

EPISODE ONE HUNDRED AND NINE - OUTSIDE TIER ONE EPISODE 1: MIKE WALTERS

Original transcript edited by Theo

[Begin Episode 109.]

INTRO: Hey, guys. Welcome to Season 10. I hope you're as excited for a new season of WOE.BEGONE as I am. Right off the bat, I want to say that this episode is not a spin-off podcast, this is an episode of WOE.BEGONE. And you'll understand why I'm making that point once the episode starts. Quick plugs. It is still Nancy Drew season over on my Twitch at twitch.tv/woebegonepod, where every Sunday, I write the episode soundtracks, and I've been on a Nancy Drew kick, so come watch me fail at very basic puzzles. And accidentally spend all of my money at the bakery, and have to restart. That's twitch.tv/woebegonepod. And if you'd like to support the show, you can do so on Patreon at patreon.com/woe_begone, where you can get early access to episodes, instrumentals, soundtrack albums, Q&As, director's commentaries, Movies with Michael, postcards, and more. I'm sending out April's postcards this week, and I am very excited for people to get them. Each postcard comes with a handwritten message from one of the characters, and all of the postcards combined tell a larger, slice-of-life story. People compare their postcards in the Discord, and it's a lot of fun to see people react to each other's cards. So check that out if that sounds like something you'd be interested in. That's patreon.com/woe_begone. Special thanks to my 13 newest patrons who have joined since the previous season finale: [REDACTED] for supporting the show. Enjoy.

[Warning: this episode contains a depiction of violence. Listener discretion is advised.]

[Opening theme plays.]

JAMILLA *[narrating]*: Oldbrush Valley. It's a place that you have heard about, even if you don't think that you have. Fans of early 20th century folk and Americana music might recognize the name from an old folk song from 1929, "Ol' Brush Valley," with "ol'" being spelled the ol' timey way. But even if you don't have a collection of Folkways CDs, you will definitely remember the attack on Oldbrush Valley a couple years ago that made national news and turned a mysterious building into a smoking crater. That building, Building 357A, was inside of a place called Oldbrush Valley Energy And Resources, or O.V.E.R. for short. Think Area 51's cooler, older cousin. And though O.V.E.R. technically does work with "energy" and "resources," its closely guarded secrets are much more pernicious than the name suggests.

There are dozens of conspiracy theories about what goes on inside of O.V.E.R., some of them more credible than others. Stories about alien spacecrafts, laser guns, the Hollow Earth, time travel... put a pin in that last one. What's really going on is a rabbit hole that one could easily fall down, but I want to focus on something that's a bit more... within my grasp. I can't tell you what is hiding in the deepest recesses of O.V.E.R., but I *can* tell you a story about people. People on the margins of power; people who are not as powerful yet as they want to be, even though they are already extremely powerful; people who have an inkling of an idea about what O.V.E.R. is doing, and seem to have never heard the phrase "a little bit of knowledge is a dangerous thing."

And what happens when the trajectories of these people intersect. It is a bloody game that these people are playing.

I'm Jamilla Gardner. They/them. You can call me Jam. And this is *Outside Tier One* Episode One: "Mike Walters." Stay with us.

[Outside Tier One opening theme plays.]

JAMILLA *[narrating]*: Okay, so. A little bit about myself. My name is Jam. I'm 28, I'm from Kentucky, I'm non-binary, my favorite band is Wilco, I was a teacher's pet in grade school (can you tell?), I do English paper piece quilting in my spare time (which is something that is too complicated for me to describe to you now), I come from a middle-class background, and I work in the interfacing department at O.V.E.R. O.V.E.R. is divided into three tiers, with Tier Three being the most secure and mysterious. Interfacing is like a Tier One job inside of Tier Two. I basically make sure that what is entering and exiting Tier Two has been authorized and is documented. Every person, every important bit of technology has to be accounted for. Is it boring? Yes. Sometimes maddeningly so. But having an office job at O.V.E.R. is an excellent resume builder. I can get basically any job I want after this in any number of fields. It doesn't command much authority. We aren't the lowest on the ladder; that would be the patrol officers. But it's an entry-level job.

