

EPISODE ONE HUNDRED AND SEVENTY EIGHT - A SMALL CATTLE DRIVE IN A SNOW STORM

Original transcript edited by Theo and reviewed by Jenah

[BEGIN Episode 178.]

INTRO: Hey, guys, quick plugs. Happy Halloween. This Halloween marks the fourth year that we have done *Nine To Midnight*, which is our annual horror audio drama anthology compilation. This year is a very special one with more audio drama shows contributing to the feed than ever. *Nine To Midnight* is available on its own feed, so search for "Nine To Midnight" wherever you get your podcasts. I contributed a story, and many other audio drama creators that you know did as well, many of whom have voiced characters on the show. I hope to see you there.

Or to see you over on Twitch at twitch.tv/woebegonepod, where every Sunday I write that week's episode soundtrack and then hang out and play a video game. My Halloween stream was— I'm going to call it haunted. Haunted is the nice word for what happened. I caused hundreds of dollars of my own property damage, and then we beat a Nancy Drew game. So next time is going to be something brand new. So check that out at twitch.tv/woebegonepod.

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 commentaries, Movies with Michael, postcards, corkboards, and more. This week, I posted a director's commentary for last year's *Nine To Midnight* submission, "That's How I Beat Shrek," so be sure to sign up at the \$10-and-up level if you'd like to hear that and if you'd like to help me replace hundreds of dollars of property damage that I caused on stream. That is patreon.com/woe_begone.

Special thanks to my ten newest patrons: [REDACTED] for supporting the show. Enjoy.

[Warning: This episode contains descriptions of violence. Listener discretion is advised.]

[Opening theme plays.]

[We hear the roar of a campfire and the howl of the wind on a frigid night outside Yellowknife, Canada. 38 is cooking over the camp stove.]

38: Ya know, 21 says this whole place is gonna be a city in 50 years. I ain't talkin' about a rinky-dink one-horse-town, neither. A whole city with millions of people in it and an arcade with a DDR machine. It sure as hell ain't gonna have no path for a cattle drive no more.

XL: 38, we can barely build a fire big enough to cook out here. How is someone going to build an entire city?

47: Yeah, 38. You know as well as I do that 21's full o' shit. Ain't no iteration's been that far in the future, and ain't nobody'd wanna propagate that kinda information back to a lowlife like him. You know all us iterations got a penchant for tall tales.

XL: Well, devil's advocate here, 47. 21 is always on the hunt for old arcade machines. Maybe he did some future scouting and tracked one down in... Yellowknife in, what, would that be 2070-something?

47: That lumberin' oaf ain't got no use for a DDR machine! But, speakin' o' huntin', you gonna eat the rest of that moose meat, XL? 38 and I hunted hard for that, and the more we eat, the less we gotta pack out.

38: That's 500 pounds o' raw meat, XL. So eat up.

XL: It feels like I've eaten 500 pounds. If I eat any more, I will be useless on the cattle drive tomorrow.

38: Hell, why'd they even call ya XL if ya can't eat your fill?

XL: Ugh, 38, I'm sure that someone has explained this to you before. XL isn't short for "extra-large," it— it's Roman numerals. It's less confusing than all of you guys getting numbers and all of us getting numbers, too? Like, Michael 40 is probably out there somewhere, right? So, you wouldn't want to get him confused with me, would you?

38: I sure as hell hope 40 ain't out there somewhere. I killed that sucker myself.

47: 38, you did not kill 40. No one knows who killed him.

38: I did. 40 was a jackass. Got what was comin' to him.

XL: They can't all be winners, I guess. Uh, did you see the report this morning? Uh, 47, I put it out with your coffee?

47: I ain't readin' that. That's a dang connectivity trap if I ever saw one.

XL: Right, well, the reason that I bring it up is that 40 is definitely not the only jackass Michael iteration. There's a new propagation report, and it indicates that Base might finally have decided that they are completely through with Tex. Like, entirely done.

38: Speakin' of fuckin' trouble. Geez.

