

# Hope Was the Last Thing in the Box

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*A Canadian Existential Grail Quest*

*by Brand Robins*



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## Capsule Summary

Hope Was the Last Thing in the Box is a freeform scenario, designed to be played mostly around a table but with the possibility of doing some scenes semi-live. It is set in Canada in 2014, with the world being mostly like our world, but presented metaphorically. In this game people are people and live the way they live in our world. But sometimes people are called to greater things. They are called on quests by forces they cannot understand, and have the possibility to make a real change in the world through symbolic, ritual actions.

It's a story where the main characters are on a quest to heal themselves and their nation, not knowing why or how, or even if it's really possible. They follow in the footsteps of one of Canada's most beloved heroes, trying to finish the quest he died upon, to run across Canada and heal sickness and shame and death. On the way they face all the ugliness the world likes to hide, and face the scars and hurt and ugliness in their own hearts as well. They have to learn who they really are, and ask if they really deserve to be forgiven. Thus the story focuses on those rituals, the metaphors, and not the logistics or timing of actually running across Canada.

It's about the terrible cost of hope, the price of making the world a better place, and the question of if it can even be done. It's also about Canada, and everything I love and hate and hope and fear about this nation I call home. It is about corporations and oligarchs and stubborn, not-yet-broken people, and about closed down fishing villages and poisoned First-Nations towns, and the wide, grand, uncaring magnificence of the land.

It's a game, I guess. If you want to call it that. It's for 5 people — 4 players and one facilitator — and should take about 4 hours to play.



## Timeline and Overview of Play

- 1) Introduction and Warmup — 1 Hour
  - a) Introductions and Overview — 10 minutes
  - b) Safety Overview — Lines and Breaking — 5 minutes
  - c) Character Casting — 15 minutes
  - d) Workshop 1 — 5 minutes
  - e) Workshop 2 — 10 minutes
  - f) Mechanics Explanations — Running Scenes, Conflict Scenes, and Trigger Cards — 5 minutes
  - g) Bathroom Break — 5 minutes, pee quickly.
- 2) Act I — The World of Our Past — 45 minutes - 1 hour
  - a) First Running Scene — Thunder Bay, The Dawn of Another Day
  - b) Flashback Scene for Each Character
  - c) Working Together Conflict Scene
- 3) Act II — The World of Our Desires — 45 minutes - 1 hour
  - a) Second Running Scene — Manitoba, Stuck In the Middle
  - b) The Most Racist City in Canada Conflict Scene
  - c) The Smiling Man Choice Scene
- 4) Act III — The World of Our Fear — 45 minutes - 1 hour
  - a) Third Running Scene — Kicking Horse Pass, The Road Down
  - b) Small Town Doubt Conflict Scene
  - c) The Bad Man Choice Scene
- 5) Act IV — The World of Our Choice — 30ish minutes
  - a) Final Running Scene — The Pacific Has No Memory
  - b) Should I Stay or Should I Go Now Conflict Scene
  - c) Down By the Water Choice Scene
- 6) Debrief — 30 minutes

## Overview

Facilitators can read the sections below, hand them out for players to read, or summarize it, at the start of a game in order to give players a sense of the tone and texture of the game. This game is not for everyone, and so I like to start off by giving people a strong sense of what it is about, and then talking specifically about the difficulties of the subject matter and style of play. To give everyone a grounding in where the game is coming from, I read them this. But I love the sound of my own voice. If you don't love yours as much, feel free to make them read, or just start with a less long winded summary:



## **Time, Place, and Metaphor**

This game is set in Canada in the spring and summer of 2014. It is mostly our world, but with an existential and metaphorical bent. This game is a Grail Quest, a quest to heal both the characters and their people. The characters will meet things that look and act like people, but are not really, or are not just, people. They are the manifestation of those forces: conspiracy, sociology, statistical aggregate response patterns made flesh.

The smiling face of corporate greed becomes The Smiling Man, a smooth talking marketing agent who wants to buy your soul out from under you. The brutality of a system of inequality becomes The Bad Man, a callous murderer who will kill you for defying The Order of Things. When the Smiling Man comes, he isn't just a marketing rep from a big company. He's everything that capitalism and corporate personhood represents, good, bad, and indifferent, all rolled into one package. When the Bad Man comes, he isn't just a bad man, he's all the bad men, all the not so bad men who do bad things, and all the good men who hurt by accident, all in one.

These things are both people and forces, and they interact directly with the characters. They may seem like archetypes, spirits, gods, or the faces of chance and conspiracy. They are all of those things and none of them.

They are, quite simply, the way we think about humanity and each other. The things we fear and hate about each other, given a mask and allowed to speak. But despite the fact these things are in the game, the rest of the world is our world. They aren't there to be superheroes or villains, they're in the story to give a face to things that are real, but that we can't normally speak to.

## **Terry Fox and the Marathon of Hope**

Terry Fox is a Canadian icon and a hero. In 2004 the Canadian Broadcasting Company ran a popular vote across the nation where people could nominate and vote for the Canadians they thought had done the most, been the best, and had the most impact on making Canada into Canada. 2nd place, above every Prime Minister, King or Queen, General or Scientist, was Terry Fox. A kid who didn't discover anything of scientific note, didn't found a nation or build a monument or fight a war. What Terry did was hope.

In 1977, at the age of 19, Terry lost his leg to cancer. At that time cancer care in Canada did not offer a lot of hope. In hospital after hospital, surrounded by people who had lost hope and seemed filled with endless pain, Terry decided to make a change, to make things better, for himself and for others. Terry decided that he was going to run across Canada, from one end of the country to the other, to raise money for cancer research.

His quote, one of the most famous in Canada, was: "As I went through the 16 months of the physically and emotionally draining ordeal of chemotherapy, I was rudely awakened by the feelings that surrounded and coursed through the cancer clinic. There were faces with the brave smiles, and the ones who had given up smiling. There were feelings of hopeful denial, and the feelings of despair. My quest would not be a selfish one. I could not leave knowing these faces and feelings would still exist, even

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though I would be set free from mine. Somewhere the hurting must stop....and I was determined to take myself to the limit for this cause"

After learning to run again with the help of a prosthetic leg, Terry started the Marathon of Hope on April 12, 1980. Supported by family and friends Terry ran for 143 days, from St. John's, Newfoundland to Thunder Bay, Ontario. He ran over 5,370km (about the distance from Copenhagen to Tehran, more than the distance from New York to San Diego).

He started the run unknown and with drivers sometimes trying to run him into the ditch. He ended the run a national hero, with bands playing fanfare for him as he came into Toronto and the Prime Minister coming to meet him. He became the icon of a generation, even as he fell short of his goal. Near Thunder Bay Ontario Terry's condition worsened, his cancer returned aggressively. On September 1 he had to stop his run, and within a year the cancer killed him.

Terry didn't want anyone else to finish the run for him. Others started annual Terry Fox runs, the first in 1981. Now every year millions of people across the world run in local Terry Fox runs. It is now the world's largest one-day fundraiser for cancer research; more than half a billion Euros has been raised in Terry's name.

But the Marathon of Hope was never completed.

### **The Quest and the Called**

When you were a kid you watched Terry run. Maybe it was just outside St. John's, when the winds and the rains looked like they might kill him. Or was it in Quebec when your uncle almost ran him off the road? Or in Hawkesbury when he entered the city like an emperor in triumph? Toronto when it seemed like the whole country was coming alive with possibility, like the world really could change? Or was it just outside Thunder Bay, when everything stopped?

Terry didn't want anyone to finish the run for him. He wanted to finish himself. 143 days and 5,373 kilometers and he didn't want to quit. But he didn't have a choice. Often in life, we don't have a choice.

34 years have passed since the run ended. 33 years have passed since Terry died. They haven't been good years for you. When you were a kid, when you saw Terry run you had a family, and hope. That isn't to say you had it good, or easy. So many don't. But the future looked like it could be something.

Then it all went wrong.

For one of you, your family died of a disease in the town's water. For one of you a person that you loved, the bedrock of your life, died in horrible pain, wasted and shriveled. One was taken from his family for money and given to an institution that ground your humanity out of you. One made a horrible mistake and cannot forgive himself for the death of a child.

Whatever it was, you tried to fight. Tried to help your family fight. You didn't want to lose, didn't want to quit. But you didn't have a choice. Often in life, we don't have a choice. You were at low ebb, watching rock bottom coming rushing up. That's when someone stole Terry's leg.

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Three days ago, you, all of you together, found it.

And that's when you felt it come upon you, as unreal as joy, as undeniable as death. Maybe you wanted it, had been waiting for it. Maybe it was the last thing you ever wanted: A future. Hope.

You have been called. By what, you may not know. Why, you certainly do not know. But bone deep you know it is true. It is fallen on you to finish the Marathon of Hope. From Thunder Bay to Victoria, you have to take Terry's leg and dip it into the Pacific, to heal yourselves, and in so doing to heal Canada.

It doesn't matter that you're not an athlete. Or that it's almost 3000km across plains and prairies, mountains and rivers and badlands and every damn thing. It doesn't matter a shit that you don't have resources, or backing, or a team that's going to run with you. All you have is some other folks as deep down the hole as you are, and the shoes on your feet and shirt on your back.

But it isn't even about the distance, the logistical improbability. Because what you are doing is about hope. About the chance, the long run, slim hard chance that we — all of us — can be healed. That we — all of us — can be better than this. That we — all of us — have a choice in life and can use that choice to make the world a better place.