Speaking of patrol officers, O.V.E.R. is packed with them at every level. And our story begins with one of them.

Marissa Ng is the loudest person that I have ever met. That's how we met, actually. I was grabbing some food from the cafeteria, and Marissa roped me into a conversation before I could squirm away. I don't even remember what the conversation was about, but it ended up with her telling the story about how she shot the bear that's mounted in the cafeteria. She tells that story often. I have it memorized. She patrols Tier One, and not much happens out there, so something as exciting as shooting a bear is something to write home about. That conversation was the start of a wonderful friendship. Marissa would go on to tell me about more than the bear. Through her, I discovered a world outside of Tier One, and as we have already established, a little information is a dangerous thing.

The first lead I received from Marissa happened over breakfast. We were meeting at the Oldbrush Valley 24-Hour Diner, one of only two restaurants in the valley. She was getting off her night shift patrol route, and I was going in to start my day. So, breakfast for me, dinner for her. I had a rough morning, and couldn't find my car keys, so I ended up being extremely late. Well, 15 minutes late, but that is well beyond my standards; I cannot be late. When I finally showed up, Marissa said, "Ah, I thought you had pulled a Mike Walters on me."

With a bit of digging, I was able to discover that Mike Walters was the name of a patrol officer that went missing on his first day at O.V.E.R. It was handled quietly. O.V.E.R. didn't make a statement, it didn't make the news, and life went on as usual. Nobody knew where he went or

why, and nobody seemed to care. I wasn't even able to find any trace of a search for him. Maybe less of a quiet disappearance, and more of a cover-up. Marissa remembered him, though. She was scheduled to train him the day that he went missing, so she had been given his name and his cabin number. She showed up on time to discover the cabin empty. Mike Walters was nowhere to be found. She grumbled to me that she was one of the patrol officers that had to cover what would've been his shift (a day shift, no less) until O.V.E.R. was able to hire someone new. Marissa calling you "Mike Walters" is an insult.

So... where the hell is Mike Walters? I don't know Mike. He might be the type of guy who can just drop everything, leave his old life behind, and start completely fresh. Maybe he took one look at O.V.E.R., and got scared, and decided that it was time to get out of there. But it definitely feels more sinister than that. Several people have gone "missing" from O.V.E.R. since I began working here, and I don't think they all wandered off into the woods to get eaten by a bear. The timing of Mike's disappearance was... suspicious.

In fact, Mike is at the locus of several strange coincidences. I think... I think he might be a serial killer? Bear with me. Before he went missing, Mike Walters had a habit of ending up near dead bodies. There were several police who were killed in the months before Mike Walters disappeared. One was in his hometown. One after that was in a nearby town, and his social media activity from the time of that murder is incredibly odd. He was with a friend of his, and that friend was *from* that town. In retrospect, it looks as though they were establishing an alibi. And, finally, there is the grizzly unsolved murder of one of Mike's friends in Vancouver right before he left for O.V.E.R. Could I be connecting dots that aren't even there? Yes. Did I stay up until three a.m. clicking Facebook links until my brain dripped out of my ears? ...Yes. But I think it's still something to keep in mind as we attempt to figure out who Mike Walters really was.

That is all I have to say about Mike the Serial Killer, though, at least for the moment. There are thousands of true crime podcasts. Statistically, if you're listening to this, you probably *have* a true crime podcast. And I hope that goes great for you. You can have *Mike Walters: The Disappearing Dexter*, 11-part series. Because now that that is out of the way, we need to talk about the big technological elephant in the room.

O.V.E.R. has developed a technology that can transport objects from one temporal location to another. Time travel. O.V.E.R. has time travel, and it is so ubiquitous at the facility that even Tier Two employees can be given permission to access it. Remember when I said that my job involved cataloging things going in and out of Tier Two? That's because O.V.E.R. wants to make sure that things aren't traveling through *time* out of Tier Two without their authorization. I would even go so far as to say that this is common knowledge in certain conspiracy circles, though those same people will also say that Tier Three contains an opening to the Hollow Earth. You can believe me or not, your choice. But if you don't believe me, then what I am about to describe is going to sound impossible, and you're wasting your time. Or, you can enjoy it as Jam's Big Made Up Story: An Audiodrama. I'm sure Rusty Quill will be knocking on my door any minute now.

