

PART ONE HUNDRED AND ELEVEN - OUTSIDE TIER ONE EPISODE 2: THE MINNESOTA COWBOY

Original transcript edited by Jenah

[BEGIN Episode 111.]

INTRO: Hey guys, quick plugs. I'm still streaming every Sunday evening over on Twitch at twitch.tv/woebegonepod where I write that week's episode soundtrack and play a video game. We are currently playing Nancy Drew: The Silent Spy and when I say we, I mean it because I really need chat for this. So come help me out over at 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 ad-free episodes, instrumentals, soundtrack albums, Q&As, director's commentaries, Movies With Michael, postcards, and more. This week I want to talk about the director's commentaries where every Sunday for 10 dollar patrons I listen to and talk about an episode of the show. We're up to episode 83 of the show. So if you want 83 episodes of me talking about what I have learned, what I think, what my process is and where we're going then consider supporting at the director's commentary level. Special thanks to my 10 newest patrons: *[REDACTED]*.

[Opening theme plays.]

JAMILLA: Hunter Jeremiah Hartley. That's the name of the man that killed Mike Walters inside of his own cabin. Hunter Jeremiah Hartley. I played the clip over and over. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. If you listen back to episode one, you'll hear me say that I "recognized his voice." Of course I recognized his voice! He introduces himself as "Hunter Jeremiah Hartley" in the clip. I was, frankly, too rattled by this revelation to fully collect my thoughts for the podcast. Hunter Jeremiah Hartley was no stranger to me the first time I heard that recording.

JAMILLA: Hunter Jeremiah Hartley is a Tier Two security trainee and one of the nicest people that I've come into contact with at O.V.E.R. He's sort of a dadly type around the Interfacing office where I work. He's in his 40s, so he's a bit older than me and most of my coworkers and he's always making sure that everything is going well for us. I remember one day, my parents called me while I was at work to tell me that my childhood dog was being put to sleep. Hunter was in the office that day and I remember how he consoled me. He pulled out his wallet and showed me an old picture of a golden retriever that had been *his* childhood dog. He explained that she died over 20 years ago and he still kept that picture to remember her. He said that the memories would hurt, but that was because they were such beautiful memories to begin with. And that the hurt would be replaced with something else. Not "joy," per se, but a warm emotion with a deep color to it. A lot of people attempted to console me that day, but Hunter Jeremiah Hartley is the one that I remember when I think back on it now.

JAMILLA: The Hunter that I knew, the one that would carry spiders out of the building instead of killing them, did not seem capable of killing Mike Walters, but the recording is unambiguous. You

hear the gunshots, then you hear Mike go down and Hunter leave. I have this recurring impulse that I've misunderstood something, that I jumped to the wrong conclusion, but in reality, there is only one conclusion to draw: Hunter Jeremiah Hartley killed Mike Walters.

JAMILLA: I knew from talking to Marissa— that's my loud security officer friend that broke into Tier Two with me— that Hunter and some of his co-workers had a Base of their own somewhere else in Oldbrush Valley. And I know that you don't set up a Base of operations like that unless you are willing to engage in the same sort of unsavoriness that an organization like O.V.E.R. regularly participates in. It is a bloody sort of business. So, it logically follows that Hunter isn't some sort of naive pacifist, no matter how sweet he might seem. But even if I had overlooked his killer instinct, that doesn't explain the connection between him and Mike or how he was able to so coldly go about killing him. Mike was new to O.V.E.R. How did he factor into this at all?

JAMILLA: I suspected that if there were any answers to be had, they would be at Hunter's Base. My understanding is that his Base is building a parallel technology to rival O.V.E.R.'s and has some of that capability already. With that technology comes the need to obtain and secure power. The Base seemed like a likely motivating force for many types of violence. Perhaps there was a version of events where Mike had a Base of his own and the two Bases attacked each other and Mike lost. This is pure speculation, because speculation is all that I have at this point.

JAMILLA: This isn't a story that is going to come together easily, but I am determined to see it through. If the answers were at the Base, then I was going to find them. And the easiest way to do that was— drumroll please— to volunteer to work for them. I'll figure out why this happened to you, Mike. I dug you back up. I owe you that much.

JAMILLA: Oh, um— Mike's here, by the way. Say hi, Mike!