47: *[Scoffs.]* What's that mean, 38? You lose all your money to him?

38: Yeah. Somethin' like that.

47: Hey, 38. Didn't you used to have a Mikey iteration that used to tag along with ya? ...Yeah. Whatever happened to that 'un?

38: Well, speakin' o' Tex, that 'un is down there, mixed up with the rest of 'em at this point. They got a name for 'im and everything. Last I heard, they was callin' 'im Stinky and bringin' him around to Base and everything.

XL: I'm sorry to hear that, 38. Nothing good ever comes from getting that involved with Base, even if they have Calculators.

38: Oh, no. It ain't like that. I ain't missin' 'im. I was glad to be rid of him, XL. Stinky was the worst thing that ever happened to me. They can keep him. Hell, I had to trick Tex into takin' him. I played the worst poker game of my life, and acted like I didn't have nothin' else to give 'im. He thought he was gettin' somethin' special from me. I know he's wonderin' right now if he made the right choice. If'n he's still alive, that is.

47: You think that Stinky was Tex's undoin' in all this?

38: I'll just say it wouldn't surprise me. I've tried to stay far away from that shitshow. Stinky ain't normal folk. He'll put on this show in public, but when it's just you and him, he's like one of them little kids in a horror movie. Spooky.

XL: Well, 38, we're all gathered around the campfire. It's a perfect time for a spooky story.

38: I'd be glad to, pard. [*Reminiscing.*] It was a night exactly like this one. Well, except we was in the Great Plains and not outside in the tundra in a snowstorm. But there was an asshole iteration that I didn't wanna deal with, so it was kinda like tonight. I had a farm back then. Name on the deed and everything. Weren't nothin' big, just a place to call mine. I finished up work for the day, made dinner, got into my pajamas, turned out the lights, and got cozy in bed. As soon as I got comfortable and looked up, I saw someone starin' dead-eyed at me at the foot of my bed. It was—you guessed it—Stinky. He didn't say nothin', didn't move. He was just starin' at me like he was my sleep paralysis demon. Stinky didn't live in the house with me. He lived over in the bunk house, 'cause I didn't trust him in my house at night. I must've forgotten to lock the door. Anyway, he spooked me, and I musta jumped up about ten feet when I saw 'im. He didn't react. He just kept starin' until I asked why the hell he was in my room.

Accordin' to Stinky, he was asleep in the bunk house and heard a noise outside. When he went out there, there was a fox in the chicken coop. I didn't let Stinky have a gun, 'cause I didn't trust him, so he didn't have no way to defend the chickens. So, he said he came up to the house. Now, that didn't explain why he was starin' at me at the foot of my bed, but if he was tellin' the truth, there weren't time to dissect his story. So, I jumped up, grabbed my shotgun, and ran out the door. I didn't stop to grab anything—not my phone, not a flashlight, nothin'. I didn't even put my shoes on. I was racin' against the clock. The fox weren't gonna wait up for me before making

a meal outta my chickens, and I didn't know how long Stinky took walkin' around bein' creepy before he ended up in my room. So, I ran across the farm in my pajamas and bare feet in the mud.

XL: I'm imagining those striped pajamas and one of those hats with the little cotton ball at the end? I don't think I've ever actually seen those in real life.

38: You're darn tootin', that's what I was wearin', pilgrim. It was exactly like that. So, I ran up to the chicken coop, itchin' for a fight, and I didn't find one. I looked high and low for fox sign, but there weren't no prints. The chickens weren't even scared, and if there had been a fox anywhere, they would've been freaking out. So, I was dang confused. I turned around to ask Stinky what was goin' on, only to discover that Stinky weren't even there. He didn't follow me back out to the chicken coop. Now, Stinky weren't a good worker, and he's scared of the shotgun, and the chickens, and foxes. So, I cain't say I was surprised. I headed back up to the house, barefoot and wide awake in the middle of the night, ready to give Stinky a piece of my mind.

