

EPISODE ONE HUNDRED AND EIGHTY NINE - LONGYEARBYEN, SJ

Original transcript edited by Theo and reviewed by Jenah

[BEGIN Episode 189.]

INTRO: Hey, guys, quick plugs. My new beat tape, *the american bison 3*, is available on all streaming platforms. Think of it as WOE.BEGONE beats to work/sleep/study to. So, check that out wherever you stream music if that sounds fun to you. Also, my new podcast, *The Proof Is In The Podcast: A WOE.BEGONE Recap Show*, is available wherever you get your podcasts. This is a show where I sit down with some guests, and we recap a whole season of WOE.BEGONE. The first episode recapping Season One is out now, and the second episode will be coming out soon. Again, that's *The Proof Is In The Podcast: A WOE.BEGONE Recap Show*.

I'm still streaming on Twitch over at twitch.tv/woebegonepod, where every Sunday I write that week's episode soundtrack, and then we hang out and play a video game. February Album Writing Month is coming up, and I want to spend some time working on album writing month songs and listening to songs that other people are doing for February Album Writing Month. We did this last year, it was a lot of fun, come check it out, 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 episodes, instrumentals, soundtrack albums, Q&As, director's commentaries, Movies with Michael, postcards, corkboards, and morkboards. For \$15 a month, I will send you an original postcard from Oldbrush Valley with a message from one of the characters on the back. These messages, when put together, tell a larger story, and it's always a lot of fun to see people put together what's going on in the Discord. Again, that is patreon.com/woe_begone.

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

MIKEY *[narrating]*: Dear Michael,

I was suddenly somewhere else, falling. The air changed. I was outside. I landed with a strange crunch into whatever was beneath me, and then I kept falling. I was dizzy. I recognized this sensation by this point. It was the familiar spin of time travel. I was somewhere else in time, or at least space. I knew that it didn't have to be both. I hadn't been told that I would be, quote, "transported," as Base put it, though Base had been keeping me confined and out of the loop ever since the incident where we lost Marissa. Chance said that he couldn't trust me anymore, but I don't know why he'd subject me to this.

It took me a moment to understand what "this" even was. That material that I had crunched through was snow. I was in an enormous snowdrift. I could tell even before I opened my eyes that it was snow, because it was beginning to fall in on top of me, burying me inside of it. If I had stayed put, I would have been fully covered in the snow.

I stood up, still dizzy from the transport and from the distance I had traveled from where I was placed to the actual ground, which I determined to be a couple of feet, considering that the snow came up past my waist. I had never seen snow this high before, though admittedly my experiences are limited. I looked around: snow in every direction, and nothing else. There were no buildings, no trees, no landscape to speak of. Just snow and snow and snow. I'm sure that from any other vantage point this would be beautiful, but from where I was standing, it was a death sentence.

I knew that I couldn't stay where I was. Base didn't do this. Or, if they did, it was because they were trying to kill me. And so, if anyone knew where I was, they weren't going to come looking for me. No one was going to accidentally jog by on their morning run. Walking felt like an equally bad idea, though. There were no signs of civilization anywhere. Any direction I chose would be arbitrary. There was a chance that I could pick a direction and actually end up walking away from civilization, reducing my chances of survival even further. Chris McCandless was only a few miles from a highway, and he still died in that bus because he didn't know the highway was there. Which is another thing that I know instead of knowing anything about myself.

To make matters worse, I didn't have any shoes on. I was inside of Base when I was transported, and my shoes had been taken from me. I was wearing jeans and an O.V.E.R. t-shirt, both of which were wet from falling into the snow. My feet hurt terribly, and the rest of my body was quickly reaching that stage.

I had been cold in the walk-in freezer at the Sidewinder when Sly found me, but it did not approach this. That freezer was warm enough that I had a couple of hours to spare. I was wearing shoes then. I stood a chance against it. The cold I was experiencing now transcended normal perception. I could literally feel it in my bones. I felt hollowed out inside. It was immediate, dangerous, an attack.