I know when Mike Walters went missing. I know where he lived before he went missing. If you know the town he lived in, you can tell which apartment building is his from his social media posts that show the windows, and you can tell which apartment is his by how far up the air those windows are. People need to be a lot more careful about that kind of thing. It isn't even that difficult. Since I know where he is at that time, I can simply... go visit him. He probably won't know why he goes missing or where he went, but he could answer a lot of questions that I have. Maybe the clues were there. Maybe everything leading up to his disappearance was already in motion. Who knows? Maybe I can save his life.

The only thing standing in-between myself and Mike Walters was that I needed to get permission to use the Tier Two time travel program. O.V.E.R. isn't stingy with their access, but they do require you to be doing O.V.E.R.-related work, and that work needs to be justified and documented. There is nothing about my job that would necessitate this, and asking for permission would likely only raise red flags. Sometimes it is better to ask forgiveness than permission. Except in this case, I will not be asking for forgiveness, because I imagine that Mike Walters would not be the only missing person if O.V.E.R. knew I was doing this. So, I had to ask myself, "How badly do you want this, Jam? Can you stop being a teacher's pet for five seconds, and do something cool?"

No. I can't stop being a teacher's pet for five seconds, and do something cool. But I know someone who never stops being cool: Marissa Ng. I would need someone to transport me back to O.V.E.R. after meeting with Mike, and while I would prefer to do this alone and keep everything secret, Marissa Ng is a born partner-in-crime. I asked if she wanted to come to Tier Two with me after hours for a time travel experiment, and she agreed before I could even get the words out. I was going to coast on Marissa's energy, all the way back to 2020. Mike Walters, here I come.

Sneaking into Tier Two after hours wasn't actually a big deal. I have permission to be inside of Tier Two. Marissa doesn't, but that didn't seem to concern her. We simply walked through the interfacing building and then across the road into a nearby security building. We found a computer that wasn't password-protected, so I didn't have to login with my credentials, and I put in the coordinates. Right outside Mike's front door.

"Punch him for me for wasting my time!" Marissa said.

"He hasn't done that yet. He won't know who you are or what I'm doing," I said.

"Punch him anyway!" Marissa replied.

"Fine, I will," I said. "Let's get this over with."

I hit enter on the keyboard, the program stalled for a scary amount of time, finally responded, and... I was gone.

Time travel is uncomfortable. I actually had to travel for work once, so I did have a modicum of experience, and knew what to expect. I imagine that it feels like those plane rides you can take where they fly in a parabolic path so you can experience weightlessness. Your body doesn't know which way is up, and you get dizzy and nauseous. People who travel all the time develop strategies to deal with the feeling, but I have neither the experience nor the constitution. So I arrived, tried very hard not to vomit on Mike Walters's doormat, turned on my recorder, and knocked on his door the day before he was scheduled to move into O.V.E.R.

[Recording chime.]

[Time travel noise. Jamilla knocks on the door. Mike opens it.]

MIKE: Uh... Hello.

JAMILLA: Hi, there. Are you... Are you Mike Walters?

MIKE: *[Huffs.]* Look, if you're here to kill me, c— can we not... do it in the hallway? I've put my neighbors through a lot.

JAMILLA: I'm... not?

MIKE: Oh.

JAMILLA: My name's Jamilla Gardner. I'm working on a podcast about O.V.E.R. Can I come in?

MIKE: Ugh. Yeah. Fuck it. Come in.

[The door closes behind the two. Mike starts talking to Jamilla in the background.]

JAMILLA *[narrating]:* Mike Walters's apartment was the ur-bachelor pad. It was disorganized and just dirty enough to be uncomfortable. There were cups everywhere, half-drunk. Food left out, a full sink of dishes. Open containers of Pepsi and milk sitting on the kitchen counter. I think he was eating tuna out of a frisbee? I saw tuna in a frisbee; I did not ask questions. Mike's appearance was disheveled as well. Unkempt hair, bushy beard. There was something agoraphobic about him. Like he had been rattled, and had holed up in his apartment.