Every fucking thing in the world that hurts and screams, everything in this wretched place that preys upon the weak and builds its fiefdoms among the ruins of freedom, every corporate profit and criminal greed and confused sense of self-loathing and shame in your own breast is going to come for you. Every single one of them wants you to fail. Every single one of them has their life on the line.

They will try to buy you.

They will pile blockades and distractions and call down fires upon everything you love.

And if that fails, they will beat you, they will hunt you, they will lie to you and make you fear and tell you the truth and make you hate yourself.

They will kill you.

You went out, looking to get drunk and forget for a night. Maybe play the lotto, win a little money.

Instead you've won the future, and it's probably going to end you.

But if it doesn't... if it doesn't....

## Setup

### Scenario or Freeform Semi-Live?

At the start of the game I recommend having a quick talk with your group about if you want to play the scenario at the table, or if you want to do some scenes (running scenes especially) at the table with conflict and/or choice scenes played semi-live on your feet. I usually run at the table, with the physical action described rather than acted out, and I highly recommend playing the Running scenes at the table as meditative, flow like scenes rather than enacted reality. However, with a group that really gets energy from enacting the conflict and choice scenes it can work. The one thing for the GM to consider is that two scenes, The Most Racist City in Canada and Small Town Doubt, have more than one NPC who may be talking at the same time, and you'll need to have a way to deal with that. Decide before the game if you have a strong preference. If not, just make sure everyone is on the same page, and if it's unclear, default to playing at the table.

### Lines and Breaking

Hope Was the Last Thing in the Box has some difficult content. Murder, violence against children, sexual abuse, and the daily brutality of life in an unfair world are all things embedded in the character backgrounds. So at the very top of the game, before anyone is committed, its worth taking a moment to let everyone know that those elements are there, in the background, hard coded. If anyone wants to step out, let them. No one should feel pressured into playing this shit.

### Lines

For folks who remain to play, have a quick conversation about what people's lines for things that happen in the game are. For example, some people may be okay with sexual abuse being something that happened in the past, but not something that will happen in the game. (By default it doesn't in any of the scenes in the script, but you never know what players will bring to the game.)

Go around the table and check with everyone if there is anything they are not comfortable with:

- 1) Having happen in the story at all
- 2) Describing in the fiction, but are okay with happening "off screen"

If anyone brings up things they're not okay with, at either of those levels, everyone at the table should make a note of it and respect that line. People should be aware that the story may go right up to the edges of those lines, but no one should cross them. This is a game about people who have been traumatized by life trying to recover, not a game about traumatizing each other at the table. Don't be the Bad Man.

### Breaking

Brake is used for situations when a player is getting uncomfortable in a way that is undesirable and does not need the game to stop, but just needs the game to feel safer. When you signal Brake cross your arms over your chest and tap your shoulders. You can also say "Brake" if needed. When someone has indicated the need for a Break, the other players must pause for a moment and then continue playing, but with a slightly softer fictional and emotional tone. Slow it down, take a moment to recalibrate, and

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then start again with slightly less intensity. Once that is done, if the braking player still is out of their boundaries, they should continue doing the Brake signal and tap their shoulders to indicate more is needed. At that point, the other players should de-escalate a bit to take the pressure off.

Note: Brake is a mechanism for the safety of the player, not the character.

### Cut

If you play semi-Larp for conflict scenes, I also recommend introducing Cut to the game. Cut is used when the game needs to come to a hard stop. If someone were to fall down and get hurt, or enter into serious emotional distress that requires the game to stop, any player can call "CUT!" to stop the game. If articulating "CUT!" is difficult for any reason, the player can signal cut by crossing their arms in front of their face. When cut is called out, or a player signals a cut gesture, all players must stop everything and attend to the situation. If the game can be safely and collectively resumed, it will be, if not, the game can end as needed. If, during a conflict scene done larp style, someone decides to take a violent act towards another player's character, they should call CUT and move it to the table.



Another fine day in Manitoba

## **Characters**

There are four questors in Hope Is the Last Thing, four human people who have been called to an inhuman task. These characters are what I call "beautiful losers." People who have been hurt by life, who are vulnerable and a little bit broken. All of them have come to a place in their life where they can't respond the way the world expects people to. But this isn't misery tourism, this isn't about reveling in their pain or them being broken. This is about seeing if they can overcome, if we can overcome, about exploring and discovering them and with them, to figure out what happens when our sense of ourselves falls away under the pressure of circumstance. To find out what's left in the box.

## **Assigning Characters**

When I facilitate this scenario, I normally start off character assignment by doing a rough bit of casting. Based on my sense of folks at the table to that point, I give them the character I think would be most interesting. Both to see them play and for them to play.

Then I have everyone read their characters, and their Trigger Conditions, and see if there is anything about the character they don't want to, or feel they cannot play. For many people this isn't an issue, but there are some elements of these characters that may be too close to the bone for some, and no one should feel compelled to play a character that will be traumatic for them. So if anyone doesn't want to play a character, or just can't connect to a character, I have the group talk about it and swap out one character for another with a second player.

Once everyone has a character they're willing to play (if not always easy about playing), we move to workshopping.

## ***A Note on Gender***

Any of the characters can be played as any gender. Most of them have a lose default, and the writeups may refer to them as "he" or "she." However, nothing about the gender of the characters is essential to their nature. Any of their backgrounds could have happened to a person of any different gender, and Canada in 2014 is just barely progressive enough that (most of the time) people's responses won't radically change because one of these characters is of a slightly different than default standard gender.

So if a player wants to play their character as a different gender than we might have initially assumed the character was, that's fine. Have a quick talk about how they want to deal with it, but don't make a big issue of it. For a game where the characters are going to deal with the manifested forces of Canada's national spiritual angst, if they wear lipstick or not is probably not going to be a game breaker.

**Michael Lavoie**

**Current Place in Life:** Scraping by living off of the settlement from a suit against the government, occasionally doing shift work as unskilled warehouse labor at Acklands-Grainger.

**Issue:** Inability to make emotional connections or build trust due to systemic abuse and victimization by the government and Church

**Born:** Lachine, Montreal, Quebec, 1970. You were born in a rough neighborhood to an unwed French speaking mother and an Irish father in a time and place where the anger between the French speaking Quebecois and the English speaking Irish was high and hot.

**Saw Terry:** Near Quebec City in early June, 1980. You saw Terry while your mother was driving you home after a court date in Quebec City, while she was fighting to keep custody of you. A driver on the road ahead of you tried to run him off the road, and nearly ran him over. Your mother stopped to see if he was okay, but couldn't talk to him because she only spoke French and he was an Anglophone. So you translated. He was funny, and kind of tough. You thought he was a good person, but didn't know he was important.

**After Terry:** When you were 11 you were taken away from your mother by a social worker and your parish priest. The official reason was that you were mentally unstable and your place in your single-parent home posed a danger to social order in public and home life. Which you later learned to translate as "being the poor son of a single mother who got pregnant by an Irish asshole and can't stop us from doing whatever we want to."

You spent a year in a "residential school" where you were forced to work washing clothes from a nearby hospital and were given two hours of schooling a day. After that first year you were declared "mentally deficient" by the priest that ran the school. Being mentally deficient meant that they were no longer required to give you schooling, so you were transferred to the Sisters of Providence, an abbey which served as a mental institution.

Your time there was as bad as it could have been. Because you were part Irish, and spoke French with an accent, the other children beat you regularly. They would tie you into a chair sometimes and leave you there with your pants pulled down until you shit yourself in public. The nuns and priests told you that you were a sinner and wicked, and beat you regularly for your "impurity" — frequently lashing your thighs and back with a short leather thong that has left scars to this day. When you weren't being punished you worked 16 hour days, 7 days a week, laundering sheets in vats hot enough that severe burns were a daily occurrence, and due to the lack of training you and the others often had chemical burns. At least you were lucky enough to keep your sight, not everyone did.

On the day you turned 18 you were processed, given one pair of pants and two shirts, and put out on the street outside. You went to your mother, though it took some time to find her. The new man she'd married took poorly to you, called you retard and other names, and made fun of the fact that you could barely read. When you couldn't get a job, he beat you almost to death for being lazy. Your mother, in tears, told you to leave and never come back.

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For the next decade and a half you lived as one of Montreal's homeless. You were in and out of jail multiple times. Without education, or hope, or any sense of your own worth as a person you slid into alcohol, though you managed to avoid harder drugs.

**Now:** In the late 90's a reporter did an expose about the conditions you and the other "orphans" had lived in. As a result the government of Quebec and the Catholic Church gave a settlement to many of you. Out of it you got just enough money to keep you from starving. Not enough to actually build a life, or get any education. Just enough to get the worst sort of rooms, edge by on macaroni and cheese for dinner every night.

It also made you known. Your picture was in one of the papers, in the background from the day many of you showed up to collect your settlement. Every day people you did not know would come and tell you how sorry they were for you. What an unlucky fellow you were. And in their eyes you could see their judgement, could feel their disgust and their pity. And not all of them were nice. Many called you retard. Men at the shelter beat you because they knew you were a victim. Unable to deal with more public shaming, you left Quebec for Ontario. You ended up in Thunder Bay with another man from the Sisters of Providence. He died a few months ago, and now that you're alone you've had to do some shift work at the local Acklands-Grainger store, cleaning up spilled chemicals and counting screws in the back storage rooms.

**Shame:** Numbing. You cannot stand to be where you are, to be who you are. You know that when push comes to shove you will lose. That things are bad now, but can be worse, probably couldn't be better because you don't deserve better. So you numb yourself, make yourself an observer. You drink the pain away, you don't make friends, you don't make commitments. When it's really bad you feel like an observer in your own life, like a plate of glass is between you and the world around you.

