey. I can't believe you.

MIKEY: Well, well, well, look who decided to join me on my walk.

MIKE: W-What was I supposed to do? I was a sitting duck out there. We're not supposed to be here.

MIKEY: I don't know what we're 'supposed to do,' Mike. This was our only option. We have no one to call. We don't even know that anyone we could call is alive. We don't have a car. I can keep going. We don't have any money and our debit cards are expired. Our phones don't work right and if they did, there's that whole 'Is everyone dead?' problem. I guess we could call up Ty Betteridge. *He's* the one that got me into this mess. What do you think that flights to Latvia cost this time of year? And do you think he's taking appointments?

MIKE: *This* wasn't Ty's idea, it was yours. *[Sighs.]* And then you strong-armed me into coming along. I only agreed because I was afraid that you would get out here and something awful would happen and then you would die. So instead I tagged along and something awful did happen and now *we're* going to die. Asshole.

MIKEY: Give me a break. If we were going to die, we probably already would have. Michael could have killed us right there if he had wanted to. We had our guard down.

MIKE: *[Laughs.]* Fat chance. A killer, Michael is not.

MIKEY: Maybe not *your* Michael, but that was a cowboy Michael. We don't know what he is capable of. Grand theft Calculator at least. What do you think he's doing back there? Assuming that he went where he said he was going, I mean.

MIKE: Well, he seemed focused on August and Edgar, so I think that he's trying to save them.

MIKEY: Then why leave us here? We came to recruit him to do that.

MIKE: *[Laughs.]* I dunno, dipshit. Maybe it's because you said that you were going to kill his boyfriend or make him do it? Maybe he wanted a plan that wasn't self-defeating.

MIKEY: It was the only way that I could make the plan make sense and you know it. It's the only way that the correction would be stable.

MIKE: Who are you, Ryan? That's just the first and the fourth challenge. You hear yourself right? Save August in step one and kill him in step four. Were you going to make Michael saw his left arm off at the shoulder while you were at it?

MIKEY: I had a very good reason as to why he needed to saw his arm off.

MIKE: Jokes aside, he really could have handled some pigs for us.

MIKEY: We are managing just fine without him. And O.V.E.R. employees are not cops, because I am not a cop.

MIKE: That's something that people who aren't cops do, right? They have to bring up constantly how they aren't cops.

MIKEY: Well, if I'm a cop, then I'm bad at my job and I'm proud of it. You worked here, too, you know. Speaking of, what do you think it means that we didn't recognize anyone at the gates? Do you think they're gone?

MIKE: Well, let's see. Charlie is as sharp as a tack. It wouldn't surprise me if she is either in the higher-ups by this point or leading some faction of her own or maybe she's the ruler of a small nation. And I assume Troy has been fired for incompetence. And I never knew the guards at the other gates. But you are so fucking lucky that no one recognized us. What was the plan if they did?

MIKEY: You mean if Charlie was here and she recognized us? Uh, explain the situation to her. Have her tag along. Charlie wouldn't have gone to the Hunters.

MIKE: Oh, fuck the Hunters. What about O.V.E.R.? What if we weren't allowed to be here and they had killed us at the gate?

MIKEY: How vexing, things would be different if they were different, Mike. *[Pause.]* Hmm. You think we go right or left here?

MIKE: *[Scoffing laugh.]* How should I know? I've never been inside of Tier Three either, Mikey, not really. I only know it from that map from the security program. Just pick a direction. *[Short pause.]* Left.

MIKEY: Left it is. Did your Michael work in Tier Three before he moved to Latvia?

MIKE: I don't know anything about Michael anymore. Anything he told me could have been a lie. I agreed to come here with you because he told me that Base was where it had always been and I thought we could just pop in and see for ourselves. It wouldn't be safe, but it would be easy. So, no, I don't know what he was doing before he came to Latvia. He could have been a Tier Three employee, I guess, though he didn't have the demeanor of one. *[Pause.]* Hey, uh... Wait... It's only been like 30 seconds, how did— how did we walk in a circle? We're back where we were.

MIKEY: Are we? I'm sorry, I was being a good listener and not paying attention to where I was going.

MIKE: Yeah, I'm sure you were doing one of those things. This is where you asked 'left or right.' That red building, remember?

MIKEY: Okay, then let's go right this time.

MIKE: Lead the way.