MIKE: So, uh... Hey, uh, do you have a theme song?

JAMILLA: For the podcast? Yeah, my friends are in a band called Cutting Grass, and—

MIKE: Cause I can write you a theme song or— any background stuff. Like, 150 bucks.

JAMILLA: Uh... We have all the music we need, but I'll keep that in mind.

MIKE: You're not here to try to get me to stop playing, are you? I'm getting tired of the runaround.

JAMILLA: Stop... playing what?

MIKE: Uh, WOE.BEGONE.

JAMILLA: I don't know what that is. WOE.BEGONE?

MIKE: Well, here's a story for your podcast. WOE.BEGONE is a time travel murder game. First, they bring someone you love back to life, and then you have to do whatever they say. And whatever they say is the dumbest, most violent shit. I cut off my arm; I cut off my hands... And then there's a challenge where you have to kill that person. But by the time you get there, you're already too far in, and that's why I'm going to O.V.E.R. The gamerunners are making me go. I thought that you would've known that.

JAMILLA: Did you kill Matt?

MIKE: How do you know Matt? Who the fuck are you?

JAMILLA: I don't mean to cause you any trouble, I promise. I'm... I'm from the year 2023, and you go missing tomorrow during your first day on the job at O.V.E.R. I'm trying to figure out what happened.

MIKE: I go missing tomorrow? Is "missing" in quotes?

JAMILLA: You aren't there when the person tasked with training you shows up to your cabin. Is there any chance you just... skipped town?

MIKE: Ha ha, very funny. I would love to skip town, but no, I was going to stay at O.V.E.R. No one's heard from me after tomorrow?

JAMILLA: No one that I could find. It's like you stop existing. Which makes me believe that... someone killed you. So, my advice would be maybe don't go to O.V.E.R.

MIKE: [Groans.] I have received a lot of advice recently, and I would love to not go to O.V.E.R., but I have to. They have made exceedingly sure that I understand that. First, someone came to my door, nice guy, same guy that helped me with Matt. Said that if I went to O.V.E.R., then he knew a way to bring Matt back again. And the gamerunners keep sending these insipid messages, all-caps, "YOU HAVE TO GO. GO TO O.V.E.R., OR WE WILL KILL YOU." Dramatic assholes... But they definitely would kill me if they felt like it, so I have to go make myself useful to them.

JAMILLA: So... you're... going to die tomorrow either way.

MIKE: Very astute of you. *[Sighs.]* It's not a big deal, really. I've died before. This is time travel, you know how it works. Nothing's forever. So I'm taking my chances at O.V.E.R. Who knows? Maybe it'll go differently, maybe, because we had this conversation, it'll go differently. I can be on the lookout. I don't know what for, but... maybe knowing about it will help? So thanks, Jamilla. Really, sarcasm aside, I really do think that I prefer to know.

JAMILLA: I'm really sorry, Mike. I thought that I was saving your life by coming here. I thought you could just... not go to O.V.E.R.

MIKE: Well, if you'd like to try to save my life, it might be good for your podcast.

JAMILLA: What are you suggesting?

MIKE: You've got the wheels turning. Do you have, like, an email address I can dump a bunch of data onto? Like a Google Drive that you can access in your time period? And I'll need the username and password.

JAMILLA: Uh. ...Sure? I guess I can make one now in 2020, and access it when I get home.

MIKE: Cool. Uh... Give me that email. I'll get a bug that uploads to the Google Drive, and I'll wear it to O.V.E.R. And then you'll get a front row seat to whatever happened to me. And then, after that, you can swing by, let's say a couple hours from now, with that recording, and let me know what happened.

JAMILLA: What if that doesn't work? What if I can't tell what happened?

MIKE: I don't know! You'll owe me, like, 100 bucks for audio surveillance equipment? *[Scoffs.]* Jamilla, I'll be dead; it won't matter.