MIKE: *[Away from mic]* Hi, Mike.

JAMILLA: I'm Jamilla Gardner. You're listening to Inside Tier One Episode 2: The Minnesota Cowboy. Stay with us.

[Inside Tier One theme plays.]

JAMILLA: A lot has happened since episode 1. As you might remember from that episode, Mike told me to meet him two hours after our initial meeting and to bring pizza and his secret recording of what happened to him. After checking the recordings, I traveled back to two hours after our initial meeting for the pizza party. I filled him in and... we decided that there was still no new course of action available, that Mike was going to have to die *again*. Mike was going to just... stand there and let "the Minnesota Cowboy" as he called Hunter shoot him dead. Sidenote: Mike talks about cowboys a lot. I haven't figured out why yet. He fell asleep on the couch last night watching Unforgiven.

JAMILLA: After the pizza party, I quietly made up my mind to double cross Mike. I was not content to sit back and let him die. I had a trick up my sleeve that I learned from Marissa Ng. A time travel party trick called “iteration.”

JAMILLA: Here’s how iteration works, at least based on what I’ve been told. Time travel doesn’t work in neatly closed loops. You don’t disappear or explode or something if you see yourself in a past time period. If you go back in time, you will exist alongside yourself, essentially creating two of you. There was another Jamilla in Mike’s time period who had no idea I was there, minding their own business. By sending someone a split second back in time, you will create a scenario where there are two copies of one person in the same time period. I knew where Mike was going to be when he opened the door to his cabin the day he was murdered, so I broke back into Tier Two with Marissa and we sent an iteration of Mike back to my cabin in my present. Hunter still killed a Mike and I assume that Mike died exactly the same way, though I think the different timelines must have caused interference on behalf of the recording equipment because none of Mike’s recordings made it onto the Google Drive this time around. In addition to that dead Mike, there’s another Mike in my cabin, hiding out and raiding my fridge and having night terrors on the couch every night. He doesn’t put the spices back in the cabinet after he’s done with them. Maybe Hunter had to live with Mike for a while and that’s why he decided to kill him? The thought has crossed my mind. You don’t want to know some of the concoctions I’ve seen him drink.

JAMILLA: I didn’t have a long term plan for the new Mike Walters in my possession. There isn’t a Mike Walters Park nearby where I can take him for a walk. I thought about setting him free, so that he could make a run for it and try to continue to live, but decided against it. I thought it was likely he would just end up dead again. I wanted to help him and I wanted him to help me. If I had a second pair of hands available, I wouldn’t need Marissa every time I wanted to go snooping. I had someone to do some of the heavy lifting– and some of the dirty work. I’ll admit it: Mike has killed people before and has a better stomach for that kind of job than I do. It might come in handy to have someone who is more willing to do... that kind of thing. In an emergency, of course.

JAMILLA: I didn’t tell Marissa that Hunter killed Mike. I thought that it was important that she didn’t know, for her own safety. I trusted her to side with me over him if it came to it, but I didn’t want to put her in a position where she would need to do that. That information could be dangerous for her to have. It could lead to her having to sell me and Mike out in order to protect herself. Hunter seemed quite enthusiastic about keeping Mike dead and I didn’t want to test how far he was willing to take that enthusiasm. I didn’t want to have to iterate Marissa in order to save her, too. My cabin was already feeling cramped with Mike Walters in it. There’s simply no room to hide a Marissa in there, too. And I love her to death, but I don’t think I could survive being her roommate.

JAMILLA: She was instrumental in my plan to infiltrate the Hunter Hartley Base, though. I let it slip to her that I was interested in getting involved. She raised an eyebrow about it, but I think that she was excited by the opportunity of having someone friendly working there with her. She

ran the request up the ladder and got permission to show me around, to see if it was a good fit. So, the very next day, I drove out to the address that she gave me and got a private tour of the Base.

JAMILLA: It's just called "Base," by the way. There's no real name for it. And it's basically just a big house in the middle of nowhere with some of the bedrooms converted into offices. People can live there if there's an ongoing project that requires constant attention, but I think the biggest reason that it isn't in an office building somewhere is because it is far away from prying eyes. It's a secluded compound, out in the middle of nowhere.