MIKEY: That was... odd. It felt like dream logic. I have dreams like this all the time. I'm back in college for some reason. Like, I'm the same age as I am now but I've decided to go back to school and turn my life around. And I'm all signed up and everything and taking classes, but then I have to go back to the dorms and I can't remember where they are. I've already moved in, but I can't figure out where I live, so I just keep walking around and while I'm walking around, things keep changing and eventually I wake up all disoriented. It felt like that. Mike Walters and Mike Walters looking for where Mike Walters lives.

MIKE: This Tier Three Michael can't be the same Michael that stole our Calculator, can he? We're not going to knock on his door to find that he's not there and is back in our time, right?

Though, if he's not there I say that we break in and raid the place. I bet there's some pretty interesting stuff in there.

MIKEY: No, I don't see how it's possible that the Michael we met worked here. This is Tier Three. Surely, if that cowboy had worked here and wanted to go anywhere, he could have done so, probably from the comfort of his own home. Calculators aren't very advanced technology, you know. Ty Betteridge *loves* to remind us of that. No, a Tier Three employee wouldn't wipe his ass with a Calculator. If Tier Three Michael wanted to be in our time, he would not have to go through *us*. Which raises the question: who the hell was that guy?

MIKE: Maybe we got here just in time for Tier Three Michael to go rogue, do something to lose the trust of O.V.E.R., and make a mad dash for freedom.

MIKEY: If that were true, I don't think that O.V.E.R. would just let us through the gates on the grounds that we were him. I think it's more likely that this time period has two Michaels.

MIKE: Well, why do we think that that Michael was from this time period? Because he said that he was? He also said that he remembered previous iterations. There was something up with him and it was more than a straight line from your time period to his.

MIKEY: I don't think that there are going to be any straight lines regardless. But if things didn't add up before, then they definitely don't now that we know that there is a Tier Three Michael. If there's anyone who is the quote unquote 'true' inhabitant of this time period, it's gotta be him. Tier Three is no joke. I think that we're the only ones walking around unarmed. O.V.E.R. doesn't fuck around. Okay, well, they fuck around a lot, but this close to the core, it is serious business. Which is why we almost never see Tier Three people inside of Tier One. It's actually top secret.

MIKE: So top secret in fact that they let us walk in the front door.

MIKEY: Well, we're Michael fucking Walters. Our key cards work and we are very important members of this institution. Important enough to live inside of Tier Three. With an extra decade of espionage and time travel experience. We're the real deal. This isn't the rodeo anymore. There are no more cowboys.

MIKE: Except for you, of course. I can't believe you wore the cowboy hat inside of O.V.E.R.

MIKEY: What was I supposed to do? Throw it on the ground?

MIKE: Yes, exactly. I think we're here. It says Walters on the doorplate.

MIKEY: Finally. Alright, let's get ready to say hi to Michael.

[Several knocks. The door opens.]

MICHAEL: Howdy, Mikey. Howdy, Mike. I figured y'all was 'bout ta stop by.

[Opening theme plays.]

MICHAEL: Welp, can't say I know nothin' about that other Michael y'all saw. I can look into it for ya, but I can't promise nothing.

MIKEY: But you can remember this iteration, too, right? The same one that he and Ty remember? That's why you're a cowboy?

MICHAEL: You got that right, pard. Tier Three don't let meddlin' like that affect their staff if'n they can help it. No offense to the Hunters and Base, but they're small fish in the pond. Especially back in your time. Y'all might be clever, but O.V.E.R.'s been just as clever over hundreds of combined years. You can't compete with 'em cause you ain't got the same resources.

MIKE: So, you remember Edgar and August?

MICHAEL: Yessir, I do.

MIKE: And you have the power of O.V.E.R. at your disposal which means that you could put things back how they were, but you choose not to? Do I understand that correctly?

MICHAEL: Well, partially. Ya know how Base got all them protocols and we spent all our time breakin' em? Tier Three ain't like that. I can't simply do as I please out here. I gotta be careful. I traded agency for power.

MIKE: But what's the point of power without agency?

MICHAEL: What's the point of agency without power? You showed up at my doorstep, tail between your legs, lost in the future with your *agency*.

MIKEY: Okay, so Tier Three gives you power. Is that worth not being able to go back to an iteration with Edgar and August?

MICHAEL: No, it ain't. But it ain't clear cut like that. I can't just flip a switch and get into the middle of your Base's politics. We don't do things that way. Our hands are heavy. If we put them on the scale, it makes a big impact. Buildings get blown up that way. You're asking me to break up a schoolyard fight with a nuke.

MIKEY: Ty Betteridge is going to torture me until we get back to that previous iteration, so I say nuke the kids.

