

PART ONE HUNDRED AND TEN - THE KEEP MIKE ALIVE PROJECT

Original transcript edited by Jenah and Tony

[BEGIN Episode 110.]

INTRO: Hey guys, quick plugs and they're the regular plugs. I'm still streaming every Sunday on Twitch at twitch.tv/woebegonepod where every Sunday I write the episode soundtracks and then hang out and play a video game. Right now it's Nancy Drew: The Silent Spy so check that out if you'd like to help because I do need help. 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 ad-free episodes, instrumentals, soundtrack albums, Q&As, director's commentaries, Movies With Michael, postcards, and more. People are starting to receive their April postcards in which Mikey is running for mayor of Oldbrush Valley. It is very funny and a lot of fun and people are comparing their postcards over on the Discord. So check that out if that sounds like something you'd like to be a part of. Special thanks to my 10 newest patrons: Lorgnit, Leah, murple, Darren, Kiara, medicus, Mariana, Alisha, AJ, great big James for supporting the show. Enjoy.

MIKEY: Well, I'm back. This isn't the story that I expected to be telling when I returned. I believe in last episode, episode 12, I promised, quote, 'dispatches from the frontlines of the Oldbrush Valley Energy and Resources security apparatus.' And making a promise like that is honestly a little bit rich coming from me. There are too many people involved with too many motivations for me to promise what is going to happen "next time." All of that can change before I finish getting out the sentence.

MIKEY: Which is exactly what happened. So as you will remember I had just been hired to work at Oldbrush Valley Energy and Resources. I was packing my bags. I was in good spirits, relatively speaking. I mean sure, Matt was dead and Anne was... disappeared without completing her challenge and I wasn't sure what that meant for my continued existence and I was being threatened by the gamerunners and by some other mysterious person into going to O.V.E.R., but I was genuinely looking forward to it. It was a chance to start over—pun not intended—it was a way for me to get out of the city and get some fresh air and get away from everyone and just vibe as a security guard. I wanted to do some self-growth out there, and get out of my dingy apartment which I was beginning to be able to smell and if I could smell it while living there then uh, it must have been pretty... unpleasant. [Pause.] And then I wrote 'me me stinky boi' in the script. Did I expect myself to actually say that? I guess I did say it, so past me wins this round.

MIKEY: Between my lifestyle as a self professed stinky boi, and my packing to move to O.V.E.R., there wasn't time to clean anything up when I heard a knock at the door. And the gamerunners did tell me that Anne was quote "no longer a problem" and that they had intervened to quote "ensure the initiation of the Oldbrush Valley project with the utmost immediacy" or whatever they said in that previous episode, part of me was still expecting it to be Anne, there to kill me to complete her fourth challenge. Or just say "hi". I was kind of hoping it was her when I opened the door, but I was ready for just about anything.

MIKEY: It was, in fact, not Anne who answered the door, but rather someone that I did not know. They had a slim build, medium height, and dark brown hair cropped fairly short with soft curls.

MIKEY: "You're...Mike Walters aren't you?" they asked.

MIKEY: "My reputation precedes me, I see," I said. "Please come in. If you're going to kill me, uh, I'd much prefer we do it in there. The neighbors, they have to put up with so much, you know?" I led them inside.

MIKEY: "I'm not here to kill you, Mike. My name is Jamilla Gardner. I'm working on a podcast about O.V.E.R.." they said.

MIKEY: "Well, I haven't gone to work there, yet, so I don't know that I can be much help," I replied. "Can I get you anything? I've got water? Okay I've just got water." I surreptitiously capped and hid a flat bottle of Pepsi and an expired jug of milk before they could see them, as I led them into the living room.

MIKEY: "So if you're here asking about O.V.E.R. I assume that you're from the future," I said. "When are you from?"

MIKEY: "I'm from 2023," they said, looking a bit surprised. "How do you know about time travel?"

MIKEY: "From WOE.BEGONE," I replied. "I assumed that you knew about WOE.BEGONE and that was part of why you were here."