JAMILLA: Marissa led me through the house, which felt like a normal house, very unassuming, which was fine. I wasn't expecting any bombshell information from how many cups the coffee maker made—12. I was merely trying to worm my way in. After showing me the common areas, Marissa led me into a small home office where someone was hard at work, headphones on, completely in the zone. Marissa cleared her throat loudly.

JAMILLA: "EAGLE!" She bellowed. Eagle pulled his headphone off, clearly used to this sort of interruption. "This is Jam. They're auditioning to work for us."

JAMILLA: "Hi Eagle," I said, sheepishly. "We've met," I said to Marissa.

JAMILLA: "Oh, hey Jam," Eagle said and pushed his hair straight back with his hand. "Trying to find an office with a real everything bagel?"

JAMILLA: I chuckled politely. "Something like that." Like with Marissa, Eagle and I had met in the O.V.E.R. cafeteria. The everything bagel thing was a tiny inside joke—something to say if we ran into each other. We didn't know each other very well.

JAMILLA: "Eagle's the number two around here," Marissa said.

JAMILLA: "Well, not really," Eagle said and shrugged. "But you will be taking orders from me. I'm the Operations Manager."

JAMILLA: "He cracks the whip around here," Marissa said. "H barks the orders. Eagle is the enforcer."

JAMILLA: "Yeah, I'm such a horrible boss, Marissa," Eagle said. "Good scouting. Jam's a good find. And they work in Interfacing. We could use one of those. You'll like it here, Jam. It's a lot more exciting than sitting behind the Interfacing desk. I can tell you that much." He winked at me.

JAMILLA: "He's a nepotism hire," Marissa said.

JAMILLA: “Everyone’s a nepotism hire, Marissa,” Eagle said. “Me and Hunter go back to when we started at O.V.E.R., but we’re all friends here. You don’t wanna be behind a desk, do you? I can’t even imagine Marissa Ng being a middle manager.”

JAMILLA: “I’d manage the hell out of you,” she said. “But we should let you get back to your assassination spreadsheet. Give me an easy one this time. Let’s go Jam.” She exited Eagle’s office and I attempted to keep up with her. Marissa walks *fast*.

JAMILLA: We were quickly inside another office, this time a larger office with two computer desks facing each other. There was a person at each desk, diligently working, just as Eagle had been.

JAMILLA: “And here we have the dynamic duo, Chris and Ryan,” Marissa announced. “As you can see, they are attached at the hip. Chris, Ryan, this is Jam. They’re auditioning to work here.”

JAMILLA: Chris and Ryan were one of the reasons I was interested in seeing the inside of Base. During my pizza party with Mike, I had mentioned that there were a Chris and Ryan working at Base and he informed me that Chris and Ryan were also the names of the WOE.BEGONE gamerunners. Mike was holding out hope that they were the same Chris and Ryan, even though those are some of the most common names in the world. I promised to do my best to size them up on my tour, though I thought the connection was tenuous at best.

JAMILLA: “Nice to meet you, Jam,” the one at the desk on the left said. “I’m Chris. This is my partner, Ryan. We’re working on some field operations at the moment.”

JAMILLA: “Yes. Nice to meet you, Jam,” the one who must’ve been Ryan said. He spoke slowly and deliberately.

JAMILLA: “They play in an acoustic band together. I’ll show you their songs sometime,” Marissa said.

JAMILLA: “No, you will not,” Ryan replied, a hint of genuine seriousness in his voice.

JAMILLA: “We brought it up at *one* office party and no one will let us forget it,” Chris said.

JAMILLA: “In addition to being folk singers, these two are some of our best killers,” Marissa teased.

JAMILLA: “I wouldn’t say *that*,” Chris said. “We might be the best at sitting inside of a van watching people with binoculars.”

JAMILLA: “What do you do, Jam?” Ryan asked.

JAMILLA: “Well, I work in Interfacing at O.V.E.R.,” I said.

JAMILLA: “They can get us codes,” Marissa added.

JAMILLA: “Eagle’s going to like that,” Chris said. “Me and Ryan are Tier One, which limits what we’re able to do. The more support between the two tiers, the better.”