**Questions:** Think about these things, but don't lock them down as truth until they come up in play:

- 1) This quest you're on is insane. Why are you doing it? How do you know, bone deep, that this is a real thing? Something you need to do? Did God tell you? Your heart? What?
- 2) You're the oldest member of the group, do you worry about being able to keep up as you spend a large part of each day running?
- 3) You grew up in Quebec, French speaking, and now you're surrounded by Anglos and Indians. How do you feel about that?
- 4) What do you most fear happening on this quest?
- 5) What do you most hope could happen?

### Trigger List:

- Have a totally anxiety breakdown. Start to cry and shake, and if the situation persists, start to sob, escalate to screaming, and if it lasts to beating at your own head and face.
- Refuse to speak English, speak only in French and curse anyone who can't, or won't, speak back in French.
- Deal with the situation totally disconnected. Talk calmly, like you're fully rational and in control, but saying things that don't make sense to anyone but you.

## Pat Amblin

**Current Place in Life:** Delivering and stocking mops for Acklands-Grainger, 732nd on the world leader boards for Assassins Creed: Black Flag

**Issue:** Hates himself because he feels he let a child die

**Born:** Don Mills, Toronto, Ontario, 1972. You were born in a nice middle-upper class neighborhood in the largest, richest city in Canada. (Toronto is more or less Canada's Copenhagen.) Your life was comfortable, middle class, and white — in fact, British descended white, which in Canada is the best kind of white.

**Saw Terry:** Toronto City Hall, July 11 1980 (age 8). Everyone was happy, everyone was full of hope. Terry looked tired, but like a hero too. He made you feel like you could do things too. It was that day that you decided you were going to spend your life helping people.

**After Terry:** In 1994 you got an internship working in a program that did outreach for at risk kids — children with families with histories of drugs, violence, or crime. The program was run through your university, and you mostly read to the kids — your kids, as you came to think of them — and gave them things to do during the day, and you worked with social workers who were giving them counseling to keep tabs on their mental and emotional states.

One of the kids in your program who took a lot of attention was a 9 year old Somali boy named Dacar. Dacar's father was a violent drunk, and Dacar dealt with life's uncertainties by acting out. A lot. He once poured glue in your hair and you had to count to 10 to keep from screaming at him. As the months went on though you started getting through to him. Things started getting better for Dacar at school and in the program, even as they were getting worse at home. Working with his social worker — Abram Mitz — you started the process of getting him removed from his home. It wasn't easy, no one took it lightly, but everyone felt it was for the best.

On September 5th, 1994 as you were packing up the games you'd been playing with the kids at the community center Dacar stayed behind, agitated. You were starting the new semester of classes the next day, and weren't feeling well. So you comforted him briefly, gave him a hug, and told him everything was going to be okay.

The next day you went to class, but not feeling well you went home early and slept most of the day.

On the 7th you went to the community center, but most of the kids weren't there. No one was making eye contact with you. Finally Abram found you, took you aside. He told you that on the night of the 5th Dacar's father had come home drunk, had an altercation with his wife. Dacar had gotten involved, his father struck him, Dacar fell and hit his head on a table. He went into seizures and died in the hospital at 6:32 on the morning of the 6th.

You hugged him, you told him everything was going to be okay. You didn't stop to listen. Too worried about school and your own shit. And he was dead, just like that. No one blamed you. No one yelled at you. No one ever said it was your fault.

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But you know the truth. It was your fault. He is dead because of you. He is dead because you were selfish, blind, and stupid.

You do not deserve to be happy. You deserve to be dead.

**Now:** In 1997 your sister died of breast cancer. With her gone your family fell slowly apart. You don't call or talk, they don't call or talk. After you graduated you moved up to Thunder Bay, got a job working in an Acklands-Grainger selling tools and mops to the local Universities and manufacturing plants. You've been in and out of relationships, but none of them last. The thought of marrying someone, of having children, makes you slowly go insane. You don't deserve children. You don't deserve happiness.

So you live working a job where everyone who finds out you have university degree is surprised that you'd do work like this. You live mostly alone, no family, few friends. You drink some nights, play a lot of video games and try not to ever be responsible for anything. Because when you're responsible for things, you fuck up. When you fuck up, people die. You don't think about this often, not consciously. In fact, if anyone asked you about it you'd probably deny it. Say that Toronto was a long time ago.

But it's there. Every day, every decision.

**Shame:** Foreboding Joy. Deep down in your heart of hearts, you don't think you deserve anything good. So whenever it looks like things are going well a part of you starts to panic. You start becoming obsessed with things that could go wrong tomorrow. Things you might have missed yesterday. Anything but being in the moment, anything but admitting that you're happy or that you deserve to be happy.

**Questions:** Think about these things, but don't lock them down as truth until they come up in play:

- 1) This quest you're on is insane. Why are you doing it? How do you know, bone deep, that this is a real thing? Something you need to do? Did your sister's spirit tell you? The memory of Dacar?
- 2) You've never been athletic, and some of the others look pretty fit. Do you think you'll be able to keep up a month from now when running every day has ground you down? What will you do if you get hurt on the way? What else are you worrying about instead of thinking about what's happening right now?
- 3) What do you most fear happening on this quest?
- 4) What do you most hope could happen?
- 5) Most of the others didn't grow up privileged. You're not sure Michael is actually literate, and you have a PhD in Sociology from the University of Toronto — how much time do you spend thinking about how much they must hate you for that?

### Trigger List:

- Freak out about things that might happen as a result of what's going on now, without actually dealing with what's going on now
- Refuse to finish something or leave something until everything is "perfect" — obsess over every detail and don't let yourself or other people finish what needs to be finished
- Viciously, but logically, verbally attack the position or person of someone who was trying to help you

### **Kelly O'Donnell**

**Current Place in Life:** 19 days sober, just got a job working as a cashier at the local Acklands-Grainger store, which isn't much, but as mom used to say "it's better than a jab up the ass with a pointed stick."

**Issue:** Alone and unable to make new connections, her mother was her rock and her death has ruined Kelly's faith in herself and the world, she's desperate for connection and that desperation makes connection impossible

**Born:** Cow's Head, Newfoundland, 1975. You were born in a village of about 172 people on the rough Atlantic coast of Newfoundland. It was a hard, beautiful place full of taciturn, tough people. Everyone was a fisher, had lobster pots in their yard, and little vegetable patches on the high, dry land near the highway. You grew up with family, but without much in the way of things.

**Saw Terry:** In April of 1980, when you were very little your mother took you to Port aux Basques to see Terry run through town. To you Port aux Basques was the big city, with a whole 10,000 people. And Port aux Basques was the first place where Terry felt like the Marathon might be successful, because the day he ran through the people gave him a check for \$10,000. One dollar for every man, woman, and child in the city. One dollar from you, one dollar from your mother, one dollar from everyone. He said that's all it took, if everyone would just give a little, the whole world could change. Your mother told you it was true, and you held it in your heart.

**After Terry:** Just as you were graduating high school the fisheries of Newfoundland collapsed. After almost 400 years of seemingly inexhaustible bounty, the cod were almost gone. The government declared a ban on fishing, and the economy of western Newfoundland collapsed. Your father had to leave to the west to get work, and your older brother followed not long after him. Both worked the oil fields in the far north, and both were killed in accidents.

Your family had always been close, and their loss was devastating. But your mother was there with you, and she held you through the storm. She was always strong, as strong and clean and beautiful as the wild coast you grew up along.

You married a boy from down in Rocky Harbor. He worked at the hotel there, cleaning up after the rich tourists who came to see Gros Morne National Park. Maybe it was because he took shit from them all day that he turned it on you. You stood it as long as you could, but the first time he hit you, your mother came over and shelacked him with a rolling pin. She told him he'd either need to clean up his act or get out of your life. It took six more miserable months, but eventually he got. And while your world shook, your mother held you.

Other boys came and went. Jobs came and went. But your mother remained. No matter how bad it got, how cold or how dark, you knew she loved you. Maybe she was the only one in the whole world, but she loved you true and strong and pure.

In 2003 she was diagnosed with lung cancer. She was so strong though you knew she would fight. And fight she did. For 4 years she fought. Through rounds and rounds of chemo, as you had to sell your

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house and move to St. John's to be near enough a hospital to get treatment. As you left Newfoundland to Ontario, where you could get better doctors. As bit by bit everything else left your life until there was only the fight, you and your mother together, fighting the thing that Terry had fought. You gave way more than a dollar this time.

And it wasn't enough. The last month was bad. You had to watch her like that, as she lost herself, as she shat herself and raved and tossed in pain. Your rock crumbled, gave way to dust, and vanished.

**Now:** The doctor gave you pills for her funeral, to take the edge off. You took them, washed them down with whiskey. And then more, and more, and more. You didn't mean to. You didn't plan it. And you know she would have stopped you, would have been ashamed of you. She was so strong, but she was gone, and without her you were nothing. You tried to make friends, to build new relationships, but it just never worked. People don't like you, they run from you, they become disgusted by how weak you are as soon as they see what you really are.

You've tried going sober before. You're to 19 days now. And you know she would be ashamed. But this time you're determined to make it different. You got a job. It's a crappy job, and boring. But it's a job, out here on the edge of Ontario. You go to your AA meetings, you go to work, and you go home to an empty apartment and your mother's ghost.

**Shame:** Desperation. You're so desperate for approval, for connection to people, that you try to force it. You share things you shouldn't share, you tell too much, reveal too much too quickly. You can't deal with letting a relationship grow, with being honest and letting a person come to know you. You think it's always going to fail, so you try to make it fail fast, and at the same time you're always desperate for human contact so you babble out every secret as fast as you can in the hopes that something will stick.

