

EPISODE ONE HUNDRED AND EIGHTY EIGHT - _____, ??

Original transcript edited by Theo and reviewed by Jenah

[BEGIN Episode 188.]

INTRO: Hey, guys, quick plugs. *the american bison 3* is now available on all streaming services. That means Spotify, Apple Music, Deezer, others. Did you know that Deezer exists? I swear Deezer exists. The *american bison* series is an electronic experimental beat tape project that I started in 2022 and do every winter, and *the american bison 3* is this year's entry. So, check that out on streaming services. Put it on in the background while you do your homework.

I've also launched a new podcast called *The Proof Is In The Podcast*, where every episode I sit down with two voice actors, and we discuss a whole season of this show. I sat down with Jenah and Shaun Pellington, the voice of Skinner and Sax respectively, to talk about Season One. And that's available in this feed and also wherever you get your podcasts on its own feed. More episodes are coming soon, so if you want a refresher on what happens in the earlier seasons of *WOE.BEGONE*, you should check that out. It's called *The Proof Is In The Podcast*, and it's available wherever you get your podcasts.

As far as my usual plugs, I'm still streaming on Twitch over at twitch.tv/woebegonepod, where every week I hang out and write that week's episode soundtrack. It's about to get fun, 'cause we're about to start February Album Writing Month. So, check that out if that sounds fun to you. 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 ad-free episodes, instrumentals, soundtrack albums, Q&As, director's commentaries, Movies with Michael, postcards, corkboards, and mor...kboards. My episode writing process begins each week with me putting themes on a corkboard. And so if you want to see those and see how they change from the beginning to the end, you should check that out. It's available to all patrons at patreon.com/woe_begone.

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

[Opening theme plays.]

MIKEY [narrating]: Dear Michael,

I guess there's no point in addressing this to you. The Michael that I know, the one from the pages written directly before these, is never going to see this. Chance makes it sound like the Michael that he knows is me. At some point, I don the cowboy hat and become Michael the Cowboy. I'm looking forward to that. Yeehaw. Chance doesn't know about you, though. The Michael in the journal. They don't know about the journal at all. But if you're long gone and I'm the future Michael the Cowboy (yeehaw), there is truly no point in addressing you. You will either

never see this, or you're the one writing it. So, I'm only writing everything down in order to get it out of me.

I've been living at Base for about a week now, and am starting to get settled in. It beats being on the run, but it has come with its own set of adjustments. Everyone here knows me, but I don't know them. I can't act how they expect me to act, and this frustrates some of them to no end. Marissa in particular keeps trying to make me remember things that we did together, things I have no memory of at all. Driving around in a golf cart and blowing things up in a tank. Chance is frustrated because that's not his real name, but I forgot his real name as soon as he said that I used to call him Chance, but also because we've, quote, "done all of this before," meaning that there was another incident where "I" didn't remember anything and had to, quote, "get my memories back," and I'm putting that in quotes because I-I don't feel like those are my memories, because I don't have them. Chance suggested "consolidating" me with someone who does remember everything, and there was a big fight about it. I'm not sure what consolidation entails, but it sounds messy and dangerous, and I'm happy to stay myself.

I am a member of something called Base now, by virtue of being picked up by Base at Sly's house. Sly was asked some questions about his involvement and then sent home. Chance has been trying to get me up to speed on who I am and how this operation works, but he seems to be pretty new at it himself. I've learned that Base is a time travel organization that is composed of employees from a place called Oldbrush Valley Energy and Resources. I think we all still work at Oldbrush Valley Energy and Resources, even though Base is moving to a new location every day. Base got their hands on some time travel technology of their own that are called Calculators, which allowed them to start their own organization. The history of Base feels pretty chaotic. Chance wants to establish some amount of stability as the new leader, starting with tracking down some members of Base that got lost during the constant moving. The other members of Base seem relieved that Chance is not as dictatorial as the previous leader, which was a guy named Mike. And, as you might have guessed, Mike is me. At least, in a sense.