JAMILLA: And we can... try again, I guess?

MIKE: Yeah, as many times as you want to. Uh, bring pizza.

JAMILLA: Huh?

MIKE: When you come back in a couple hours, bring pizza. I'm hungry, and there's no food left in the house. Well, there's some food, but it's not edible.

JAMILLA *[amused]*: Oh... sure.

MIKE: Yeah, just— get whatever you like. But also I really hope that you like olives, because olives are my favorite food right now, I'm just eating everything with olives. So maybe some sort of supreme pizza with olives, and... *[Mike's voice fades out.]*

JAMILLA *[narrating]*: I made the Google Drive that Mike told me to make, gave him the password, coordinated my return with Marissa, said goodbye to Mike Walters, and nauseously flung myself back into 2023.

"So, how'd it go?" Marissa asked. "I noticed that I still don't know who Mike Walters is."

"He dies no matter what he does," I told her. "Someone kills him at O.V.E.R., or someone kills him because he didn't go to O.V.E.R."

"Bummer," Marissa said. "Did you *punch* him for me?"

"Sure, I did," I said.

"You liar. You wanna blow this popsicle stand?" she asked.

"Yeah," I sighed. We began the trek back to Tier One.

I checked the email that I made for Mike as soon as I got home. Surprisingly, his plan worked. I was prepared to open it, and see nothing. There was a series of audio files with the timestamp of the day Mike went missing in the filenames. I listened to them all, in order. They were mostly empty. Just Mike walking around not saying anything. A couple where he talks to me, because he knows that I'm going to hear them. Here's a couple of those:

[Recording chime.]

MIKE: Hey, Jamilla. How's it goin'? I'm feeling sorta... doomed, and I was thinking, and. So. There's this box in my apartment. Uh, there's a key under the doormat if you wanna just let yourself in. And the box is labelled "Matt," it's in the closet, you can't miss it, and it's just got, uh— you know, a lot of Matt stuff. Like, we went to this Pear Jam concert together, and we both got the same shirt, and somehow, after he died, I ended up with his shirt, too? So I have both of them, and— Stuff like that's in the box. And... I don't know if this happens, and I'm not going back to the apartment, I don't... want it to just sit there. Uh, so... Do something with it. Sorry if that's a bummer. Uh, I'll talk to you later.

[Recording chime.]

MIKE: Hey, Jamilla. I was thinking about that theme song I'm writing for you, and it's, like— What if it was, like, mysterious, and it had these pads that come in that are, like, *[Imitates synth pad.]*, and then the— the *[Imitates percussion and synth pad.]*. So, uh, let me know if you like that, and, uh, if I make it out of here, I'll get right to work on it. ...Alright, bye.

[Recording chime.]

MIKE: *[Exhales.]* Hi, Jamilla. Uh, I made it out to Oldbrush Valley. Uh, I found a little diner here, and got a cheeseburger which was pretty good. ...Uh, ate it in my car because I didn't want to eat inside, and I turned the bug off because I didn't want you to hear my horrible mouth sounds. And then, of course, as soon as I do, I hear this... *[Recreates tap sound.]* this little tap on my window, and I jump, and I think, "Oh, god! Uh— I'm gonna get killed, right here, right in the parking lot." ...But it's this woman, and she's like "Hey, I don't recognize your vehicle, are you new here?" And I say, "Yeah, I just got a job at O.V.E.R." And she says, "Oh, that's awesome. So you've probably never been to the diner before. Did they give you any of the special hot sauce?" I said, "No," and she was like "I don't really know what's in it, but it's like a jalapeño sauce, and it goes great with fries. Uh, here, have mine," and she hands me this tub of... this jalapeño mayo ketchup Thousand Island thing? I think? And I dipped one of my fries in it, and it was really good! And I— So I said, "Thank you," and she was like "I'm Charlie," and I was like "I'm Mike," and she was like "Yeah, I work the front gate at O.V.E.R., uh, so I'm on my lunch break; I'll be back in a few minutes. I'll probably see you there." And, so, yeah. I guess I... m-made a friend! Uh... Don't know if you know her. But... so far, so good! Uh, not dead yet. I'll let you know... when I die. Alright, bye.