**Questions:** Think about these things, but don't lock them down as truth until they come up in play:

- 1) This quest you're on is insane. Why are you doing it? How do you know, bone deep, that this is a real thing? Something you need to do? Did you dream of your mother telling you about it?
- 2) You used to run, years ago, and you're pretty confident you can do that much right, at least. But... some of the others... you worry. Who do you worry most about? How do you try to comfort and help them? How are you inappropriate and invasive about how you do it?
- 3) What do you most fear happening on this quest?
- 4) What do you most hope could happen?
- 5) What token of your mother do you always carry with you?

### Trigger List:

- Throw yourself on someone's mercy and defer all your judgement to them, even (especially) if they won't show you mercy or you think they're probably wrong
- Over share about your vulnerability or shame — give way too many details, make the situation all about you and tell people things you fear will disgust them
- Make up lies about things that you think will make people like you. It should be painfully obvious to everyone that you're lying.

## Eli Falls

**Current Place in Life:** About to be fired from his job as a vending machine stocker for Acklands-Grainger after he beat up a client for making racist remarks.

**Issue:** Eli doesn't believe he lives in a racist society that would murder him if he could, he knows it as a fact, and despite the fact he wants to hate them for it, he spends more time hating himself for not being smart enough to be able to figure a way out.

**Born:** Asubpeeschoseewagong First Nation (also known as "Grassy Narrows"), near Kenora, Ontario, 1973. You grew up in a community of your people, about 1,200 of them, in the far North West of Ontario, a good distance from any city. Most Canadians, to this day, say it's an "Indian Reservation." But it isn't. You aren't "Indian," you're Ojibwa; and it isn't a "reservation" — it's land your people hold by legal treaty between your nation and the nation of Canada.

**Saw Terry:** You never actually saw Terry in person. You'd spent a summer with a cousin in Thunder Bay, and watched him on TV every day. You didn't have a lot in common with your aunt, but you could talk about that with her. You went with her to do bake sales to raise money for the Marathon. And on September 1st you all piled into the car together, with your brother just come to town that morning, and went out to where Terry was supposed to come into town to be there to give him money when he got there.

He never got there. Word came down the road, hours later, that he had gotten sick and had to stop running for the day. You saw him on TV again the next day, tears on his face, when he told Canada that the cancer had spread to his lungs and he had to stop running. It was the only time you ever saw your aunt cry.

**After Terry:** You finished school in Thunder Bay, then moved back to Asubpeeschoseewagong to be with your family for a bit. But you got restless, always looking for something more. You'd had good grades and were able to get a partial scholarship to Confederation College to get a diploma in Mechanical Engineering. Things were looking hopeful.

Then you got word that your sister was sick. And the next day that your brother and mother were. By the time you got back home your sister, Lilly, was dead and your father and uncle were sick as well. Within a couple of days half the community was ill, and several more had died. There was only one doctor for the first several days, and he was too busy trying to keep people alive to try to find what was causing it. When other doctors finally came, after your mother and your uncle both died, they figured out that your water supply had been poisoned by contamination caused by Dryden Chemical Company using a "revolutionary safe new process" to manufacture chloralkali for solar panels.

As soon as the company heard that they might be held responsible, they bothered to get involved in the disaster they'd been ignoring for almost two weeks. The president of the company even called the Provincial and Federal governments, asked them to send resources out. The next day trucks started rolling in. You and the others thought they were full of water containers, or filters to make the water clean.

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They were full of body bags.

Over the next three weeks every member of your family died. You held their hands, you stayed up all night and watched them, and you couldn't do a thing to save them. 121 of just over 1200 people died, many more were sick, and it would be years before anyone could drink water not from a bottle again.

The government took stern action against Dryden Chemical Company. They fined them a million dollars, and the president had to resign. He got a million dollar severance package on the way out. And the government gave a portion of the fine to the community, as compensation. Your share of it was \$74.32, for the lives of your entire family.

**Now:** Since your family died, you've never slept a whole night through without waking up in shakes and sweats. You've never had a relationship that lasted longer than two months. You've been fired four times for fights, striking clients or coworkers. And you aren't sure which you hate more — the racist assholes who say the things that make you so furious, or yourself that you let them get your goat, that you're a fucking stereotype. You know they go home and tell their families about how "Indians are so violent."

The rage crept inside you, killed something inside you just like the mercury killed something inside your mother, your sister, your brother, your father, your uncle. You feel like you're walking dead, and the only reason you keep going is you hate them too much to let them win.

**Shame:** Viking or Victim. Life has taught you one lesson clear — in life there are winners and there are losers and there is no one else. There is no equality without lies, no vulnerability without victimization, no peace without slavery. In every situation, from who picks up the tab for dinner to how the government treats your family, all you can see is a chance to be hurt or hurt someone else.

**Questions:** Think about these things, but don't lock them down as truth until they come up in play:

- 1) This quest you're on is insane. Why are you doing it? How do you know, bone deep, that this is a real thing? Something you need to do? How hard will you punch the first white motherfucker that asks you if you're on a fucking vision quest?
- 2) You're in really good shape, you hunt, you run, you play tennis and soccer. But the others... how the hell are you going to keep these idiots going? They're going to drag you down if you don't watch it. What are you going to do when push comes to shove and they can't handle it?
- 3) What do you most fear happening on this quest?
- 4) What do you most hope could happen?

### Trigger List:

- Turn on someone who is trying to help, or being vulnerable, and lay into them for being weak and cowardly
- "Team Up" with someone who is being needlessly aggressive or mean, or who you feel is high in status — even if you don't actually agree with them
- Do everything you can to provoke someone into attacking you, especially if you can't win

### **Bathroom and Toast Break**

I really hope you don't need me to tell you how to do this part.

Oh, this is what a Canadian boy's restroom looks like. So exotic. The characters will see a thousand of these as they run.



And here's what a Tim Horton's looks like. They'll drink coffee and get doughnuts in at least 100 of these.



## **Workshop 1: The Gift Game**

For this workshop, play the Gift Game to get everyone loosened up.

In the gift game, start with the GM, and go around the table in a circle. The person giving a gift presents an imaginary object to the person to their left. That person takes the gift and says "Oh thank you for this..." and then makes up what the gift they were just given was and has an imagined emotional reaction to it. They then turn to the person to their left and present them an imaginary object, and that person receives it as above.

Go around the circle three or four times, until people are getting a flow.

## **Workshop 2: Argument**

For this workshop the GM should chose two players and tell them they're going to have an argument. They're a husband and wife, and they're going to disagree about doing household chores and in so doing reveal something unhappy and more serious about their relationship.

Let them play and escalate a bit, and cut the scene before they can come to a resolution or once they start repeating themselves more than once.

Then have the other two players do a similar scene, but this time about inappropriate text messages one of them found on the other's cell phone. As above, let them play and escalate a bit, and cut the scene before they can come to a resolution or once they start repeating themselves more than once.

Then switch back to the first couple, and tell them to play their scene over again, but tell them to either escalate the scene hard, or to play it much more subtle and close to the bone — depending on how they played the first time.

Finally, do the same with the second couple.

Note: I often have Michael and Pat's player couple up, and then Kelly and Eli's players. Those characters tend to have conflict in the game, so it helps to get the juices going early.

## **Workshop 3: Humanity**

The second workshop is both gets all the players to be vulnerable and share something human with each other. For this workshop everyone should tell a story about a time they were in a situation where either:

- 1) They couldn't control and made a decision that they either did not understand why they would make, and/or regretted making later
- 2) a time when they were really and truly afraid

The story can be real or made up, and folks shouldn't say which. Either way, it should be told like it really happened to you, and should demonstrate how you understand that people sometimes make mistakes, make decisions they don't really understand, and often regret.

Start with the GM telling a story, then go around as people feel ready, until everyone has had a turn.

## **Mechanics Explanations — Types of Scenes**

There are three types of scenes in Hope Was the Last Thing in the Box, and each works slightly differently:

### **1. Running Scenes**

These are freeform, guided meditation and narration scenes where the GM and players describe what it's like to run across Canada, how they feel, where their emotional and physical states are, how they feel about each other, etc.

These scenes start out with the GM setting the scene, leading in with a little description of where the characters are, and then showing them a picture of the area of Canada they're in, one of the places that they are running through. Everyone looks at the picture, can check where it is on the map, and thinks a moment about how far they've come, how far they have yet to go, and what's happened in their character's life and the story so far.

The GM then starts things off by having everyone close their eyes and leading them through a little guided meditation, helping to get a sense of what it's like to be in that place, in that person, in this insane situation.

After that the GM leads a discussion, asking the characters and the players questions. These can be answered in character, or narratively out of character, they're a little of both, and work best when people can move a bit between modes — talking sometimes as their character, sometimes about their character.

These scenes are really about what it's like to run, what it's like to be afraid and angry and alone all the time, and what it's like to hope.

### **2. Conflict Scenes**

Conflict Scenes are the places where the Quest puts the characters to a test, mostly a test of if they have the faith and hope to make it through when their trauma keeps them from reacting the way they might want to. All of the characters have trauma in their past, and all of them sometimes find themselves reacting in ways they can't quite control, doing things they later regret. And in these scenes those reactions will be put at odds with the character's intentions.

These scenes start after Running Scenes, with the GM setting the stage and describing a bit of what the characters have found themselves in the middle of. These situations generally are things that might happen any given day in Canada, in the unfortunate parts of life. They also tend to mirror or call upon things that happened to the characters in their pasts, and generally should provoke strong reactions from one or more of the characters.