MIKEY: "No, I'm here because someone is going to kill you tomorrow at O.V.E.R.," Jamilla replied. "You go to O.V.E.R. and then you go missing before your training starts. So my advice would be, maybe go somewhere else tomorrow."

MIKEY: I would love not to go to O.V.E.R., Jamilla. I don't have much of a choice. The WOE.BEGONE gamerunners have it abundantly clear that I am going to Oldbrush Valley Energy and Resources tomorrow. And then I explained to them everything that I've explained to you in this podcast. About WOE.BEGONE, about the challenges, about killing Matt, and the guy that showed up to help me kill Matt and him being the same guy, as you know, that showed up on my doorstep and told me that I had to go to O.V.E.R if I wanted Matt to be alive, as well as the messages I was getting from the gamerunners about how I have to go to O.V.E.R.

MIKEY: "So I go to O.V.E.R. and die or I don't go to O.V.E.R and I still die," I explained. I sat and thought for a moment. "Hey so Jamilla, I'm going to need you to set up a Google Drive that I can dump a whole bunch of data onto. On my way to O.V.E.R., I'll get an audio surveillance bug, that I can upload it to the google drive and I'll wear it to my murder. And you'll get a front row

seat to whatever happens and then you can swing by here, let's say two hours from now and show me the recording, and then we can start figuring out what's going on."

MIKEY: "I don't like the idea of sending you to your death," they said.

MIKEY: "Then this had better work and we'd better figure out what's going on," I replied. "Bring pizza, when you come back in two hours. I'm hungry and there's no food in the apartment cause I'm moving. Preferably with olives. I'm on a big olive kick right now."

MIKEY: Jamilla nodded resolutely. "Alright then, I trust you Mike. Time to get to work."

MIKEY: "I won't let you down Jamilla. I'll see you at the pizza party."

MIKEY: This is WOE.BEGONE.

[Opening theme plays.]

MIKE: Two hours later on the dot, Jamilla was back with pizza. Bless them. I was half-joking, but I really did want pizza. No olives, though. Turns out that Jamilla hates olives. [*Sigh.*] Nevertheless, I was able to push down my feelings about that and work with them anyway. There was important work to be done, so I got some green olives out of the fridge and put them on my half of the pizza. Turns out, surprise surprise, I am an excellent schemer and my plan worked without a hitch, as always. Jamilla seemed surprised by this, but they don't know me very well yet and they don't know what I'm capable of. I had successfully recorded my own murder. Jamilla saved the clip locally locally on their phone and showed it to me during this return visit. I won't play it for you here, mostly because I don't want to sit through hearing myself die again, and I'd have to do that in the edit, but the long and short of it is that a man with a thick Minnesota accent knocked on my door and shot me dead when I answered it. Very cold, wild west. So, Jamilla sat there with me on the couch with a grimace on their face while they played this clip of this Minnesota cowboy gunning me down.

MIKE: "I know who that is," Jamilla said. "Hunter Jeremiah Hartley. He works at O.V.E.R. He comes into my building all the time."

MIKE: "Seems like a nice guy," I replied.

MIKE: "Oh, he really is," Jamilla said. "He's one of the nicer people I work with, actually. He would give you the shirt off his back."

MIKE: "Well, he might not give me the shirt off his back," I said. "What did I do to him, do you think?"

MIKE: "I have no idea," Jamilla said. "That's what I'm working on right now. Hunter wouldn't do something like that. There's a reason for all of this, I'm sure of it. That's the next part of my story."

He and his colleagues run some sort of Base in Oldbrush Valley and I'm trying to gather some information about them. I have a friend on the inside. Actually, she was the one who was supposed to train you, Marissa Ng. So I'm going to use my connection to her to try and figure out what they're doing inside of the Base."

MIKE: "Sounds risky. Don't get yourself killed, Jamilla," I said. "No one else has any interest in the Keep Mike Alive Project." No one is going to take up that project in your absence if you die.

MIKE: "Oh, don't worry about that Mike. Of course I have ways of making sure I don't get killed," Jamilla said. I could see a small smirk creep through their otherwise serious demeanor. "I wouldn't be investigating this if I wasn't sure that I was 100% safe. We don't have anything to worry about. Marissa will not let me get hurt, so we won't even have to resort to my Plan B."