[Recording chime.]

MIKE: *[Imitates intense music.]* But that'd be quieter in the background, you know, like, *[Repeats intense but quieter, then imitates a kick drum and crash cymbal.]* and then, like, the... the episode starts, right?

JAMILLA *[narrating]:* And then... there is the final audio file. The last trace of Mike Walters before he goes missing. I will warn you, the clip does contain the answer to where Mike ended up, but it is not pleasant to listen to. It is violent. Listener discretion is advised. Alright, here's the clip.

[Recording chime.]

[Door opens.]

MIKE: Uh... Hello! ...Who are you?

H: Hi, there! You're the new guy that they hired, aren't ya?

MIKE: Uh— Y-Yeah, that's me. Um, haven't even got my stuff out of boxes yet. Uh... Mike Walters. Uh, come in.

H: Hunter Jeremiah Hartley! You can call me Hunter or Jerry or H, *[Mike closes the door.]* or just yell anything in my direction, and I'll probably answer to it. *[H laughs. Mike awkwardly laughs in return.]* Haven't got to settle in yet, it looks like.

MIKE: Oh. No, not really, uh... Just goin' through all the stuff they left me. Uh, maybe you can answer this: what's with this odd manual on the desk? I flipped through it, and it felt... I don't know, difficult to believe? Is that what O.V.E.R.'s... like?

H: Oh! *[Chuckles.]* No. Not really. I can't believe they still hand that thing out to newbies. You're on Tier One patrol duty. It's nothing. It's as easy as a job can get. A buncha walkin' around all day.

MIKE: Oh. Good.

H: Here! Let me show you around your new cabin. And I'll show you how the dang landline works. Callin' other cabins is more complicated than it needs to be. New guys are always callin' the wrong people, because there's a system, and the system is easy to get wrong... even if you know how to use it! *[Laughs.]*

MIKE: Uh-huh.

H: And some of the young'uns? Show up not even knowin' how to work a landline these days. Op! Looks like they gave you one of the good kitchens, too. Some of 'em, the kitchen is too narrow, and the dishwasher door won't open all the way without hittin' the wall, if you can believe it. Anyway, if you'll look right over there, you'll see your standard-issue O.V.E.R. emergency button. See it? Over on that bedside table.

MIKE: Uh. No? I don't see it. I— A button?

H: Right over there. See it?

MIKE: Uh. No, I, uh—

[We hear a gunshot and a thud. Mike gasps a little. There's another gunshot. After a moment of silence, H exits through the cabin door.]

JAMILLA *[narrating]:* Mike Walters is dead. He was shot, twice, in his own cabin. And his murder was covered up. And I recognize the voice of the man who killed him.

Thank you for listening to *Outside Tier One*. I'm Jamilla Gardner. And next time, you'll hear more about the man who killed Mike Walters, and his Base of operations. Until then, stay safe.

[Outside Tier One closing theme starts playing.]

CREDITS (JAMILLA): *Outside Tier One* is a Drop Stitch Audio Production. Created by Jamilla Gardner. The theme song is "Roadtrip" by the band Cutting Grass. The background music was also provided by Cutting Grass. Check them out at wearecuttinggrass.bandcamp.com/. Special thanks to Marissa Ng.

[Outside Tier One closing theme plays out.]

[Closing theme starts playing.]

CREDITS: This has been WOE.BEGONE. The voice of Jamilla Gardner was Rae Lundberg. Check out their podcast *The Night Post* at nightpostpod.com or wherever you listen to podcasts. The voice of Hunter Jeremiah Hartley, excerpted from Episode 108, was Gary Furlong. Check him out on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [TikTok](#) at garyfurlongvo. Thanks for playing.

[Closing theme plays out.]

[Recording chime.]

AFTER-CREDITS (MIKE): *[Imitates instrumentals while tapping on and strumming a guitar.]*
[Singing.] Jamilla's podcast / Who killed Mike Walters / Jamilla's gonna figure it out. *[Speaking.]*
Maybe that?

[End Episode 109.]