After the GM sets, the players then portray their characters and describe what they do (or act it out, if you've gone semi-live), while the GM does the same for key NPCs, and the scene runs until people feel it is resolved. There are two primary rules for this:

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1. Players should get their characters engaged in the situation, despite the fact the characters may not want to. They don't have to stay for the whole scene, and can exit when needed. But they should start off getting involved. Consider it part of the mystical pressure of the quest if you need to. They are, after all, knights on a grail quest.
2. At a point chosen by the GM, when the scene has reached a certain intensity or when the GM feels there is a trigger for one or more of the PC's "Shame" traits, the GM will tell the affected players to hit their triggers. The GM does not have to trigger every character in every Conflict Scene, however no Conflict Scene should pass without at least one character triggered.

Triggers are there to give some form and structure to the uncontrollable reactions the characters have in response to emotional situations. When a player is triggered they hand their trigger list and chose another player to give it to. Based on the other player's understanding of the situation, the character, and what they think would make the best story or emotional complication they chose one of the triggers that has not yet been checked off, and then checks it off and gives it back to the character's player.

The player then must have their character follow that impulse for the next several interactions of the scene. How they integrate it is up to that players honesty, humanity, and sense of their character. How long they keep going with it is also up to them, but players should be encouraged to not just one-shot it and then move on. These are significant trauma reactions, and shouldn't be short circuited just because they're difficult.

Finally, if in Act 4 a character has no remaining unchecked triggers, then their player gets to chose if they want to be triggered or not, and if so which one they will manifest. Follow your honesty and your humanity.

### 3. Choice Scenes

Each act ends with a "Choice Scene." These typically present the characters with a choice they have to make, about how (or if), they continue the quest, if they are frightened off, bought off, etc. They're called "Choice Scenes" because there is no hard mechanic for them. Players can chose to embody their trigger conditions if they want, but unlike in Conflict Scenes, they don't have to. The only rule is to play the characters honestly, as brave humans who deserve love but do not believe they do and are full of pain, loss, and loneliness. The focus of these scenes is on what it costs to hope, and what it costs if hope is lost.

The Choice Scene in Act 1 is a bit different, in that its more about establishing background and showing the characters than making actual choices. But as of Act 2, players can have their characters leave the quest as part of their choice. Players who do this can leave the game if they want, or can stay to play NPCs, their character in flashbacks, etc.

Also, if a character leaves the game as a result of being bought off by the Smiling Man at the end of Act 2 then that player can play the Bad Man in Act 3. If their character literally becomes the Bad Man, or if it's just an metaphorical representation of their abandonment of the quest is an open question, to be answered at the table as you all see fit.

## Act I — The World of Our Past

Act I starts, as all acts in this scenario, with a running scene. It's an in medias res opening, the characters have already accepted the quest and have started working together to finish the Marathon of Hope.

Once they've done the first running scene, we'll flash back and play the scene where they started the quest, where the epiphany came on them, with a Conflict Scene about how they started working together and what a mess that was. This scene can go as badly as it goes, but players should be reminded we already know that they all end up going anyway — so whatever happens in the scene, in the next day or so they're going to end up running together anyway, so they should leave space to figure out why that is if the scene doesn't make it obvious.

Finally there is a Choice Scene that will deal with that first choice. Unlike the Choice Scenes in the other acts, we already know the characters are going to choose to run in this scene. So this scene is more about exploring the character and how, and why they made that choice and what it cost them.

The picture on the next page is the image for the first running scene. It's just outside Thunder Bay, Ontario<sup>1</sup> and is where the characters start the game. As with all the running scenes, show them the picture to start the scene, give them a few moments to look at it and get a sense of the land. Then start the scene.

If you're GMing this at Fastaval, I will be bringing color prints of all the photos for the running scenes. I'll leave them at the Infonauts booth if possible.



Terry Fox Memorial in Thunder Bay

<sup>1</sup> The picture is actually just outside Echo Bay, but shhhh don't tell anyone.

First Running Scene: Thunder Bay, The Dawn of Another Day



## **Narration**

*"The Road Does Not End In Thunder Bay  
It's Just the Dawn of Another Day."*

— S. Turkington, a poem about Terry Fox.

Look at the picture of the road, think about the distance. Think about getting up before the sun, about putting on shoes and running. Think about the car driving behind you, the times when it drives ahead and leaves you alone to run.

Four days ago, it came upon you. Three days ago your life changed.

For the last three days you've been running. You headed out down the 17, the TransCanada Highway, following the route Terry would have taken.

It's late spring, so it's cold in the mornings. Not cold enough to frost, but close enough. More than cold enough that when you start the run your breath billows up in front of you. It warms up through the day, warm enough in the afternoons that you have to strip down to a t-shirt or soak your sweater through. The sun's been bright the last three days, but spring always brings storms — sudden sharp showers, the last snow squalls left over from winter, big thunder heads coming in from the lake to the south.

The road is busy with cars during the day, it's the major corridor between Thunder Bay and Winnipeg, and even a lot of the local traffic to smaller towns and farming villages passes down this road. Single people in big trucks, families in SUVs, the occasional Mennonite in a horse-drawn buggy. And it's just as busy at night, with big semi-trucks hauling massive trailers full of food, lumber, supplies and goods of all kinds.

Just off to either side the land is big; rolling hills giving way to long flat pastures, tall stands of trees. It's beautiful, even if the road mostly smells of exhaust. In the times when you take breaks it's easy enough to get off the road, to go out into the empty fields, into the tall thick forests, and pretend the road is a million miles away. To pretend everything is a million miles away.

## **Guided Meditation**

Now close your eyes. Think about the run. Think about the road. Think about the distance — you've only run about 100km so far, and you've got 3000ish to go.

Think about getting up before the sun, about putting on shoes and running. Think about the car driving behind you, the times when it drives ahead and leaves you alone to run.

Do you hear Terry running when you close your eyes?

How does it feel on your feet? How many blisters do you have? Is the skin starting to slough off? Are the white with moisture and swollen? Do they stink? Do you have to cut bits of dead skin off with a razor every night?

How are your shins? Your hips? What is the feeling in your lower back? In the back of your mind?

When the road is endless and your mind wanders from your body, what do you see?

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When the pain gets worse, what keeps you running?

When you hit your flow, when it doesn't hurt anymore, what makes you afraid? What makes you want to stop?

When does the anxiety come? The panic? In the morning before the run begins, with all the pain in front of you? In the middle of the run, when the pain is sitting on you like a weight? At the end of the run, when you wonder if you didn't go far enough?

How do you feel when other people watch you run? When they drive by and honk? When they try to drive you off the road? When they watch silently?

### Questions

Players can open their eyes. Some questions to ask them to get talking about what the run is like. Don't get bogged down in minutia or worry about the logistics. If players put an idea forward, run with it. Their characters may be anxious about money, convinced the car is going to break down, and not know where they're going to sleep tomorrow — but we don't have to worry about that. Just let it flow, focus on feeling what it's like to run through the endless roll of Canada, with these people, on this impossible quest:

- How do you take Terry's leg with you? In a backpack? In your hand?
- You've got a car that the people who aren't running can drive.
  - Whose car is it?
  - Who drives most when they aren't running? Is everyone else happy about that?
  - Who deals with gas and maintenance and such?
- Who deals with food?
  - Do you hit Tim Hortons for coffee every morning, as every good Canadian does?
  - Would you rather go to Subway for chain store sandwiches, or stop at local farms that have signs up for homemade pies and cheese?
  - Do any of you cook at night, when you stop from the run?
- Do you hang out together after the run, or go to wherever you're sleeping alone?
  - Speaking of that, where do you sleep?
    - Little road side motels with cinderblock walls and beds just as hard?
    - In the car, maybe too close to each other?
    - Under the stars in a good Canadian sleeping bag?
- What is your running kit like?
  - Do you have proper shoes?
  - Proper jackets for the rain and cold? Layers, right, you're Canadian, you know all about layers.

### Conflict Scene: The Epiphany

*"Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:  
What if my leaves are falling like its own?  
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies*

"Ode to the West Wind"

*Will take from both a deep autumnal tone,  
Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,  
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!*

— Percy Bysshe Shelley

*Drive my dead thoughts over the universe,  
Like wither'd leaves, to quicken a new birth;  
And, by the incantation of this verse,*

*Scatter, as from an unextinguish'd hearth  
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!  
Be through my lips to unawaken'd earth*

*The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind,  
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?"*

This scene takes place four days before the running scene, as a flashback to when the characters were all called upon their grail quest.

All of the characters work, or used to work, at Acklands-Grainger. Acklands-Grainger is the largest supplier of maintenance, repair, and operations equipment in Canada. They sell wrenches, safety gloves, screwdrivers, bleach and a million products like that, mostly to heavy industry and hospitals. They have stores in most big Canadian towns and a pretty solid reputation for working with local communities. Of course, they were also bought out by Americans not too long ago. That makes some of the characters nervous. Pat, in particular, would probably have been obsessing about that.

One evening, much like any other boring work day, the characters were all in the warehouse to pull and pick. That means they were taking shit out of boxes and putting it on shelves. They're on the floor of the warehouse, pictured below, alone. Their manager, Jennifer Malone, is up in her office doing paper work so that she can fire Eli.

As the scene starts one of the characters (I like to chose Michael, but pick based on your group's casting), opens a box that should be full of ice melt. Instead it's got an old, semi-battered prosthetic leg inside of it. The other characters have just come over to look at it, and then they're hit with an epiphany.