MIKE: Jamilla filled me in about what they already knew about Hunter's Base. It didn't have a name, just Base. How uncreative. Meanwhile I had already come up with my partnership with Jamilla, the 'Keep Mike Alive Project'. Surely they can come up with a name for their organization.

MIKE: The Base consisted of O.V.E.R. employees with fairly low-level clearance, people like their friend Marissa the Tier One security guard. They had discovered some alternate source of time travel technology and were building their own organization in Oldbrush Valley. They hadn't been there yet but they listed some members of Base that Marissa had told them about: Hunter, obviously, Eagle, Chris, Ryan—

MIKE: As you might expect this list of names set off alarm bells for me. So I started with the most important question. "Eagle? His name is Eagle?" I asked.

MIKE: "Yeah I've met him actually," Jamilla said. "And he looks like he should be named Eagle. He doesn't look like an eagle. It's hard to explain..."

MIKE: "And probably more importantly, Chris and Ryan are the names of the people who run WOE.BEGONE," I said.

MIKE: "I haven't met Chris and Ryan," they said. "What do the WOE.BEGONE gamerunners look like?"

MIKE: "I'm afraid I don't know, really," I said. "I interacted with them mostly through text. When I did meet with one of them, he was wearing a mask the whole time. I think the masks were a new thing. They kept taunting me about how I wouldn't see their faces this time. So maybe I saw their faces at one point and they went back changed it. I was so close to finding Chris's apartment at one point, but then they caught wind of that and undid all of my work. And so all I have to show for it is I know their names are Chris and Ryan. If this Base has access to the time travel tech outside of O.V.E.R. and they have a Chris and Ryan with them, I am willing to bet that they are the same guys. You need to be very careful around them, Jamilla."

MIKE: Jamilla wrote quickly but legibly in a legal pad while I spoke. “Oh, I wasn’t planning to be careful but now I think you’ve talked me into it,” they said. “There’s no risk as long as there’s no rush. I can do a days, weeks, months worth of work and come back to you here in this time period as though no time has passed at all. There’s no need to get antsy and make mistakes.” They put their pen down and sat their hands on their legal pad. “So, Mike Walters, what do we do now that we know how you’re going to die?”

MIKE: “We do it all over again, I suppose,” I said. “Well, you’ll be doing it all over again, this hasn’t happened to me yet.”

MIKE: Jamilla scrunched their face at me. “What do you mean? You know that Hunter knocks on your door and shoots you. Don’t be there when he gets there. What do we do after that?”

MIKE: “I have to go to O.V.E.R. or the gamerunners will kill me, remember?” I said. “So, what do I do? I dodge Hunter’s attack and then try to work there while he hunts me down? That’s just dying with extra steps. And especially if Hunter’s Chris and Ryan are the same Chris and Ryan that run WOE.BEGONE I am cornered.”

MIKE: Jamilla stared at me, jaw slightly open. “You’re not going to open the door and let him in, knowing that he’s going to shoot you. Your body won’t let you.”

MIKE: “I have pushed myself through worse,” I said. “And after the shootout at the Oldbrush Valley corral you’re going to come back here after looking into Hunter’s Base and Chris and Ryan and WOE.BEGONE and we’re going to trying to understand why they’re doing this, why this is happening, and what we can do to make it not happen. Got it? That’s your take away from this trip, that’s your new mission. I strongly suspect that Chris and Ryan are that Chris and Ryan. That’s your new lead. But your podcast can’t be named WOE.BEGONE because this is WOE.BEGONE.”

[Opening theme begins to play then stops abruptly.]

MIKE: I should see my confidence steeling their resolve. “I don’t suppose it would be much of a podcast if we got everything figured out by episode two,” they said.

MIKE: “That’s the spirit,” I replied. “You gotta try for six parts at least. And maybe Mike Walters writes the outro theme?”

MIKE: “Let’s focus on making sure you’re alive to maybe write it for now,” they said. “I had better get going so you can prepare for tomorrow. Do the thing with the bug like you were going to do. I’ll see if anything changes. And I might come back again to let you know what happened. But for now, I need to get away from these olives.”