There's definitely enough of me to go around. I've learned from living here that my name is Mike Walters. I kickstarted the formation of Base by poking around inside of O.V.E.R. and discovering the Calculators. Different versions, or "iterations," of me have been moving back and forth through time, which created a lot of them. I'm "Mikey" because I'm one of the younger iterations in this time period. And, of course, you are an iteration, too, Michael. Uh— One of the older ones, I think.

Base has recently acquired a more powerful technology than the Calculators. They're calling it the Stinky Device, which will go down in history as one of the all-time worst names for a superpowered technology in all of history. I can see on Chance's face that he feels like an idiot every time he says "Stinky Device." Marissa flat-out refuses to call it that. It's called that because it was brought to Base by a guy named Stinky, which is an all-time terrible name for an adult human being. And, of course, Stinky is an iteration of me. Just my luck. According to Stinky, I gave him that name, for which I have apologized even though I don't remember it. Stinky smells completely normal. I don't normally smell people, uh, don't put in the papers that I

smell people, but I smelled him to see whether or not he's actually stinky. And he smells... s-snormal. I wrote "snormal." Oops. Everyone here smells normal. Except Troy. Troy smells super expensive. I asked him why he smells like that, and he said that he sprays this stuff on himself that costs \$500 for a seven-ounce bottle? He keeps hinting that he's a— a millionaire or something? I don't understand why Troy's galavanting around time and space in this cramped, little house with us when he could be on a yacht.

Base could be operating out of a mansion at this point, but I think we're in this house for sentimental reasons. We've lost a lot of members of Base; maybe we're staying in this house like we would if we lost our pet dog, in hopes that they'll remember what it looks like and find their way home. We're about to go out on a mission to find one of them named Edgar; maybe we should just put some of our clothes that smell like us on the back porch with some food.

The Stinky Device is capable of working miracles, by which I mean no one is sure how it works. It's more complicated than the Calculators, which is another piece of technology that no one at Base is completely sure of how it works. Chance and Marissa have done enough tinkering around with it in order to do some rudimentary tasks, but it is obviously capable of more. It's like that big tabletop cooking machine that we have in the kitchen that's like an air fryer and a steamer and a pressure cooker all in one, but no one knows how to use the rest of the settings, and so we're just air frying everything. Or like if you were a caveman and someone handed you a computer. You might be able to click around and find the website that Troy's getting his \$10,000 cologne from or whatever, but you aren't going to figure out that the whole thing is powered by 1s and 0s switching at incredibly fast speeds. How could you ever figure that out unless someone taught it to you? And the Stinky Device is more complicated than that. It's probably using some quantum computing technology that hasn't been invented in 2025, so no one has a chance of understanding it. Stinky doesn't understand it either, even though it's named after him. Stinky doesn't understand much, but not understanding the Stinky Device is not one of his shortcomings. It's impossible to understand without more information.

Stinky is not the mastermind behind his namesake. In fact, he's kind of an airhead. This worries me, because Stinky is an iteration of myself. He looks exactly like me. He's my age. He's me, for all intents and purposes. We could disguise ourselves as each other. His idiocy is either a coping mechanism or an act. Stinky wasn't an original member of Base. He was working with a guy named CANNONBALL, who was giving him orders. He's here because he got captured after showing up and trying to capture Base with his Stinky Device. It was supposed to work automatically, and, when it didn't, Base captured him and seized the Stinky Device for their own purposes. It is unclear how such a powerful device was able to land so easily in our hands, and there is much conjecture about it. According to Stinky, anyone else who challenged him was severely injured and ultimately defeated.

The speculation over "why us?" has become contentious, and leads me to our next Mike iteration housed here at Base. His name is Mike Walters, and he was running Base before Chance got the job. Mike established controversial, new operating procedures, namely that Base must move to a new location every day for security purposes. Mike is the reason that we

need to track down members of Base that got left behind in the move. Chance also suspects that Mike is the reason that Stinky was not able to use his Stinky Device to capture us and bring us to CANNONBALL. CANNONBALL was not the source of the power of the Stinky Device, either, though. They were getting their technology from a mysterious mastermind named FLINCH. No one knows who FLINCH is, and no one has ever seen him. He's like a spirit or a god, pulling the strings behind the scenes. He is a force of nature that everyone has to react to, because nobody knows who or where he is in time or space.