I had to act if I were going to survive. I began by calling out for help. I felt the wind whip the words out of my mouth and into the aether. No one was going to hear me. I couldn't hear me. Worse, I could feel more heat leave my body through my open mouth. Shouting was pointless. I only had one option. I picked a direction, and began walking, more like a stumble, until I couldn't walk anymore. Then I would rest for as short of a time as I could possibly manage, and walk again. I don't know how many times I did this before I lost consciousness during one of these rests and did not get back up.

Time slipped around in half-consciousness. I might as well have been time traveling again. But, after some amount of time, and it couldn't have been long because I was alive, I heard the sounds of snowmobiles and voices calling out.

"Stinky? Stinky? Are you out here?" one voice called out.

"Bring out your dead!" a second voice added.

I didn't recognize the voices, but I recognized that name. They were looking for Stinky? As far as I knew, Stinky was at Base. Was Stinky transported out here, too? Uh, I hadn't seen him, but he could have been lost in a snowdrift, too. And if he was out here, he could be in even worse condition than I was. I tried to call out to the snowmobiles, to stand up, to raise my arms, anything at all, but the fatigue and the weakness from the cold pinned me down. The voices waxed and waned, getting closer and further, passing by me without knowing, as I slipped in and out of consciousness.

"Here he is!" It was the second voice. "Jesus Christ, Toph. You murdered him."

"Did not! Look, he's breathing. And even if I did, I'd just do a correction. You're okay though, right, Stinky?" the original voice asked.

"[Groans.]" I groaned, hoping that I effectively communicated that I was Mikey and not Stinky—please don't call me that—that I wasn't okay but that I was alive, and that this was an emergency and I needed to be taken somewhere to warm up immediately.

"You gotta stop dumping people in the middle of Svalbard, Toph! You're gonna get one of us killed, and not even in a fun way. What's the fun in freezing someone to death?"

"Shh! Ryan. Don't say where we are! Asshole," the first voice, Toph, said.

"Pshh! Like he can even hear us," the second voice, Ryan, said. "Here, help me get him up."

I heard them crunch through the snow on either side of me and grab me under the shoulders. I tried to help them stand me up, but my legs were weak, and my feet didn't want to support any weight. They did most of the work getting me over to one of the snowmobiles and putting me on the back. I felt a thick, black cloth bag go over my head.

"Come on, Toph. Seriously?" Ryan said. "He's a popsicle. He's not going to Hansel and Gretel his way out."

"Yes, seriously," Toph said. The snowmobiles were moving again. "You know how these iterations are. They're conniving. The frozen thing could all be an act. Maybe Base got to him, and this is a trick."

"Got to him? Stinky's one of them. We're the ones that are supposed to get to him," Ryan said.

"All the more reason for the bag over the head," Toph said.

"You alive back there, Stinky?" Ryan asked. "Are you gonna find our hidden ice lair and alert Base to us?"

I groaned again, this time trying to act as though I actually were Stinky, that I wasn't working for Base, and that I was in fact working for these two people, and that I fully intended to cooperate. I knew that Stinky had been sent to Base by a different organization. This must be them; one of these guys must be CANNONBALL.

"Oh, shit, hold on," Toph said. The snowmobile stopped moving. For a moment, I worried that he had figured out who I actually was.

"Are we really doing this, Toph?" Ryan asked. "Your flare for the dramatic is a bit much. It's freezing out here. I just wanna go home."

"I'm not being dramatic," Toph said. "See? On the other side of that snow bank? That's a polar bear. It really is."

"Sure it is, Toph," Ryan said. "Look, I don't think he can hear us. We don't have to do dinner theater this time. Let's just get him back."

"There really is a polar bear," Toph reiterated. "See him? Right... there."

"Hey, careful where you point that thing," Ryan said.

"I am being careful. We have to go that way. We're going to drive right up to him if I don't scare him off," Toph said.

"Okay," Ryan said. "But remember: you can only bring a hundred pounds of meat back to the wagon after every hunt. And we lost most our bullets last time you tried to ford the river."

"Shut up," Toph said. There was a moment of silence, the only sounds being the wind and the idling of the snowmobiles. Then there was the loud crack of a shotgun being fired. I bolted upright, regaining a bit of consciousness.

"See? He's running off now," Toph said.

"Hear that, Stinky?" Ryan said. "There's polar bears out here. So no trying to prison break in the middle of the night, or you'll get frozen and eaten, like a TV dinner. Good job scaring the polar bear away, Toph. Very convincing. I bought it; Stinky buys it."