JAMILLA: Marissa laughed. “Don’t sell yourself short, dude. Chris and Ryan are the perfect pair. They’ve pulled off some extremely complicated missions. They’re who you go to if you need someone to navigate a convoluted timeline.”

JAMILLA: “We travel a lot for work,” Chris said. “Ryan helps keep everything straight.”

JAMILLA: “We love a good puzzle,” Ryan said.

JAMILLA: “It’s all a game. To see who can come up with a solution with the fewest amount of unintended consequences. Solving for contingencies. Like... sudoku but if you solve it wrong then everyone dies.”

JAMILLA: “We should let you get back to running your little game, then,” Marissa said. “Catch you guys on the flip. Jamilla! We march onward.” Marissa led me out of the room, before I could squeak out a “nice to meet you.”

JAMILLA: I didn’t know what to make of Chris and Ryan. *Could* they be the WOE.BEGONE gamerunners? Marissa called them “killers,” they talked about games and killing people “in the field” and managing timelines... I could see the resemblance. Mike said that he never saw the gamerunners’ faces, so this circumstantial evidence was all I had. I’d say I’d give it a... 49% chance that they are one in the same. Leaning just barely into the “doubt” category. They didn’t have the demeanor of people who ran a sadistic game, but this whole story began with Hunter Jeremiah Hartley and I knew for a fact that he was acting at odds with his demeanor. It was possible, but I don’t think Chris and Ryan would have raised any suspicion if Mike hadn’t told me about WOE.BEGONE first.

JAMILLA: We got to the end of the hallway. There was a door in the center, more like a real office door than any of the previous ones. There was a frosted glass window and a plaque that read “Hunter Jeremiah Hartley: Day-To-Day Operations.”

JAMILLA: “You wanna meet H?” Marissa asked. There was a smirk on her face, like she was suggesting something that we shouldn’t be doing.

JAMILLA: “Uhhh... I guess so?” I replied, pushing down memories of the recording. “I’ve already met Hunter, though. He comes through Interfacing almost every day.”

JAMILLA: Marissa gave me a confused look, which quickly subsided into understanding. “Oh, you don’t *know*. I guess you wouldn’t. That’s going to be a fun surprise.”

JAMILLA: “What is?” I asked, sounding more panicked than I had intended.

JAMILLA: “Oh, it’s nothing. I’ll let him explain it to you,” she said. I did not appreciate the ambiguity.

JAMILLA: Marissa knocked on the glass portion of the door. “You free, H? Jamilla is here.”

JAMILLA: “Send them in,” Hunter’s trademark Minnesota voice boomed through the door. “And go take a break fer Christsake, Marissa. You’ve been running around all dang morning. I’ll talk to Jamilla one on one.”

JAMILLA: My survival instincts majorly kicked in. I could feel myself sweating. I was walking into a showdown with the Minnesota Cowboy. I thought about making a run for it or telling Marissa what Hunter had done. I had to get out of there. I felt jumpy, like I could leap through the ceiling of the Base and fly out of there. But instead I nodded at Marissa, let myself into Hunter’s office, and closed the door behind me.

JAMILLA: Hunter was immediately warm and welcoming, leaned back in his leather office chair, casual. “You must be Jamilla Gardner! Have a seat. Marissa told me you were coming. She talks about you all the time! It’s so good to finally meet you.”

JAMILLA: I took a seat in the comfortable leather guest chair across from him, body on autopilot. “Hunter, it’s me. It’s Jam,” I said. “From Interfacing...” I trailed off as I noticed that something wasn’t how I remembered. The Hunter that I knew had a scar across his face, one that could not easily be covered up, one that Hunter never covered up for as long as I knew him. This Hunter had no such scar.

JAMILLA: “Ope! Sorry. Let me explain,” Hunter said. “The Hunter that you know is the Tier Two trainee. There are actually a few of us here in this timeline for work. We’re all “iterations” of each other from different points in time. I don’t know if you ever have to deal with that in Interfacing. Your Hunter is the baby of the family. There’s four of us kicking around this time period right now. You’ll get to meet ‘em if you join us here. So... nice to meetcha. I’m H.”

JAMILLA: “Hi... H,” I managed to get out. “There are... four of you?”