I went to open the front door, and it was locked. I know I didn't lock it, 'cause I was in a dang hurry. I didn't even get my boots on. I didn't keep a spare key outside, 'cause I didn't want Stinky comin' in at night and doing this exact thing. I rattled the door, and I called out to Stinky, but all I got in response was silence. I gave up after a minute, and started walkin' around the house to the back door.

I walk walkin' along the side of the house, callin' out to Stinky, when suddenly I heard a growl coming from behind me, back toward the chicken coop. Could I miss the fox? No. This was louder, loud enough to reach me all the way at the house. It was deeper than any sound a fox could make, or a bear, for that matter. It weren't the sound o' any critter I ever heard.

Suddenly, I felt my foot slip downward into the dirt. There was a loud *snap*, and I fell to the ground. A searing pain went through my leg. It took me a second to understand what was happenin'. I was in a dang bear trap, one of those old-timey ones with the sharp teeth. Now, I don't own no bear traps. They're illegal most places, for one. So, wherever this bear trap came from, it didn't come from me. And it was much too heavy for me to pry apart with my bare hands. Pun intended.

So, I'm standin' there, howlin' in pain, callin' out for Stinky or anyone to come and rescue me. I howled so loud and so long that I lost my voice and couldn't catch my breath, so I sat down, distraught, unsure what to do. It was while I was sittin' down that I realized that the whole place had gone quiet. Not normal farm quiet. You can always hear critters. But every critter for miles had got the memo that it was time to shut up. And that put my hackles up. As much as I wanted to sit and simper, I held my breath, and listened to see if I could tell what was goin' on.

I looked back towards the chicken coop. There was a figure standin' there, dressed in all-white, seemingly illuminated just by the clothes. I squinted through the dark to look at it. Was... that...

Stinky? ...N-No, it couldn't be. Stinky couldn't have made that sound. That weren't what he was wearin'. Stinky was wearin' the rags I gave 'im.

I didn't call out to him. I was afraid. I pulled helplessly at the trap around my leg, blood seeping through the jaws of the trap. It was useless. If a bear couldn't pull these jaws apart, I didn't stand a chance. Back when folks used bear traps like those, ya had to get 'em set by a machine at the store and carefully bring 'em home so you didn't set 'em off. I was stuck there. I thought I heard footsteps. I thought I heard the figure gettin' closer, but I didn't dare look again to find out. My shotgun had fallen outta my arms and outta reach. I couldn't cut myself free from my leg if I tried. I didn't have nothin' to sever it with.

[Drops cowboy accent and raises pitch.] "38? What are you doing out here?" *[Resumes normal voice. For the rest of the story, 38 pitches his voice higher and without the cowboy accent when narrating as this character.]* The voice was directly behind me. I jolted, pullin' on the trap's chain and sending a shock of pain through my whole body. It was Stinky. "What are you doing out here, Cowboy? Oh— Oh, no! You're really hurt!" His tone was not convincin'.

"What do you mean? You told me there was a fox out here! You locked the door! I stepped in this here trap 'cause I got startled by a sound while I was walkin' around back 'cause o' you!"

Stinky looked puzzled. "I have no idea what you're talking about, 38. I was in bed in the bunk house, and I heard you howling. Have— Have you been s— sleepwalking? Maybe you heard your own cries reverberating across the farm? ...Come on, let's get you out of here."

I didn't trust Stinky. I never did. But I needed out of the trap. He helped me get free, and then helped me limp inside.

"That trap was just a warning," he said.

I stared at him, crazed look on my face. "A warning!?"

Stinky acted like he hadn't said anything, like he didn't know what I meant. He helped me get bandaged up, and I had to book an appointment for corrective healin' in order to save the leg. That annoyed me, 'cause it put me back on the radar.

From that night on, Stinky swore he never come to the cabin that night. That he didn't know nothin' 'bout no bear trap. That I musta sleepwalked outta the house and stepped on it. I took him to the poker game with Tex a week later. I racked my brain for any proof that anything I saw was real, but I still don't got nothin'. But I know the difference between bein' asleep and bein' awake. And what I saw was just as real as the three of us around this campfire tonight.