They bantered like this for the entire ride back to what Ryan called the "hidden ice lair." I was warming up past the immediate threat of harm, but I was still very much disoriented, cold, and tired. The black bag over my head did little to keep me awake. I floated in this liminal state as we sped across the snow to our destination.

[Opening theme plays.]

MIKEY *[narrating]*: The hidden ice lair was large and cavernous, a huge metal dome. It felt sort of like an airplane hangar, but there wasn't very much inside of it: some computers, some big machines that I didn't recognize, and a lot of empty space. There were some reinforced windows on either side, looking out into dark, deep, solid white and blue ice. Ryan wasn't kidding. This really was a hidden ice lair, built directly into the ice.

"Alright. Hand it over, Stinky."

I had barely taken my first sip of coffee when Toph began demanding things from me. I looked down at my feet. They still felt terrible, but they weren't black or anything. Isn't that what happens with frostbite? My feet still looked normal, but they were extremely sore and stung as they started to thaw out. I'm pretty sure what happens is that ice freezes between your cells, and then the ice molecules sharp, and it cuts you up? I was so focused on this that I almost didn't notice that Toph was talking to me.

"Earth to Stinky! Where is it?"

"Where is what?" I asked. Was I supposed to have something? Wa— Was Stinky supposed to give something to him? Oh! Of course. "You mean the Stinky Device?" I asked.

"The Stinky Device?" Toph asked. I guess they didn't call it that.

"I mean, that's what they call it at Base. The— The Stinky Devi— It's named after Stinky, uh— m-me. Uh— I'm— I'm Stinky," I said.

"Yes. You know that's what I'm talking about," Toph said.

"I... don't have it," I admitted. "T-They took it away from me."

I could see Toph's face flush. "Ugh, of course they took it from you. I should have known that when you didn't make it back out."

"It's not like it matters," Ryan butted in. "You iterated him. You can't iterate any of the tech. It's programmed not to duplicate itself. Those Calculator things are the same way. The game's no fun if there's an infinite money glitch. So, Stinky here was never gonna have it with him unless you barge in and grab the real thing."

"I couldn't barge in and grab the real thing," Toph said. "Because if they knew that we had Stinky again, they would know that I can access them, and if they know that I can access them, they'll up their defenses."

"Have you considered saying pretty please? Or abra cadabra? Ooh! Speak friend and enter, that's a good one. I'm sure Base would be very understanding that you wanted to destroy their operation, subsume it into your own, and probably kill most of those Mike iterations."

"Shut up, Ryan," he said. "Stinky, what happened? Why didn't you just use it on them? It should have done everything for you."

Stinky hadn't told me much about what happened in CANNONBALL's hidden ice lair. All I knew was what Chance said about what happened when Stinky showed up.

"I... I, uh, t-transported there... and the device didn't work," I explained, doing my best impression of empty-headed Stinky. "MDawg has these neo...something magnets, and his clothes got really close to it, and, uh, so it didn't do what it was supposed to."

"Bullshit," Ryan said. "There's probably neodymium magnets in the device, there's no way he gummed it up."

"Uh—! That's just what they said!" I explained. "Chance had another explanation, uh, but everyone got really mad at him about it."

"Who is Chance?" Toph asked.

"Chance is Chris. Come on, [*Snaps fingers.*] keep up, Toph," Ryan said.

"You're not in charge here, Ryan. I am," Toph said.

"Sure thing, boss," Ryan said. "So, Mikey, I mean, Stinky. What does Chance think about this whole big conundrum?"

"Chance thinks..." I thought for a moment if I should tell them what I had learned. I couldn't see the harm in telling them, but there was so much about the situation that I didn't know. "Chance thinks that Mike is FLINCH, and because the device came from FLINCH, Mike simply prevented it from working on him."

"Mike is FLINCH?" Toph asked.

"Y-You mean you don't know if he is?" I asked.

"Of course Mike isn't FLINCH!" Ryan said. "So it's probably the magnet thing, let's go with the magnet thing." He gave a sort of smug smile.

"You asshole. Are you saying that he is FLINCH?" Toph asked. I could relate to Toph; no one should be allowed to use sarcasm except for me.