MICHAEL: ...Did Ty say that he cleared that with his superiors?

MIKEY: I got the impression that he was acting on his own.

MICHAEL: Interesting. What a mess. Typical Tier Two work, no offense to the Hunters, but there're some holes in the bottom of this here boat, if'n ya catch my drift. Which is why I've been waitin' for y'all to show up ever since the changeover.

MIKE: You knew that we were coming? We barely knew that we were coming.

MICHAEL: Mike Walters is a predictable creature. He only seems unpredictable if you ain't been around long enough to catch onto the patterns. It's like how everyone used to think that their phone was listening to 'em to serve 'em advertisements, but the reality was the predictive algorithm was strong enough that listening in would be a waste of time. I knew y'all'd be yearnin' for what could have been as much as I was eventually. That dam was bound to break.

MIKEY: I wouldn't call it 'yearning' just yet. The other cowboy said that if I knew what I was missing, I'd want to go back. Was he right?

MIKE: Because he lied to us about everything else.

MICHAEL: Well, he was right about that. Missing Sly and Edgar is the easy part of the hard part. What's more difficult is feeling the weight of reality crush those memories til they don't feel real anymore. Once this is over with, I highly suggest both of you take up keepin' a journal. Helps keep things straight.

MIKEY: So, you *are* going to help us get back to that other iteration?

MICHAEL: I gotta be careful. I can help to walk you into the right situation at the right time, but I can't bust down the door on my Yamaha VMAX and come riding to the rescue. *[Pause.]* That's a story about August.

MIKE: So, let's get started, where do we begin? Are you going to send us back with some instructions or some coordinates or stuff to look out for?

MIKEY: You know, I was already starting to receive messages from Ty Betteridge about correcting the timeline and one day he might send me something useful. Do you think we could use him?

MICHAEL: You're staying right here in my time period, partner. The Hunters and the Tys can't see what you're up to here, not as long as you're with me. I can explain all that I can and then I can show you where you need to go. Though I need to warn y'all: y'all were scared of getting tortured or killed earlier. What was Ty doin' to ya, Mikey?

MIKEY: He was cutting off my fingers... Each of these lines, see, that's where he cut one off.

MICHAEL: If things go belly up while you're workin' with me, you'll wish that you were there, lettin' Ty cut your fingers off. Best case scenario if this goes wrong: we never existed. I ain't talkin' about killin' us. I'm talkin' no Mike Walters cause mom and dad were never born cause grandpa died in the war kinda stuff. It'd be a pain in O.V.E.R.'s ass but they'd fill in the blanks somehow. O.V.E.R. don't take kindly to people usin' their services for personal matters and we will be takin' advantage of their most prized asset.

MIKE: What you described does not sound fundamentally distinct from being dead.

MICHAEL: Well there's no 'fundamental distinction' between any of the three of us, if'n you're reckonin' that way.

MIKEY: It is a lot easier to stop being dead if we exist.

MIKE: Well, needless to say that we're in. We can't back out now. So, show us what we need to see or take us wherever we need to go or whatever.

MICHAEL: It ain't the time yet. It's going to take some cajolin'. And I got to go to some meetings. Not much free time these days. Y'all stay put and don't go wanderin' around. Watch a movie or something while I'm gone. Well, uh, wait a second...

[Items rustle as Michael reorganizes.]

MICHAEL: Right, uh, let's see, uh. Y'all can't watch, uh, this one... or this one... or... or this one...

MIKE: He's time proofing his movie collection for you, Mikey.

MICHAEL: Darn tootin'. Can't have you propagatin' movies. If I got fired cause y'all started tellin' everyone what happens in the remake of *Terrible Help is Hard to Find*, Ty wouldn't be the only one cuttin' your fingers off.

MIKEY: They have really run out of stuff to remake, huh?

MICHAEL: So help yourself to what's left. Everything else here is going in the safe. Oh, there's, uh, cards in the cabinet, too, if'n you get bored of movies. I'll be back in a few hours. And help yourselves to the fridge, but don't spoil your appetite. Dinner's on me and I make a mean baked rigatoni. Old family recipe.

MIKEY: Alright, we'll see you in a few hours then... I guess...

MICHAEL: Yup. Y'all take care now.

[The door opens and shuts.]

MIKEY: Mike, we're all from the same family. Do you know the family baked rigatoni recipe?

MIKE: I don't even know what rigatoni is.

[Scene transitions. Pages rustle. Faint movie sounds play.]

MIKEY: Leave that alone, Mike. He's going to kill us. Come back and watch *Donnie Darko* with me.