For some reason that they probably cannot logically describe, they are called. Maybe by god, or a ghost, or Canada, or whatever. It doesn't have to make sense outside of them. But each of them, at one and the same moment, knows without a doubt and true as death and deep as bone that:

- 1) This is Terry Fox's leg
- 2) They have been called to finish the Marathon of Hope
- 3) If they finish their quest, they can be healed, they can be whole, and maybe forgiven

## Hope Was the Last Thing in the Box

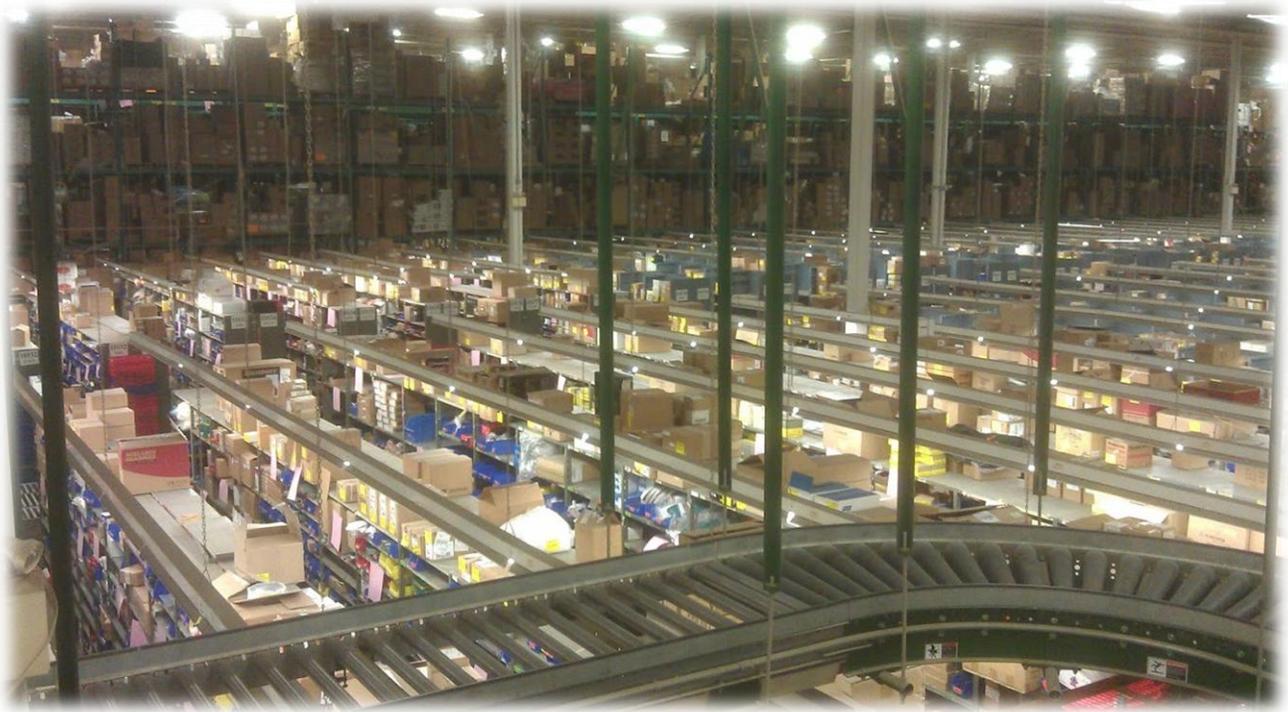
- 4) And so, maybe, can all the rest of Canada
- 5) No one else can do this, no one else can help — they have been called, and they must carry this alone

The scene then plays out in two stages:

- 1) Have each player describe what the epiphany feels like to their character. They were primed for this with a question on their character sheet, so give them a moment, guide them if they need it, but let them describe what it feels like.
- 2) The characters then have to start figuring out what they're going to do. We already know they're going to run, and that they're going to start running the next day, maybe the day after. But they won't see things that clearly at first, and they should be full of hope and anxiety and fear.

In this stage the characters should encounter and explore the difficulties in working together. Help push them towards setting off each other's triggers. Eli and Pat should be particularly easy to trigger in this scene, with their issues with anger/control and foreboding joy.

If the characters are being to reasonable, have Jennifer come down and start yelling at them to get to work, accusing them of theft, yelling at Eli to get out and otherwise being unreasonable. Let things escalate, and end the scene when it gets bad enough.



The Acklands-Grainger warehouse where all the characters worked

### **Choice Scene: Flashback**

For the Choice scene for Act I each character gets a flashback to the moment when they committed to the run and told the other people in their life — or realized they had no people in their life, and had no one that loved them enough to tell.

Procedurally this scene acts as the bridge between The Epiphany and the first running scene, letting us see how the characters got from the trauma in the warehouse to the point where they started running.

Play a short scene with each player to embody what it looked like and felt like when their character made their final choice. Start with the player of the character who seemed most ready to start running, and in the best emotional shape and move around to end with the character who seemed most in trauma or least likely to run.

If the players want their characters to involve each other in their scenes, that's cool. If it resolves the choice for both in one scene, that's cool. If it doesn't resolve it for the character who was called in "out of turn" then they still can have their choice scene.

For these scenes work with the player to show a bit of the emptiness of the character's life before the run started. Work together to frame a bit about where they live, how they live. Have each player describe who they talked to, before they left, if anyone. Play out that conversation. Turn the screw — other people will not understand, it's just too damn weird. They may even want to "help" by getting someone to "intervene" and, say, put the character in an involuntary psychiatric hold. (Not actually easy to do, but the mere threat of it is a pretty fucking horrible thing.)

If they didn't have anyone to talk to, work with them to narrate a scene where they can't even call anyone to tell them they're on a fucking grail quest. Turn the screw.

End once everyone has committed, and set out to run together.



## Act 2 — The World of Our Desires

Act 2 starts with a running scene. It's about two weeks after the end of Act I, and the characters have run just shy of 666km. They've moved out of the hills and woods of Ontario, and are coming into the endless prairies of Manitoba and Saskatchewan. They're also getting close to the longitudinal center point of Canada, which will probably feel like a big milestone, despite the fact it's less than 1/3rd of their actual trip.

In the Conflict Scene, the characters see a racist interaction at a Tim Horton's in Winnipeg. Fair or not, Winnipeg has a reputation as being the most racist and racially divided city in Canada, and the characters get a view of it up close. And what would probably just be another passing example of casual racism is likely to get rapidly escalated as the characters get triggered.

The Choice Scene starts off a few days after the Conflict Scene, enough time that people aren't still bleeding, but not so long ago that anyone has forgotten. In this scene the Smiling Man shows up to make the characters an offer: abandon the quest for a nice profit and a comfortable life.

### The Smiling Man

The Smiling Man will show up in the Choice Scene of this Act. So you may want to start foreshadowing him earlier. Talking heads on the TV, companies that make billions of dollars of profit talking about their new charity program that will give one dollar for every twenty that they make to a charity that they also run and manage... you get the picture.

The Smiling Man's writeup is in the Smiling Man Choice Scene, on page 38.



Second Running Scene: Manitoba, Stuck In the Middle

Centre Longitudinal  
du Canada  
96° 48' 35"

Longitudinal Centre  
of Canada  
96° 48' 35"



### **Narration**

*" Here, where the world is quiet;  
Here, where all trouble seems  
Dead winds' and spent waves' riot  
In doubtful dreams of dreams;  
I watch the green field growing  
For reaping folk and sowing,  
For harvest-time and mowing,  
A sleepy world of streams.*

*I am tired of tears and laughter,  
And men that laugh and weep;  
Of what may come hereafter  
For men that sow to reap:  
I am weary of days and hours,  
Blown buds of barren flowers,  
Desires and dreams and powers  
And everything but sleep"*

— "The Garden of Proserpine" by Charles Algernon Swinburne.

Look at the picture of the road, think about the distance. Think about getting up before the sun, about putting on shoes and running. Think about the car driving behind you, the times when it drives ahead and leaves you alone to run.

You've been running for two solid weeks, 14 days in a row. You've made almost 666km together. Every day you all run, at least for a time.

A few days back you crossed out of the hills and forests of Ontario and into the prairies of Manitoba. This is big sky country, the land long and flat, endless plains and fields, low winding rivers and winds that come roaring down thousands of kilometers from the taiga far, far to the north.

In the rest of Canada they call this "fly over country" because people from the big coastal cities fly over it. People don't think of this as the place to see in Canada. It's not Toronto's skyline, or Newfoundland's rocky romantic shores, or the mountain lakes and alpine summits of Alberta, the cool grey beauty of British Columbia. It's just flat, flat and endless and all the same.

But running through it, you've found that isn't true. Certainly the changes are less dramatic than the ocean or the mountains. But there is beauty here. Small flowers that nestle deep among the grasses, flocks of birds a hundred thousand strong that cover the sapphire sky with the million colors of their flight.

Late spring is moving in. The mornings are mild, crisp without being cold. The afternoons are warm, but without the sticky heat you had in Ontario. It's a beautiful time to run, and beautiful land to run through. And everywhere you see the signs of progress, big agribusiness farms with bright signs, giant threshing machines, and patchwork fields of a thousand kinds of wheat, corn, lentil, and bean.

### Guided Meditation

Now close your eyes. Think about the run. Think about the road, steady and straight across the endless prairie.

Think about the distance — you've run almost 700 km so far. You're getting down to only 2000km more to go. "Only" 2000 more to go....

Think about getting up before the sun, about putting on shoes and running. Think about the car driving behind you, the times when it drives ahead and leaves you alone to run.

Do you hear Terry running when you close your eyes?

How does it feel on your feet? Your shins? Your hips? What is the feeling in your lower back? Has it gotten worse in the two weeks? Gotten better?