"Of course he's FLINCH. Why do you think I rooted him out on Scruff? I wanted to keep an eye on him, ingratiate myself but not so much as to look obvious, and position myself so that when Mike in 2050 has access to the technology and comes beckoning back to 2020, he falls right

into my loving arms. And that's how I started WOE.BEGONE. Simple as that. Mike is FLINCH, and FLINCH... is my boyfriend." Ryan's smile could barely be contained by his face.

"Bullshit," Toph said, and sighed. "[Sighs.] If you know something, why don't you tell me?"

"What gave it away? The boyfriend thing? Look, Toph: I might help you if you weren't keeping me captive in your ice palace. But you're the boss, and I'm an underling. A captive. Why would I help you? I'm gonna join Stinky here. Yeah, Stinky's gonna lead the uprising. Your days are numbered, pal."

So, Toph *is* CANNONBALL. Good to know. I made a note of that.

"I— I don't want to lead an uprising." I shot a glance at Ryan. [Internally.] What are you doing!? [Aloud.] "Can't you...? Can you...? Can't he...? uh... just make another one?"

"Oh, yeah, I'll whip one up in a jiffy," Ryan said. "Heh, I'm stuck here under this idiot's thumb, and you're asking if I can just make a time travel device? Surely I would have done that already."

"Words hurt, you know," Toph said.

"So does frostbite," Ryan said. "Poor Stinky here is gonna lose that foot. Come on, you're gonna give him some points for WOE.BEGONE 2.0 for that, right?"

Toph ignored him. "We can't make a new one. We didn't make the first one. We don't know how. And besides, we need that one. You know that, Stinky. That one's got Michael and Ty on it."

"[Briefly lost for words.] Michael's... on it?" I asked. Is that you, Michael? Does he mean you? The one who started this journal? Are you in the Stinky Device?

"Yes, Stinky," Toph said. "I know it's hard to keep track of everything, but remember when we found you? And we sent you to the future, and you put Michael and Ty on the device so that I could edit them? They're still on the device."

"That's an absurd oversimplification, Toph! You make it sound like you converted them into 1s and 0s! So, I guess it's totally fine to tell Stinky that, he wouldn't understand the real process anyway," Ryan said.

"Oh, right, uh, I remember, I just thought they'd be... I don't know... in the cloud?" Thank god Stinky was one of the Empty Heads. I could get by not knowing anything if I was lucky.

"Well, they aren't in the cloud. They're in the device, and the device is at Base. We'll have to get it back," Toph said. "Do they know that Michael and Ty are in the device?"

"I don't think so," I said. "They haven't said anything about it, but they didn't tell me everything. What are you going to do to Michael? You're not gonna hurt him or change him or something, are you?"

"What do you care?" Ryan asked. "I thought you hated cowboys. Before you got captured by Base, you were always talking about how those [*Cowboy voice.*] dang cowboy iterations were always puttin' you through tarnation, [*Drops cowboy voice.*] or whatever."

"I- I-I don't... care," I said.

"I'm going to do whatever I want to Michael," Toph explained. "He could be very useful if calibrated correctly."

"Yeah, yeah, it's always fun to hurt the cowboy," Ryan said. "He's always so dramatic about it. So, how are we gonna get him back?"

"We're going to send Stinky back in, of course," Toph said.

"[*Scoffs.*] 'Cause it worked so well the first time," Ryan added.

"Stinky, you know where you were being held, right? Where the original Stinky iteration still is?" Toph asked.

"Y-Yeah, I-I guess so. They didn't throw a bag over my head or anything when they put me there," I said.

"Cool. So I can put you right back in there. You can kill that Stinky or whatever, get free, get the device back from Chance, and make a break for the door. We'll be on standby," Toph said.

"Right, Stinky, so it's like last time, but you don't have the magic gun this time. It'll go great," Ryan said.

"Mike's down there too, right, Stinky?" Toph asked. "Could you hear him from where they're keeping you?"

"Yeah, I could hear him," I said, "but he hasn't said very much."

"Tell him that there's a reward for helping us out," Toph said. "I'm sure he doesn't appreciate being locked in a cage. I've been locked in a cage before. It sucks."

"Well, it was fun for me," Ryan said.