MIKE: "Suit yourself," I said. We said our goodbyes and I was alone again in my apartment. Just me and my olives. And I began to prepare for my suicide mission into Oldbrush Valley. That's after the break.

[It Pulses Because It Loves Us plays]

*I hope
it's not insensitive
to want to be done with this
it has me by my throat
I really oughta go
but I'm drawn
to the middle of
the superstition so
bleed the circle closed*

*make it address me by a name
that I wouldn't give myself*

*it pulses because it loves us
bear witness to it
full-throated spirit
it pulses because it loves us
this is the end of the time
of our lives*

*it was fine, it was fine
the door darkened briefly
I was wondering if you would notice it
there was time, so much time
extending past the limits of our sight
the stone melts while we admire it
and what better way to
end unpleasant days
than to pull the curtain back and show you
how little remains to be seen?*

[Scene transitions.]

MIKE: The roadtrip across the country to get killed in cold blood was a little bittersweet, if you can believe it. I was holding out hope that Jamilla would pop in again or I'd get a call from them saying that they had figured something out and there was a new plan, but those things didn't happen. If they were going to happen, they were going to happen in a different version of these events. I was going to die, at least this time.

MIKE: Not to get too Alice Isn't Dead about it, but there's something striking about driving through the quote 'flyover states.' There are so many people in the world with so many lifeways and everyone is eking out an existence, whatever that means for them. Billions of people, each directed by their own wills, each with lives and communities and obligations, and all so minuscule when considered that way but the most important thing in the world when you're one of those people. Mike Walters is just one guy and not one with much in the way of life, community, or obligations. Small. It is a miracle that we are able to care for anyone at all. Atoms that are mostly air whose fields somehow manage to find each other and cohere. Listening to In The Aeroplane Over The Sea and driving across the country at night might have made me a little bit squishy.

MIKE: I used the audio surveillance equipment to leave little notes for Jamilla. Stuff to pass the time, stuff to entertain them, to entertain myself. Me singing Two Headed Boy at full volume whilst squishy, ideas for their podcast, little nothings, digital residue that would constitute what remained of my existence. This was going to be harder for Jamilla than it was for me. They had not been embroiled in something like WOE.BEGONE before and thinking about life or death in the way that it one has to is akin to learning another language. I wanted to give them *something*. I don't know that the gestalt amounted to anything, but it was what I could give. These messages and one final recording of myself getting shot, sputtering weakly, and then getting shot again.

MIKE: Oh, and one final gift that I put in the drive for them. I... I lied, I did go back and listened to myself getting killed. And I was able to find some audio after that and I boosted it. Looks like Hunter took a phone call right outside my door. So that's in the drive, too. I titled the files: Hope this helps.

[Recording begins.]

H [muffled through the recording]: Hey, this is H. He's taken care of. As long as we've got Flinch, I don't think that we'll need him again, but I made comprehensive notes in case we need to dig him back up, so to speak. [Laughs.] Yeah, no, I think he's done. That was the last of 'em, too. No more trouble. Make sure the young one doesn't catch wind of this. I know they got attached to each other. Should be easier for all of us with no Mike Walters around. Anyway, I'll see you in a bit to go over plans. Alright... yeah, [Laughs.] I'm excited, too. Alright, bye now.

[Recording ends.]

MIKE: I didn't understand everything that Hunter Jeremiah Hartly was talking about. I didn't know who 'the younger one' was or who he was even speaking to. But I did understand one thing. Hunter Jeremiah Hartly said that he had Flinch.

MIKE: Once the adrenaline wore off, there was an odd peace to my resignation to death. And then I would get a burst of energy, the adrenaline would kick back in, I would panic, rinse and repeat. I was exhausted from driving by the time I made it through security at Oldbrush Valley

Energy and Resources and made it to my cabin, cabin 63A. It was taken aback by how large the place was. Tier One was huge and that was just Tier One, the outskirts of the whole operation. There appeared to be at least 100 people doing what I had been hired to do, the low-level Tier One security guard. I couldn't imagine how many people it took to run the entire place.