What about the feeling in the back of your mind? Has it gotten worse in two weeks? Better?

When the road is endless and the sky seems eternal, and your mind wanders from your body, what do you see?

When the pain gets worse, what keeps you running?

When you hit your flow, when it doesn't hurt anymore, what makes you afraid? What makes you want to stop?

When does the anxiety come? The panic? In the morning before the run begins, with all the pain in front of you? In the middle of the run, when the pain is sitting on you like a weight? At the end of the run, when you wonder if you didn't go far enough?

How are you feeling about the others you're running with? Two weeks on the road is a long time. What do they smell like? How do they run? What things do they do in the morning when you're all getting ready that drive you mad? That make you laugh?

### Questions

Players can open their eyes. Below are questions to ask them to get talking about what the run is like. As before, don't get bogged down in minutia or worry about the logistics.

- Do any of you make jokes about the prairies? About how much Winnipeg sucks? Because everyone knows Winnipeg sucks. There's even a famous song, "I Hate Winnipeg."
- Is anyone having a really hard time with the run?
- Has anyone been injured, or is really worried about being injured?
- How are they dealing with the fear of injury? Of being out here alone with no support?
- There are some stretches of the road that are quite busy, others that you can run down for 12 hours without seeing another car. Which do you like more? Which would you rather run on?
- You probably know that Manitoba and Saskatchewan grow a lot of food for a lot of the world. Like, half the world's lentils come from here. And that more and more family farms are going away and being replaced by big corporate run businesses. Do any of you like that idea? Hate it?
- Have you had a fight about genetically modified food yet?

### **Conflict Scene: The Most Racist City in Canada**

*"Building bridges between the things we know and don't know*

*Making connections*

*Making the connections between you and me can be hard, especially if we keep pointing out differences from a place of inferiority.*

*I be, no better than We."*

— A Poem for My Imagined Daughter, Jayal Chung

Winnipeg in late spring is already hot, humid, and sticky. The city is not Canada's most lovely, with large sections overtaken by rail yards, shipping depots, industrial buildings, and historical structurally embedded racism. The last of which comes bubbling up in front of the characters one random night when they stop in a Tim Hortons at the edge of town and see one of the little microaggressions of intersectional racism that fill daily life for a lot of Canadians. It's the kind of thing that normally passes without a lot of comment. But the characters are on a quest, and under pressure, and its unlikely to pass without comment this time.

The situation is like this, the characters come into a Tim Hortons for coffee at the end of a long day of running. They probably would have wanted to use the bathroom too. There are a handful of other patrons inside, mostly white and male, truck drivers and warehouse workers — people the characters probably feel some level of comfort with, considering where they come from. Most of them are quietly minding their own business, politely disinterested in each other in the best Canadian fashion. Unless things become violent, or they are directly and persistently engaged, they're unlikely to get involved. And even then their most likely responses will be to either leave, call the police, or film the incident with their cellphone. Probably some combination of those three.

While most of the characters are in line to get coffee, with Eli close enough to hear part of but not all of the exchange, a small scuffle breaks out at the counter. The guy ordering leans across the counter and shoves the cashier and tells him to "shut the fuck up you little gook fuck."

The patron doing the shoving is Jay Barnfeather, a big, heavily built Metis man. The Metis are an ethnic group in Canada, part Cree First Nation (like Eli's Ojibway and part French in heritage. The highest concentration of them is in Manitoba, where they face considerable racism from non-Metis. In Winnipeg they have a racist stereotype reputation for being drunk, homeless, and lazy. And for picking fights.

In this case he's shoving the cashier because - and he'll swear to it if confronted - that the kid called him "a drunk half n half."

The cashier being shoved is Charles Ang, the child of immigrant parents from the Philippines. He was born in Canada and hates being referred to as Filipino. Much less gook. Which isn't even the right racist slur. There's a big Filipino population in Winnipeg, and they take almost as much racist shit on a daily basis as the Metis do, and Charles is not okay with being pushed.

He'll also swear he didn't call Barnfeather any kind of slur, that he asked him if he wanted to drink half caffeinated coffee because its late. And he'll swear to that story and stick to it.

## Hope Was the Last Thing in the Box

If the characters weren't there, Charles would yell at Barnfeather and tell him to leave or he'd call the cops. Barnfeather would yell back for a few minutes. The other people in the Tim's would nervously not look at them, or at each other. After a few minutes Barnfeather would leave, pissed off, and that would be that.

Of course, the characters may very well not leave it at that. And if they do, if somehow Barnfeather goes out the door without anyone getting triggered, then you should trigger Eli when the characters talk about it afterwards.

One of the keys to this scene is to make triggering slow, let the tension build before you set people off. It is tempting in the middle of play to want to escalate fast to stop the awkward terribleness of the situation, to have people take sure and certain action in the face of a muddy, frankly stupid situation. Resist that urge. Go slow, and use escalations and triggers to slowly turn the screw. Direct the characters away from turning this into a Tim Hortons brawl. And cut the scene when you feel it's hit its emotional point. If there are questions left, bad emotions still on the table, that's fine. If the characters are a little pissed and disgusted moving into the next scene, that's just as well.



**Tim Hortons:** Tim Hortons is the Canadian institution. It's a fast food place where you can get coffee and donuts. They also serve other things, like sandwiches, but no one eats that. To many Canadians Tim Hortons and Canada/Home are close to being the same thing. In 2010 a Canada wide survey was done in which Canadians were asked what companies they trusted and/or respected. Tim Hortons had a >80% trust rate. The second place company was under 50%, and third was under 30%.

People love "Tims" or "Timmy's." It's the common person's coffee: cheap, hot, and plentiful. And you can find a Tims about every 100km along the entire Trans Canada. The characters have probably stopped at 30 Timmy's in the 14 or 15 days they've been running. They'd have no reason to think this would happen here. Or, if they're Eli, and grew up in a world where this happens every day, no reason to think it fucking wouldn't.

### Choice Scene: The Smiling Man

*"Please allow me to introduce myself  
I'm a man of wealth and taste  
I've been around for a long, long year  
Stole many a man's soul to waste*

*"And I was 'round when Jesus Christ  
Had his moment of doubt and pain  
Made damn sure that Pilate  
Washed his hands and sealed his fate*

*"Pleased to meet you  
Hope you guess my name  
But what's puzzling you  
Is the nature of my game"*

— "Sympathy for the Devil" the Rolling Stones

An indeterminate amount of time after the last scene, the characters will be approached by the Smiling Man. The Smiling Man is the first of those metaphorical forces given a human mask that we talked about in the overview. He is the smiling face of corporate greed given flesh: a smooth talking marketing agent who wants to buy your soul out from under you.

When the Smiling Man comes, he isn't just a marketing rep from a big company. He's everything that capitalism and corporate personhood represents, good, bad, and indifferent, all rolled into one package. And he's here to give them a choice — they can keep limping along on their silly quest, getting more tired and more hurt every day while no one knows or cares; or they can let him help them, get them some big name corporate sponsorship, let people know about their quest, handle the PR and make sure people don't get mad about them profaning Terry's memory, and he will, of course, make sure a lot of money goes to charity too!

The Smiling Man is handsome, and he wears a nice suit. Not too handsome though, not too nice. After all he wouldn't want you to feel bad about yourself, or to point out that you don't have as much as he does. Or that you never will, never could. See he has it all: money, power, love, self-respect, a Porche...

Luckily for you, The Smiling Man is a good guy. He's here to help you. To help you help him. To help you help him help us all. It's win-win. Baby, it's better than that, it's win-win-win!

The Smiling Man will approach the characters in a Subway or a McDonalds or a Tim Hortons- some big chain where they stopped for lunch one day. He'll already know their names, their stories, and he'll make it clear he's here to buy them out. Play him smooth, play him confident, and make sure the players and the characters feel how wrong he is. The same thing that gave them the epiphany - however they explained it to themselves - lets them know in the same way that this is Not The Right Path.

When the Smiling Man pitches, rather than making specific number offers, I pitch it like "He gives you a number. It's a nice number, nice enough to live off for a long time if you're not greedy." Or "He knows

## Hope Was the Last Thing in the Box

folks back in Newfoundland, people you know he names by name." This is partly to keep from getting involved in logistics, but also partly in the fiction of the game. Talking to the Smiling Man isn't really talking to a person. The whole situation is a bit surreal, and a bit too smooth, not enough humanity involved.

The players are free to take or leave his offer, as they desire in playing their characters honestly. This is a choice scene, so there's no triggering. Get them to choose, then ask them how they feel about their choice.

- If no one leaves, the whole party keeps running.
- If one person leaves, then the rest of the party keeps on running. That person becomes the Bad Man in the next Act. If this means just that the player is going to play the Bad Man, or if it means that in fiction the character literally becomes the Bad Man, is up to you and the table. Let it ride based on what feels best and what the group thinks.
- If two characters leave and two stay true, the two who stay true keep running. In the next Running scene, ask the two who stayed true how they kept running instead of leaving the leg with the others.
  - One of those who left becomes the Bad Man, as above.
  - The other who left should get a short wrap up scene in which we see them go back home, with some money, and some comfort, to the terrible loneliness of their unhealed and unregenerate life.
- If three or more characters leave, then the Smiling Man makes good on his offer. They get money, they get whatever else he offered. But no one gets healed.
  - For all that left, do a short series of scenes with each character where we see them, comfortable and middle class, with money and maybe a little fame, but with all their pain and trauma still haunting them. Then move to the Debrief.
  - If one character tries to continue without the other three, then they meet the Bad Man and die by his hand, as per the end of Choice Scene: The Bad Man. In this case let the others narrate how knowing that the only one who stayed true was murdered because they abandoned the quest effect the rest of their lives.