JAMILLA: “Oh yeah,” H said. “But you’ll mostly be dealing with me. I’m in charge of day-to-day operations here. The other Hunters pop in sometimes to make sure that everything is ship-shape, but Base is my responsibility. Did Marissa give you the rundown of what we’re doing out here?”

JAMILLA: “I think I’ve got a good idea of what you’re doing,” I replied. “You have the same technology as O.V.E.R.? Where did you get it?”

JAMILLA: “Afraid I can’t tell ya,” H replied. “We operate on a need-to-know basis around here. Safety purposes. I’m sure you understand. There are a buncha rules around here to make sure nothing goes wrong.”

JAMILLA: “Sounds just like O.V.E.R.,” I said. “Need-to-know info and a bunch of rules? I can handle that.”

JAMILLA: “Oh, our operatives are safer than the operatives at O.V.E.R. doing the same work, that’s for sure,” he said. “It’s a dangerous job, but no one here is expendable.”

JAMILLA: “Marissa brought up assassins and stuff like that on the tour,” I said. “Do you really kill people here?” I looked side-to-side, as though I were checking to make sure no one would hear me breach the subject.

JAMILLA: H sighed and then chuckled lightly. “That explains why you’re so tense. I bet Marissa made it sound like we’re all James Bond out here. I won’t lie to you, Jam. When I say it is dangerous work out here, I mean that there are scenarios where it is kill or be killed. But we take all of our missions extremely seriously and have the best operations management in the business. I’ve been working with Eagle for years and he’s never made a fatal mistake. We have never permanently lost a member of the team.”

JAMILLA: “I’ll be more blunt,” I said. “Do you have missions designed with the express purpose of killing people?”

JAMILLA: “We do,” H said. “It is an unfortunate consequence of what we are trying to do. But, as with everything else, we have very strict policies. We run a death-neutral operation here. That means that we will only kill someone if it will save the life of at least one other person. And if it saves more than one person, that doesn’t carry over to the next mission. So, for instance, if killing one guy saves fifteen-hundred people— and that really happened to us, by the way— that doesn’t mean we get a spare fifteen-hundred kills we don’t have to worry about. The counter resets every time. Each mission is independently death neutral and we are strict about that.” He was quiet for a moment, studying me. “Is that something you are willing to be a participant in? It’s definitely not for everybody.”

JAMILLA: I adjusted my posture in my chair. I caught myself absentmindedly bouncing my knee and stopped it. “It’s not something that I’ve ever had to do before... but I want to do it. I want to be a part of your Base.”

JAMILLA: “If Marissa trusts you, I trust you,” he said. “And if anyone can get you into fighting shape, it’s her. You can get started with training on Monday, if that works for you.”

JAMILLA: “That does work for me,” I said.

JAMILLA: “Excellent. Glad to hear it,” H said. “I like you, Jamilla. There’s something professional about you. It’ll be nice to have you around. Keep the lollygaggers in line.”

JAMILLA: “I seriously doubt that anyone can keep Marissa in line,” I replied.

JAMILLA: “She’s a loose cannon, that’s for sure,” he said, “But she straightens up when it’s time to get down to business. It’s impressive. Welp, that’s all I had. Do you have any questions for me?”

JAMILLA: “Just one, I think,” I said. “Marissa introduced me to Eagle, Chris, and Ryan. Is that everyone?”

JAMILLA: “There are a few more people,” H said. “You met the field team. There’s a couple people doing management, IT, stuff like that. You’ll meet the whole gang eventually.”

JAMILLA: “Cool. Well, it was nice meeting you, H,” I said.

JAMILLA: “Nice to meet you, too, Jam,” he said. “I’ll see you on Monday.”

JAMILLA: We said our goodbyes, I left H’s office, said a quick goodbye to Marissa, and drove back to O.V.E.R.

JAMILLA: I sat down with Mike to get his input about what I had learned.

MIKE: I still think that you should have recorded it. We’ve still got the audio bug.

JAMILLA: I wasn’t going to barge in there and start recording the top secret gathering of time travel assassins, Mike. Besides, the bug didn’t work last time. You’ll have to rely on my steel trap memory. What did you think of Chris and Ryan?