Chance thinks that the reason the Stinky Device didn't work on us is because Mike is FLINCH. If Mike is FLINCH and FLINCH controls the Stinky Device, then Mike could have simply not allowed Base to get captured. This made intuitive sense to me—there's a superpowered weapon created and controlled by one guy, and it works on everybody but then suddenly doesn't work on us? So, who else but that one guy? This is not how these comments were received by the rest of the group. Chance's suggestion has been quite contentious among the other members of Base. Mike might be misguided and foolhardy and dictatorial, but FLINCH is considered evil. If Mike were FLINCH, then it would recontextualize the years that Base has spent together with him. A lot of questions were raised. Did Mike make himself cut his own arm off to play an internet game? Is he working with the Compound, with Operose, with O.V.E.R.? Is this still a podcast? None of these questions made any sense to me, but they were very important to everyone else. Mike being FLINCH would be a stunning betrayal to Base. But it's all Chance's conjecture. There isn't any proof. There's only the sole piece of evidence that no one has been able to account for: the Stinky Device did not work on Base, even though it has worked on everyone else. No one has been able to explain why its state-of-the-art security features didn't work on us when Mike was in the room. Mike, to his credit, has categorically denied any of this. He's still here, by the way. He's being kept as a prisoner—for being a dictator, not for being FLINCH. Everyone agrees he was a dictator.

While Chance and Marissa have been preoccupied with serious matters like retrieving lost members of Base, I've been spending my time with a group that I've been calling the Empty Heads (I haven't been calling them this to their faces): Troy, Stinky, and MDawg. They don't take themselves as seriously, and that makes them more approachable. Stinky and MDawg are iterations of me, and it is a bit surreal to interact with them, but they've taught me a lot about myself. I guess I'm extremely malleable. That's good news. I can be whoever I want to be. I can don the cowboy hat and become Michael the Cowboy if I want to. Yeehaw. That could be how I find my footing here, as a rough and tumble outlaw. There's room to be silly and serious within that archetype, which I appreciate. The best of both worlds. The Empty Heads don't concern themselves with where we're going or what we're going to do there. They're along for the ride, which is much less stressful than trying to figure out what Chance and Marissa are talking about. Strangely, I feel better understood by them than Marissa, who is constantly trying to get me to remember "who I am."

I should stop writing now. I'm trying to keep this journal a secret. I don't want Chance to see it and think that there's something valuable for him or Base in here. They don't know about the parts that you wrote, and I don't wanna give those away, especially not when I haven't

deciphered everything for myself. I'm getting closer, though. Living at Base and learning from Chance is giving me the language to understand what you meant. I don't trust them with that information yet. Chance is friendly, but that doesn't mean that he doesn't have sinister motivations that I can't understand because I don't know enough. I'm still keeping an eye on him before I let him in.

We're going out into the field today to retrieve a member of Base that got left behind. His name is "Edgar," and people are treating this mission like it's a big deal for me, but I don't understand why. It is my first mission, though, and I will follow up with a description of how it went. Maybe I can bring some of that cowboy energy into the field with me. Wish me luck.

Yeehaw,

Mikey

[Scene transition.]

MIKEY *[narrating]*: Dear Michael,

When I ended my last entry by saying "I'm sure I'll follow up with a description of how the mission went," there was a small voice in the back of my head saying that it was bad luck to sign off that way. But what is luck except for superstition? Things were going to go how they were going to go no matter what I wrote in the journal. It's irrational to think anything else. Still, it feels almost karmic for things to end up so differently from where I initially imagined them to be.