MIKE: I unlocked the door to cabin 63A for the first and last time and stepped inside. The place was empty, just some sparse furniture and some introductory literature for me to read before going out to work. It felt full of potential. Like anything could go in there. This space could be anything. Except I knew how and when that potential was going to collapse. All potential collapses into inevitability at some point, but usually we are able to be blissfully unaware of it. At some point in your life, it was possible that you could've been an astronaut. But now you're 40 and that will never happen and there was a point somewhere in your timeline where it became certain that you'll never be an astronaut but you could never pinpoint where it is. And an infinite amount of such potentialities pass us by every second of every day and eventually and inevitably one of those is the potential of when you are going to die, a point on a timeline that was racing towards me.

MIKE: I started bringing in some of my boxes because why not? That's what I was supposed to do, had I been able to ignore the potential collapsing around me. I brought in everything. Might as well make them have to clean up after me, earn their murder.

MIKE: After I brought everything inside, I had a moment to sit there, sweaty, in a wooden chair beside my work desk and think about what was about to happen. I was going to die sweaty. It was cold outside, so it was the uncomfortable kind of sweaty that happens when you exert yourself on a cold day in your cold weather clothes and you're wearing them inside and outside because you're bringing things in and it's not like you can take them off until you're done. Sp I was sweaty and gross and about to die.

MIKE: I pondered the notion of taking a shower. Would it be worth it? Would I have time? What if Hunter barged in and killed me in the shower? I wouldn't die sweaty and gross, I would die soapy and slippery. The decision was made for me when I heard the knock on the door. The knock. I felt a separation from my mind and body as I stood up and began to walk over, shocked at myself, as though it were my destiny to do this and I were just a vessel. That was what was going to happen. I was going to open the door. There was no chance of it not happening. The potentials had already collapsed. I could see my hand reaching for the doorknob.

[Pause.]

MIKE: And then I felt the nauseating feeling of being ripped through time and space. The world distorted around me and I returned to consciousness, crumpled on the floor of a cabin. As the dizziness subsided I looked around. It looked much like my cabin but was very well cared for. It expressed what my cabin only had the potential to be. Clean, lived-in, well-decorated. A signed and framed Wilco poster on the wall in front of me.

MIKE: “Oh good, it worked,” Jamilla said, more giddy than I had ever seen them. “Welcome to my cabin, Mike. Sorry to put you through all that, but I knew exactly where you were when you opened the door so it was more reliable to transport you from there.”

MIKE: “What did you do, Jamilla?” I asked. I could feel a panic beginning to foment inside of me. “You can’t just whisk me away. If Hunter isn’t going to come after me, then the gamerunners will.”

MIKE: “Oh, Hunter got his guy,” Jamilla said. There was that sly smile again. “Hunter killed Mike Walters and successfully completed his mission.”

MIKE: “You know that I don’t understand,” I said.

MIKE: “I made an ‘iteration.’ Something that I learned from Marissa,” they said. “I moved you back in time and space extremely slightly so that there were two of you in the same time. Then I moved one of you here. So Hunter had his Mike Walters to kill and I got my Mike Walters whose life I saved.”

MIKE: “Am I the original or am I a copy?” I asked.

MIKE: “No one’s a copy,” they explained. “But you’re the one who moved so I guess you’re the original? If that helps you to think about it. What is actually important is that everyone thinks you’re dead or disappeared because... Hunter really did kill you. And that means that no one is after you anymore.”

MIKE: I sat cross-legged on the floor of Jamilla’s cabin, looking up at them. I was in uncharted territory. I was unaccounted for. “Now what?” I asked.

MIKE: “Now the real work begins,” Jamilla said.

MIKE: This has been WOE.BEGONE. Next time: the real work begins. Thanks for playing.

[Closing theme plays.]

CREDITS: This has been WOE.BEGONE. The voice of Hunter Jeremiah Hartley, excerpted from episode 108, was Gary Furlong. You can find Gary Furlong on Facebook, instagram, and Tiktok at garyfurlongvo and in this household we use every part of the Gary Furlong. Thanks for playing.