MIKE: It's fine. I took pictures of where everything was before I started going through shit. He'll never know that I went through his stuff. And if he didn't want us going through it, then he should have babypoofed the house better. He had a chance to put all of this stuff in the safe and he didn't. And it's the director's cut of *Donnie Darko*. Pass. Why does he even have that?

MIKEY: Hey, not everything about the director's cut is worse. There's something to be said about saying what you mean. I think the vagueness regarding the mechanics of the universe in the original is a mixed bag. Probably a net good for rewatchers, but too confusing for a casual audience.

MIKE *[overlapping the few words]:* Mikey, they got rid of *Killing Moon* in the opening scene. I can't watch the movie without thinking about how bad an idea that was.

MIKEY: The bones of it are still good, though. And the acting. Jake Gyllenhaal. Drew Barrymore's great in this. Cast against type, sort of.

MIKE: Yeah, cause she's a metacommentary about her career as a child actor... Who the fuck are these people?

MIKEY: Yeah, that's, uh, Seth and Ricky, they're the bullies. Did you know that that's Seth Rogen playing Ricky? I guess *Donnie Darko* came out years before I even knew who he was.

MIKE: No, dumbass. Come here. I found something.

MIKEY: What did you find, scoop hound?

MIKE: Looks like, uh, surveillance of some kind? It's you and some guy. I don't recognize him. *[Papers rustling.]* Here, uh, see? All sorts of notes and timestamps and, uh, looks like references to a video that I assume is on that computer.

MIKEY: That's-That's him! That's Edgar. That's who this all is about.

MIKE: That's Edgar? *[Small, disbelieving laugh.]* I understand why you were so surprised. I mean, there's-there's nothing *wrong* with him, I just don't see how we would gravitate towards him. He's... cute. We don't do cute.

MIKEY: And that isn't me in the picture. These aren't pictures from our date. I don't even own that shirt. And every time I saw Edgar, he was either at work or we were on a date, so he was a little dressed up. Business casual. And he strikes me as the type of guy to be decently well dressed wherever he goes. So I've only ever seen him in a button-down shirt but not... you know, *that* kind of button-down shirt.

MIKE: Surf's up, my guy.

MIKEY: These have to be from the iteration that we're trying to get back to. Is this who I was in that iteration? *[Fumbles for words.]* A beach bum? I— You know, I hesitate to say this, but I think I'd rather be a cowboy.

MIKE: You don't hesitate to say that as much as you act like you do. But, uh, see here? It, uh, it looks like he was quote 'project running in parallel with Base and O.V.E.R. ops.' So, uh, that's another Mikey from your time, stationed somewhere. I didn't know about him. Base only told me about you.

MIKEY: Project? So, like, Michael's project? He stationed them in my time or iterated them there or something?

[Papers rustling as Mike talks.]

MIKE: Uh, looks like it. Or, if he didn't stationed them there, at the very least they were invested in keeping them there. Yeah, look, uh, they were paying them for their time. There're references to invoices to O.V.E.R. Uh... But, I... It doesn't look like they're there in our iteration? Like, uh... *[Blows our air.]* I don't think we flew out to Vancouver we would find them there.

MIKEY: What— Why Vancouver? What's Vancouver?

MIKE: I don't know, Mikey. There's more shorthand and jargon on here than in an academic paper. It might as well be one of those Red Flag Cabin files with the numbers on them. And I think that the actual important info's all on that computer, if you want to start brute forcing passwords. Any guess at what 'secondary M&MB manips' are vis a vis some guy named Matt?

MIKEY: Uh. Our Matt?

MIKE: What do you mean 'our Matt?' I don't mean to be indelicate, Mikey, but we blew his fucking brains out. And I'm sure that we did that in the previous iteration, too, because we still clearly played WOE.BEGONE. The Hunter's correction didn't go back that far. It started sometime at O.V.E.R., which means that we had plenty of time to go through all four challenges.

Matt's dead. And Matt is one of the most common names in the English speaking world, so I'm not surprised that there's another guy named Matt.

MIKEY: But Matt was in Vancouver. We went to his house and everything.

MIKE: I'm struggling to understand what you don't understand about the possibility of two guys named Matt. Come on, Mikey, he's dead. And this stuff isn't just about this one guy. There's all this stuff here about, uh, 'residual causality' and 'anticonsolidation' and 'Breiborn-Treichter maneuvers?' What is this? I can't make heads or tails of this. It feels like Charles Thibbideau.