XL: That's assuming that we're not a figment of your imagination, too. Right, 38?

38: Supposin' that, yeah.

47: That was one hell of a story, 38. Now, how much of it was true?

38: You'll have to figure that out by your own dang self, 47. Now... anyone else got any stories? I ain't ready to hit the hay just yet.

XL [*amused*]: You know, it's funny that you offloaded him to Tex like that. We've had our fair share of run-ins with Tex. Right, 47?

47: I'd say that Tex and Stinky are a perfect match for one another.

38: Well, if ya wanna tell a story about Tex, I'm all ears, pard. I never liked that one. He ain't no better than 40. I just tried to keep the hell outta his way.

47: You wanna take the reins on this 'un, XL? You was the one that saw what you saw, after all.

XL: Oh, yeah. I can do that.

38: You gotta finish your dang moose meat 'fore you go tellin' stories, XL.

XL: I am so thankful for the food, 38, but if I eat anymore, I'm going to pop.

47: Oh, just start yappin'. 38'll forget all about the dang moose meat once ya get talkin'.

XL: [*Chuckling*.] Oh, yeah, he will. You're not gonna believe me, 38, but that's okay. Uh, I don't think I believe you about Stinky teleporting around or whatever.

38: Believe what ya want, pard.

XL: Yeah, I think I will. Okay, so [*Claps once*.] it was a night exactly like this one. Except it was during the day, and also it was in Texas, it wasn't snowing, there weren't any cattle, no one was doing a cattle drive, no one was making me eat more moose meat than I could handle, so basically exactly like tonight. So, as both of you know, Tex advertises these little poker games that any of the iterations can go to if they know the time and place, and the place is always the back of the Outpost. Personally, I think that putting yourself out there like that is asking for trouble, so I'm not surprised that he's finally bitten off more than he can chew.

38: Tex is like that 'cause he was doted on by one of the Tys. He misses havin' that attention.

XL: Yeah, that scans. So, 47 and I spent our fair share of time in Texas, attending these little poker games.

47: If'n Tex wants to hand me all his cold hard cash, who am I to say no?

XL: We were sort of regulars at these poker nights. We weren't there every time, but if we missed one, Tex would come up and ask us why we missed. We kept our distance as well as we could, but that meant that we were still regularly in contact with him. Anyway, as you know, November 20th is Bluster's Day down in that town that I think is named "Bluster's Grove" at this point? And there are festivities that go on all day and all night, most of them centered around the Outpost. So, the tavern is closed on November 21st, because the 21st is the unofficial cleanup day where everyone resets back to normal, the Outpost does a deep clean, and everyone tries to get over their terrible hangovers that they got while trying to go shot-for-shot with a horse.

38: Bluster ain't drinkin' all those drinks, ya know. It's one o' Tex's party tricks.

XL: Yeah, everyone knows that (at least I hope so). But, we let Tex get away with it because it's such a fun time. 47 and I rented a car when we were down there, because something happened to 47's truck, and Bluster's Grove is not a pedestrian-friendly town. Everything is spread out, and there are basically no sidewalks.

47: Truck needed a whole new transmission. Cost me a pretty penny, but I paid for it outta my poker winnings.

XL: Tex was paying for rounds for everyone all night, so I got way more drunk than I should have. Don't get me wrong, I've been told that I had a wonderful night and I only made an ass out of myself a little bit, but all I remember is Bluster doing a keg stand and then nothing else for the rest of the night. I woke up back where 47 and I were staying, and I realized that, shit, I must've left the keys to the rental back at the Outpost? This was annoying, but nothing too worrisome. The people of Bluster's Grove are a friendly lot. I wasn't worried about the keys going missing; they'd be behind the bar waiting for me. The car was our only means of transportation, though, so I had to walk all the way back to the Outpost, which was four or five miles, and there was a chance that I could get all the way to the bar and the doors would be locked.

47: I was hoppin' mad, I'll tell ya that. I sure as hell weren't goin' with him.