MIKE: Umm, obviously they’re the WOE.BEGONE gamerunners. Sudoku but everyone dies? That’s what they were making me do. It’s like I’ve always said. You can never trust a folk duo. Simon and Garfunkel were CIA operatives, you know. You need to be careful around them, Jamilla. You don’t know what they are capable of. But we need as much intel as we can get. Can you hack their computers? Like, carefully hack them?

JAMILLA: I don’t know how to “hack” anything.

MIKE: Oh It’s easy. I learned a lot when I was researching WOE.BEGONE. I’ll show you sometime. [**JAMILLA:** Uh huh] But that’s for later. Let’s talk about the rest of the tour.

JAMILLA: “H” is one of four Hunters.

MIKE: Yeah, H is the one that killed me. If you boost the audio you can hear him make a phone call after he leaves the cabin. I put a boosted version of it in the Google Drive but it's missing now? Oh actually, I went to download it on my phone and I might have removed it instead. Remove and Download are right beside each other on Google Drive, they really need to fix that.

JAMILLA: He seems to think that killing you saved someone's life. At least that was my impression. They have a policy about killing people. They only kill someone if it saves at least one other person's life.

MIKE: So this is a trolley problem situation, huh? And Hunter— excuse me— H is out there pulling the lever.

JAMILLA: Any idea who they might have saved by killing you?

MIKE: Uh, Anne maybe? I mean I hope she's still alive to be saved from me killing her.

JAMILLA: Maybe I made a terrible mistake saving you and someone's going to die because of it. You had better not kill *me*, Mike

MIKE: Hey, no promises. But I really am a little insecure about this, you know.

JAMILLA: You know I'm kidding. While I've got you: is there anything else you want my audience to know?

MIKE: Yeah Jam says they doubt that Chris and Ryan are the gamerunners. They're so obviously the gamerunners. We're going to have to do something about that. Based on Jam's description, I'm pretty sure they call him Eagle because he wears his hair pushed back. And, Jam's food is way too fancy. I tried to make lunch today while they were gone because, you know, I'm stuck here, I can't go out and get something to eat. And I don't know how to eat any of the stuff you have. Like what does "herbs de provence" go on?

JAMILLA: Lamb, chicken, anything you want really—

MIKE: Yeah I'm going to stop you right there. Lamb? I rest my case. Too fancy. And I need the people of the world to know this. There's no olives in this entire cabin. These are not humane living conditions.

JAMILLA: I'm not buying olives.

MIKE: Okay! Then I'm ordering an olive tree off the internet and planting it in front of the cabin. How long does it take to grow olives once you plant the tree?

JAMILLA: Longer than you're going to be here, surely. And you don't know how to make them edible.

MIKE: It can't be that hard. The ancients did it. You just gotta pick them and soak them in something and then you put the red stuff in the middle and then you're done. And then you have olives... [continue to ramble]

JAMILLA: It was an elucidating day and I couldn't help but be tantalized by what was going on inside of Hunter's Base. It was an exciting place to be: DIY, bleeding edge, dangerous, powerful, like they were capable of anything. A part of me wanted to explore that, regardless of whether or not it gave me the answers to the Mike Walters mystery. Nevertheless, I am resolved to focus, to get to the bottom of this. Mike's life depends on it. And, like H said, I'm a professional.

JAMILLA: Thank you for listening to Outside Tier One. I'm Jamilla Gardner. And next time, I'll show you what it looks like to be an operative working for the Minnesota cowboy. Until then, stay safe.

[Outside Tier One end theme plays]

JAMILLA: Outside Tier One is a Drop Stitch Audio Production. Created by Jamilla Garner. 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 and Mike Walters for their help with this episode.

[Closing theme plays.]

CREDITS: This has been WOE.BEGONE. The voice of Jamilla Gardener was Rae Lundberg. Check out their podcast [The Night Post](#). Thanks for playing.

BLOOPER (JAMILLA): Hunter Jeremiah Hartley. Hunter Jeremiah Hartley. Hunter Jeremiah Hartley. Hunter Jeremiah Hartley. Hunter Jeremiah Hartley. Hunter Jeremiah Hartley. Hunter Jeremiah Hartley. Hunter Jeremiah Hartley.

BLOOPER (JAMILLA): There's another Mike in my cabin, hiding out and **[MICHAEL: *[singing Outlaw Ty]* scraping by]**