MIKEY: Do you think our Base would be as capable as O.V.E.R. or the Flinchite Compound if we had Breiborn-Treichter maneuvers?

MIKE: That's it, that's the one thing separating us from them.

MIKEY: You gotta give it to us, though. That Walters-Ng maneuver is pretty clutch.

MIKE: Ah, yes, the Walters-Ng maneuver: shoot first, get shot later.

MIKEY: *[Snaps.]* You know it.

[A loud thud, against the outside of the cabin.]

MIKE: Fuck! What was that? *[Another thud.]* Is Michael back?

MIKEY: Put everything back where you found it.

MIKE *[overlapping]:* I-It can't be him, right? He doesn't, like, bang on the side of his cabin to announce his return?

MIKEY: I-I-I don't care. We don't when he'll be here. Get a picture of the Mikey and Edgar project and put everything back.

MIKE: Right. And we can see if talking to Michael will get us into the safe or the computer.

MIKEY: Alright, that's the plan. Um, I don't see anything out the windows. Maybe that was just a bird? Let's just act natural. You clean up over there and when you're done, come watch the end of *Donnie Darko* with me.

MIKE: Not interested. He dies at the end, you know.

MIKEY: Yeah, but the dreams in which he's dying are the best he's ever had!

MIKE: Tell me about it.

[Scene transition.]

MIKEY: Damn, Michael. You were right about the rigatoni. It's excellent. Where did you say you learned to cook this?

MICHAEL: I have been around for a long time, pilgrim. Picked up cookin' along the way.

MIKE: Cagey answer, great. Can we ask you some questions about the iteration over dinner?

MICHAEL: You can ask.

MIKEY: Cool cause, uh, you know, I was wondering: was Matt still alive during that iteration?

MICHAEL [suspicious]: He was. Why were you thinking about Matt?

MIKEY: Oh, I was just thinking about WOE.BEGONE and how everything started and it occurred to me how different everything might be in the iteration that you're trying to bring us back to, like what might be salvaged.

MICHAEL: Well, if'n you want, y'all can put that on your list of things worth fightin' for. Do it for Matt.

MIKE: I had a bit of a more high-minded question, I guess. You've been around for a very long time. Uh, you said it yourself. What's so special about this previous iteration? You've seen a ton of iterations, no doubt. So, why this one and not a different one? Or something completely new?

MICHAEL: This'n's tried and true. I could think up a dream reality and try and push it towards that, but it would involve more work and more danger. What I want most is Sly back. And Edgar. Everything else is unnecessary risk.

MIKE: How does that work, when August is back? Does he work here in this time period? Or do you not work in Tier Three in the other one? Because it would be hard to see him if you work here and he doesn't.

MICHAEL: I am not entertaining this line of questions.

MIKE: Oh, is your work here a direct consequence of the Hunters' correction? Like, maybe O.V.E.R. was watching it happen and they decided that they needed a way to put their thumb on the scale in case the Hunters got too big for their britches and needed to keep them in check... and I mean, who better to keep them in check than *[Sarcastic cowboy accent.]* the rough 'n' tumble surly cowboy *[Normal voice.]* who would personally benefit from keeping them in check? And they don't have to worry about the *headache* that is employing Mike Walters at such a high level for very long because your mere presence inside of Tier Three is evidence that the

iteration is unstable and that you will revert things to their previous state, thus making it so that you don't work here after the job is done. You were right, earlier. They are very clever.

MICHAEL: Uh, was there a question for me somewhere in there?

MIKE: Well, the answer is that you can't or won't talk about it. Or possibly don't even know.

MICHAEL: Welp, there's your answer. *[Sighs.]* I hope you boys enjoyed dinner. It's nice having you here. I'll take care of the dishes if y'all wanna get settled in for the evening. The couch in the living room's a pull-out: the luxury of being a Tier Three employee. Y'all are gonna wanna get some good shuteye before we head out tomorrow on our little field trip. We leave at dawn.

MIKEY: Where are we going?

MICHAEL: A couple places. We need to make some complicated transmissions. More complicated than I truly understand, but I know how to work the device.

MIKE: The device being...?

MICHAEL: The Boulders.

[Closing theme plays.]

BLOOPER (MICHAEL): When this is done, *[Robotic cowboy voice.]* I highly suggest both of you take keepin' a journal to keep things *[Very drawn out.]* straight. Shutting down.

[Brief start of closing theme.]

BLOOPER (MICHAEL): I'm talkin' ain't no Planet X comin' cause ain't no space cause ain't not globe Earth.

[END Episode 104.]