Everything began innocently enough. Chance called all of us into the meeting room to lay out a brief of what would happen. Edgar had been missing ever since Mike had left him behind when he took control of the Base and began moving it around. Conventional attempts to locate Edgar had failed. We tried calling his cellphone, and he didn't pick up—stuff like that. He wasn't under the couch cushions or in the last place we looked, so we were still looking. Thankfully, the Stinky Device was capable of "tracing," meaning that it could locate people based on some sort of time travel signal. No one was quite sure of the specifics. We were hoping to find Edgar in the present. This would be harder than finding Edgar in the past, obviously. If we wanted to find him in the past, we could easily find him under the couch cushions or wherever it was we last left him. But it was important to find him in the present to, quote, "preserve his iterative personhood," a technical term that I was not familiar with. Finding present Edgar would apparently prevent stray iterations from occurring, and I had seen firsthand how many iterations of a single person there could be. It would also, quote, "preserve his connectivity." Everyone nodded along in agreement, including two Troys that I didn't realize existed until that meeting that I know were just as confused as I was. When I asked them where they had been since I got here a week ago, they just said "trampoline" in unison. The Troy that I knew, the one from the Empty Heads, nodded sagely. Is there a— a trampoline a-at Base somewhere? ...Not that I wanna bounce on it or anything.

The additional Troys were present because the use of the Stinky Device constituted an "all hands on deck" scenario. Everyone at Base would either be on the mission out in the field or back at Base, Calculators ready, waiting to extract us back to safety. Mike, however, was not present. He was still being held prisoner wherever Chance was keeping him. I still hadn't seen him in person. The more technical aspects of the Stinky Device are a mystery to everyone involved. Chance has figured out, quote, "tracing," to the point where we can ask it to find Edgar, and the Stinky Device will take us to him, but we won't know where that is until we are already transported there. That explains why Base seemed surprised when they found me at Sly's house in 2022. They didn't know that that was where or when they were going. Wherever Edgar was, we were going there. That could be someplace dangerous, somewhere that could be attacked, or even somewhere inhospitable like the middle of the ocean. In those cases, Base was ready with Calculators to extract us immediately.

Chance didn't anticipate a fight, either from Edgar or from whoever he might be with. He envisioned a mission more akin to when they showed up at Sly's house and retrieved me, just a case of a misplaced member of Base reunited with the group. It was a good way to get me acclimated to going on missions and to travelling through time and space. I had done that once before on my own when I was transported from the Rugby sign back to the house, and then several more times when Base had done its daily transports from one location to the next. That first time had been rough. I felt thrown about and nauseous. Transporting with Base was a much smoother experience. And I wasn't afraid of transporting anymore. It might feel a little unpleasant, but it would give me some experience. And I liked the idea of being experienced in the field of time travel. It made me feel smart and strong and capable, like a cowboy on the bucking bronco of time. Yeehaw.

While we weren't preparing for a fight, I wasn't being sent out alone. Marissa was going with me, which is great because she's much *fightier* than I am. In case of a shootout, she instructed me to get the fuck behind her and let her take care of it, goddamnit—though I was given a pistol. I asked Marissa if Mikey, the one she remembered, knew how to shoot a gun. She scrunched up her face and repeated, "If there's a shootout, get behind me, dipshit." Works for me.

Chance, the three Troys, Stinky, and MDawg would be staying behind at Base. Marissa and I would have a line of communication with them so that we could ask them to extract us at any time. There was also a "correction point," so that Chance could use time travel to call the whole thing off, so that it would be like it never happened in the first place. The idea of a complete correction caught me off guard. It hadn't occurred to me that there could still be more for me to not know about who I am or what I've done. I could go out on a mission and be killed, maimed, or witness unspeakable things, and then be reset so that I didn't remember anything at all. These implications nagged at me in the same voice that told me not to write in the journal that I would report back with what happened on the mission. More bad luck that I don't believe in.

There was no way to prepare for the mission, because we didn't know where we would be going. We would have to adapt on the fly. That didn't seem like it was going to be a problem for Marissa; I just hoped that I could keep up with her. They did give me one thing to prepare,

though: a picture of Edgar. It was odd to see him after hearing people talk about him all day. He looked... normal in his picture in a way that I wasn't expecting. The need to rescue him from whatever circumstance he was in had built him up in my head as an important figure. It had separated the idea of him from any sort of corporeal form. I don't know what I was expecting him to look like, but it wasn't quite like that. Like when you've heard a singer in a band on an album, and then they don't look like what you expect when you see them? It was easy in that moment to read a lot of meaning into what he looked like in his picture: kind, but serious, capable with smiling eyes. Like the coworker you go to when you really need something done, and you know that they are the ones that will actually do it instead of screwing around.