XL: So, I sat out on my own, on foot. It was late November, so the weather wasn't too terrible, but I was super hungover, and I found myself getting tired quickly. I made it about two-and-a-half miles, and started really feeling beat. It was right at that moment that I saw someone I thought was Tex ducking into a building on the side of the road. It was this warehouse-looking thing, nondescript building. His truck was in the driveway. And so I thought to myself, "Oh, great! There's Tex. I can go in there, and I'll explain what's going on, and he can give me a ride to the Outpost, and I won't have to walk the rest of the way there."

38: I wouldn'ta done that, pard. Tex is trouble.

XL: Well, I know that now! But I thought that he was slightly less trouble back then. So, I walk over to the building; it didn't have any signs on it, or anything. If it had been a business, it was

long closed. So, I opened the door and stuck my head in. ...And I was not prepared for what I saw inside. Real quick. 38, do you remember Paul?

38: Paul, as in Paul from the boat? O' course I remember Paul. Mike really worked that guy over. Dang, that feels like ages ago.

XL: Yeah, that Paul. I opened the door and looked inside, and Tex was gone. I think he went off into another room. The inside of the warehouse was lined on both sides with huge cages. Rows and rows of cages. And inside each cage was an iteration... of Paul.

38: Tex was iteratin' Paul? Well, what the hell for?

XL: He wasn't just iterating Paul. These iterations of Paul were all different shapes and sizes, mostly human-sized and larger. They looked ragged, disheveled. Honestly, they looked like the "duplicates" that Ty keeps around the Compound. Experimentation subjects. I knew that I was seeing something that I wasn't supposed to see. They definitely saw me, though. I could see every single one of them draw their attention to me when I walked in. It felt like hundreds of huge eyes catching me trespassing. I looked around for Tex; luckily he was still nowhere to be found. So, I made a "shh, don't tell anyone I was here" motion towards the Pauls. They seemed to understand. They all looked so melancholy, but I couldn't help them. I had flashbacks to the Compound. As soon as I could get my body to unfreeze from the fear, I got out of there, closed the door as quietly as I possibly could behind me, and bolted across the desert. I got to the Outpost in record time, and, sure enough, my keys were sitting there waiting for me. I drove about 120 miles per hour all the way back to where 47 and I were staying, and I got us the hell out of there.

47: XL didn't even tell me what was goin' on till we were already on the interstate.

38: So, did y'all ever end up goin' back to poker night?

XL: Yes, many, many times, despite my protestations.

47: I ain't just gonna leave free money on the table like that! O' course we went back!

XL: And one of the times that we went back, I actually went back to the warehouse. But... all the Pauls were gone. It had been months; Tex must have moved them.

38: Whaddaya reckon Tex was doin' with a whole warehouse full o' Pauls?

XL: Well... don't you ever wonder how Bluster got to be so big?

[There is a pause.]

38: That's one hell of a story, XL, I'll give ya that. Is any of it true, though?

XL *[slyly]*: I mean, it could be. That was the story that I told you on cleanup day. Right, 47?

47: It's mostly the same, I reckon.

XL: So, that's my story, 38. Pretty creepy, right?

38: Yup. That was a pretty good one, XL. *[Yawns.]* And with that, I think it's high time we hit the hay. We got a lotta work to do in the mornin'. Cattle to move, moose meat to pack out. We gotta be in tip-top shape. So, I'm headin' out to my tent.

47: Yup. I'll be doin' the same. See y'all in the mornin'.

XL: Good night, 47. Good night, 38. Sleep tight. Don't let the Gigantic Pauls bite.

[Closing theme plays.]

BLOOPER (DYLAN): Someone on Tumblr made a post while I was working on this episode talking about how the show confuses them a lot sometimes, and I reblogged it and said, quote, "I'm working on it." All the while, I was writing this episode with new characters who were saying things of questionable canonicity. When I said I was working on it, I'm talking about something else completely different; uh, feel free to be confused about this.

[END Episode 178.]