"Tell Mike that CANNONBALL will make sure he stays happy if he helps me get back what's mine. Tell him to use his intention. It should go a long way."

[Snorts.] Make sure he wishes on his lucky rabbit's foot, too, Stinky," Ryan said.

"I can do that," I said. I was coming up with plans of my own. I needed that device, and I needed to get to it before CANNONBALL.

"I'll start setting things up," Toph said.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa! We should, you know, let Stinky here get some rest before we send him back out there," Ryan said. "His feet are still frozen! Toph, you have poor circulation, you know what that's like. Let's get him some shoes! Hell, socks, even! How does that sound?"

"I am extremely tired," I admitted.

"You're right, Ryan. We'll give it a few days," Toph said.

[Scene transition.]

MIKEY *[narrating]:* Night came. I had a plan. Michael was on the Stinky Device. You were on the Stinky Device. That's what Toph said. Ryan made it sound more complicated, but that was the gist of it. And if you're on the Stinky Device, then I want to have it. Not Base, not CANNONBALL in his stupid ice lair. Me. I wasn't going to wait for CANNONBALL to use me to his own ends. No one cares about my wellbeing. CANNONBALL wanted to use me to infiltrate Base. Base was keeping me locked in a cage for something I don't even remember. I was going to have to strike out on my own.

I waited until Ryan and Toph were asleep, stole some shoes and winter gear, and snuck out to the front entrance of the ice lair. I would look for a road or a town or a village or anything. I didn't have to leave tonight. I just needed to figure out where I was. If I figured out where I was, I could start to figure out how to get the hell out of here. Ryan said Svalbard. Was that serious or a joke? I couldn't tell about anything he ever said. I braced myself for the winter cold, and threw open the large metal doors of the ice lair.

Standing in the doorway, as if waiting for me, was a polar bear. Ten feet long; one thousand pounds. It looked at me like it was expecting me, like it had followed us from earlier that afternoon, its fur matching perfectly the snow underneath it. We stood and stared at each other for several seconds. I was afraid to move. I was afraid that if I moved, it would move. That it would come at me or try to get in, and I wouldn't be able to get the door shut in time.

I heard the sound of a shotgun being fired behind me. The shotgun load whizzed through the arctic air outside, missing both me and the polar bear. The polar bear startled, turned away from the door, and ran. Someone elbowed past me, pushed me back inside, and closed the doors to the ice lair.

"Toph said the polar bear's real, dipshit," Ryan said. "You're lucky I'm a light sleeper. Look, I get that you want out of here, Mikey, I really do. But if we're gonna get what we want, he has to keep thinking that you're Stinky, and we have to start working together."

[Closing theme plays.]

[Brief start-stop of the closing theme.]

BLOOPER (MIKEY): Stinky hadn't told me much about CANNONBALL's hidden ice lair. All I knew was McDonald's, charge they phone, twerk, be bisexual, eat hot chip, and lie.

[Brief start-stop of the closing theme.]

BLOOPER (MIKEY): "Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, Whoa, Whoa, whoa... whoa, Whoa. Whoa, whoawhoawhoawhoa, wow-wow-wow-wow-wow-wow-wow-wow," Ryan said.

[Brief start-stop of the closing theme.]

BLOOPER (MIKEY): "Whoa, whoa, whoa...begone."

BLOOPER (DYLAN): *[Off-mic.]* Riga... I'm tired. Riga, help me. Help me, I keep saying wow, wow, wow, wah, wah, wah, wah, wah, wah, wah, wah, wah. Do you want a treat? You want a treat? I can give you a treat. *[Opens a bag.]* I can give you a treat. *[Normal volume.]* I'm giving her a treat. *[We hear a bag crinkling.]* Aren't you glad that you stayed past the credits? The— The— So, like, you could hear her get a treat? She's not gonna make any noise. *[Bag crinkling stops.]* Uh, but you heard the bag crinkle. Um. Riga, you want a treat? Riga, can you sit? *[Off-mic.]* Can you sit? Can you sit, you have to sit first. Can you shake? Good girl, here's your treat. *[Normal volume.]* And— *[Babbles.]* Good-bye.

[Brief start-stop of the closing theme.]

[END Episode 189.]