Marissa and I stood at the front of mission control. Marissa had the Stinky Device in her hand. Chance and the others were at different stations. Each station had a Calculator. Everyone was ready. Marissa smirked at me. Chance asked if we were ready. We both said yes.

Three...

"Let's go save your boyfriend, dipshit!"

Two...

My— My boyfriend?

One...

I felt the increasingly familiar feeling of time travel, the disorienting jolt of being lifted out of where I was and being placed somewhere else entirely. The headrush as my inner ear tried to make sense of what had just happened. I closed my eyes instinctively, trying to keep my balance. I had managed not to fall over the past couple of times Base had transported. I planted my feet, and waited for the dizziness to pass. Mostly, I didn't want Marissa to make fun of me for falling over.

I opened my eyes. I was still at Base. Something must have gone wrong. Maybe the Stinky Device malfunctioned? M-Maybe it was actually beginning to work again, in the way that Stinky intended, and it was thwarting us. Maybe Mike wasn't FLINCH after all, and FLINCH was intervening. Or maybe Mike was FLINCH, and the Stinky Device was thwarting us as a punishment for locking him up. I searched for answers on the face of Chance and the others. They looked shocked and confused. Troy's confusion I could rationalize, but Chance's confusion worried me. Chance didn't just look confused, though, he looked scared, alarmed, caught off guard. Something had happened.

I looked over to Marissa. She... wasn't there. I scanned the rest of the room. She wasn't anywhere.

Finally, Chance broke the terrible silence. "What the hell happened in there?" The words fell to the ground in front of me, heavy. He was angry. Angry with me.

I didn't know how to respond, but the silence felt more oppressive the longer I kept quiet. "No— No, I was— I was right here the whole time... wasn't I?" I didn't understand. W-Was this the correction that I had been told about? I didn't remember going anywhere. But, if the mission had been corrected, then... where was Marissa? If a correction was necessary, wouldn't she be back with us? Why did everyone look so worried?

"Where the hell is Marissa?" Chance demanded.

I felt dizzy again. Not from the transport.

"I-I don't understand! I-I don't— I don't remember anything. Uh— We counted down, uh. Marissa said that Edgar was my boyfriend, which caught me off guard. And then the transport happened, or I guess i-it didn't happen? And now I'm here. What do you mean, 'what happened in there?' I-I've been here the whole time. Or, a-at least I think I've been here the whole time. I-I don't remember anywhere else. ...Where's Marissa?"

"You don't remember anything?" Stinky asked. I shook my head.

"And you don't remember anything about remembering anything," he asked. I shook my head again, more puzzled this time.

"Oh, I get it," one of the Troys said. "Sometimes, when I get scared, I forget everything, even my own name. Which is why I write my name on my arm if I know I'm going to be doing something scary."

"You were in the— the place. The— The whats-it-called. The— With the— the tater tot hot do— hot dog hot do— hot hot dog guy," a second Troy said.

"Yeah, and you were like the Mikey and everything, with, like, the biscuits and gravy and the seance, like that Mikey! What happened, Chance?" the third Troy added.

"That wasn't Hunter, that was Eagle," Chance snapped. There was no levity in his voice.

"Wait, that was Eagle?" Troy exclaimed. "Eagle!?"

I didn't know who Eagle was.

"What are— What are you saying? Are you saying that I— I went back to normal?" I asked Chance.

"Yes, you remembered everything," Chance said. "You were back to normal the whole time that you were in there."

"What do you—? Where's 'there?'" I asked.

"Operose International. Marissa is still in there."

"Did we find Edgar?" I asked.

"Not exactly."

[Closing theme plays.]

[Brief start-stop of the closing theme.]

BLOOPER (DYLAN): Here's a line during the climax of the episode that I almost didn't catch. So, enjoy this.

BLOOPER (MIKEY): Edgar said Marissa was my boyfriend? Uh, the transport happened, or—

[Brief start-stop of the closing theme.]

BLOOPER (MIKEY): Uh— I've— I've been here the whole time! Uh— The only way to learn is by playing, uh—! The only way to win is by learning? Uh—! And the only way to begin is by beginning. Uh, so, without further ado, let's begin.

[Brief start-stop of the closing theme.]

[END Episode 188.]