### Act 3 — The World of Our Fear

Act 3, as always, starts with a Running Scene. It's four to six weeks after the Smiling Man made his offer and whoever took him up left the quest. The characters have run just about 1,800 km farther, which is an impressive feat. They've come out of the long, long rise of the prairies, and about a week and a half to two weeks ago hit the massive, daunting tower of the Rocky Mountains just after they passed through Calgary. Every Canadian knows that that means they're now far to the West, and that when they come out of the mountains they'll be at the Pacific, and almost to the end.

In the conflict scene the characters get caught in a freak summer snow storm, which are rare but not unheard of in the high passes through the mountains. They take shelter in a roadside motel, sharing a room with a family to keep from death by exposure, and are confronted by their own ghosts and the possibility that the family is abusive to its child. Without hard evidence, they have to decide what they do, if anything. If they can actually make a decision, that is, and not just react impulsively from being triggered.

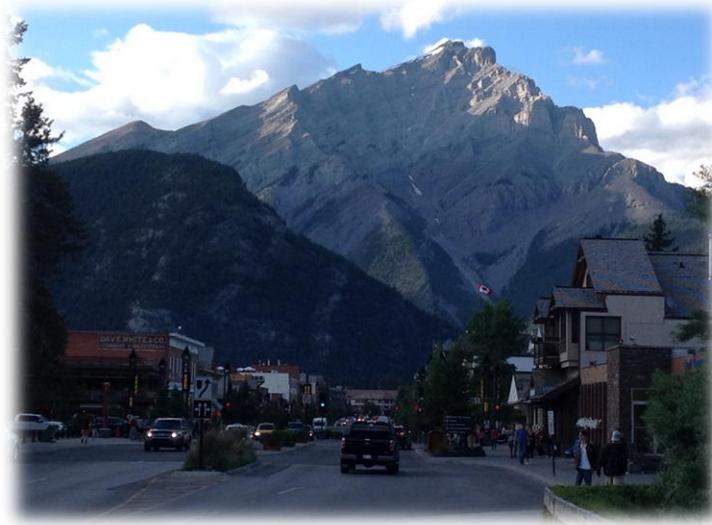
The choice scene starts off a few days after the Conflict Scene, with the taste of the last scene still in the character's mouths, but the smell of the Pacific starting to reach them in the long run through the mountains. There the Bad Man comes for them, and one of the characters will die.

#### The Bad Man

The Bad Man dominates the Choice Scene of the Act. He is the archetype of all the worst that humanity is, and he will kill one of the characters. So please, foreshadow him.

If one or more of the PCs sold out in the Smiling Man Choice Scene, then let them foreshadow his coming too. Just the act of them reading the Bad Man's write-up - and the two of you discussing it - is enough to add a frisson of out-of-character angst to the scenario.

The Bad Man's write-up is in the Bad Man choice scene, on page 3847.



Third Running Scene: Kicking Horse Pass, The Road Down



### **Narration**

*" I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness,  
starving hysterical naked,  
dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking  
for an angry fix,  
angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly  
connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night,  
who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat up smoking  
in the supernatural darkness of cold-water flats floating  
across the tops of cities contemplating jazz,  
who bared their brains to Heaven"  
— "Howl" by Allen Ginsberg*

Look at the picture of the road, think about the distance. Think about getting up before the sun, about putting on shoes and running. Think about the car driving behind you, the times when it drives ahead and leaves you alone to run.

You've been running for about two months now, six weeks since Winnipeg. You've added another 1800km together, around 2400 in total since you started out from Thunder Bay. Every day you run, most mornings you don't even think about it anymore. Two months makes a habit, or that's what they say.

A couple of weeks back you left the prairies, and just past the big city of Calgary, you hit the wall of the Rocky Mountains. They rose up out of the flat land like impossible thunderheads, dark and massive beyond words, as inevitable and incontrovertible as death. They're some of the tallest mountains on earth, home to glaciers that survived the last ice age, lakes that have never known human touch, and ski communities that people fly from all over the world to see.

Up those mountains you ran, following the winding switchbacks of the TransCanada. Up and up and up, gaining more than a thousand meters of elevation in those weeks. Up into the home of eagles and rocks and little stunted trees, down through long valleys filled with lakes bluer than the sky, clear as crystal, as unimaginable as purity.

It's summer now, and that's just as well, as even now it's often cold at night this high up into the mountains. The days are often bright and clear, but sudden storms often blow up out of nowhere, and you have to keep your eyes open. But on the days when it's clear and sunny, it's like nothing most people will ever see. The sun bright as god's face upon the snow capped peaks, the endless black and grey of stone topped with living green of evergreen trees, the call of eagles and at night the distant sound of wolves.

### **Guided Meditation**

Now close your eyes. Think about the run. Think about the road, winding up and back, higher and higher for two weeks. You're coming to the highest point, and soon you'll start heading down again, towards the Pacific.

Towards the end.

## Hope Was the Last Thing in the Box

Think about the distance — you've run almost 2400 km so far. You've only got 500 km left. You're so close.

So close to the end.

Think about getting up before the sun, about putting on shoes and running. Think about the car driving behind you, the times when it drives ahead and leaves you alone to run.

Do you hear Terry running when you close your eyes?

How does it feel on your feet? Your shins? Your hips? What is the feeling in your lower back? You've been running up hill almost constantly for weeks. Is the pain better? Worse?

What about the feeling in the back of your mind? Has it gotten better in the clear, high air of the mountains? Or do you hear the wolves and fear?

When the road vanishes behind the mountains and they block out the whole sky until there is nothing before you but stone, and your mind wanders from your body, what do you see?

When the pain gets worse, what keeps you running?

When you hit your flow, when it doesn't hurt anymore, what makes you afraid? What makes you want to stop?

When does the anxiety come? The panic? In the morning before the run begins, with all the pain in front of you? In the middle of the run, when the pain is sitting on you like a weight? At the end of the run, when you wonder if you didn't go far enough?

How are you feeling about the others you're running with? You've been on the road with them for two months or more. When was the last time you had a relationship that lasted that long? What's it feel like to have the same people in your life, sharing a thing every day for two months? Sharing a thing no one else could understand.

[If someone left with the Smiling Man] And those who left? Do you think about them often? Do you wish you had quit too? Do you fear for them? Hate them? Envy them?

### Questions

Players can open their eyes. Below are questions to ask them to get talking about what the run is like. As always, don't get bogged down in minutia or worry about the logistics.

- Which of you is having nightmares?
  - What are they like?
  - And what happens when you dream about the Bad Man?
- What kind of engine trouble is the car having?
  - How much does that worry you? Will you die if the car breaks down?
  - Who keeps the car going? Has that changed over the course of the trip?
- Did the events in Manitoba change the group?
  - How do you feel about it, about the choice to keep going?

### **Conflict Scene: Small Town Doubt**

*"Like a baby, stillborn,  
like a beast with his horn  
I have torn everyone who reached out for me.  
But I swear by this song  
and by all that I have done wrong  
I will make it all up to thee."  
— "Bird on a Wire", Leonard Cohen.*

As the characters head down from Kicking Horse Pass, the highest point on the TransCanada and the moment when they are officially on their way down towards the Pacific, a freak summer snow storm drives them to find shelter. They know better than to try hiding it out in the car, Canadian weather common sense tells them that's a bad plan — even if the car was in better shape than it is. So they find themselves at the Castle Inn, the only shelter for miles. And because it's a storm, the place is full up.

That's when they're saved by the kindness of strangers. A woman who has the hotel's only suite, with her husband and child, offers to let the characters sleep on the couch and the pullout in the front room of the suite. The characters end up spending the night in close quarters with the family, and start to notice things. But there isn't any proof, no one will confirm, and everyone will deny. So the character's won't be sure if it's real, or if it's their own scars and baggage. And they're going to have to try to make it through the night.

### **The Family**

- Carl Wriggle, the father. He's in his middle 30s, used to be an athlete, now works selling tires for a Canadian Tire store in Calgary. He's a bit drunk when the characters get there, and while he won't get shit faced, he will keep drinking most of the night. He's clearly not happy about the offer his wife made, and doesn't bother to hide it. He's barely hospitable, but isn't going to throw people out in the snow to freeze either. But if he's outright accused of abusing his kid or his wife he will lose his shit and fly into a screaming, spitting rage.
- Martha Wriggle, the mother. She's in her middle 30s, maybe a year or two younger than Carl. She's a runner too, which is why she says she noticed the characters in the first place. But all night she's nervous and jumpy. She watches Carl way too much — never takes her eyes off him, which is easy to read as being a sign of fear, and all of the characters would know from past experience can be sign of abuse. Or just a sign that it's been a long day and she's tired and worried about her husband, who hasn't been feeling well and is having a really shit year at work.
- Drake Wriggle, the son. He's 9 or so, bright but quiet. He'll avoid the characters at first, sulking in the corners a bit. He gets clearly and obviously nervous if his dad gets upset, and when his parents have an exchange of unhappy looks or snippy words about Martha inviting the characters in, he'll end up quietly in tears. He also has a long string of bruises down the left side of his body, from the top of the hip to just under the shoulder blade. Which could be where someone wailed on him, or could have been from a fall during rock climbing.

## Hope Was the Last Thing in the Box

One of the keys to this scene is to make triggering slow, let the tension build before you set people off. It is tempting in the middle of play to want to escalate fast to stop the awkward terribleness of the situation, to have people take sure and certain action in the face of a muddy situation.

Resist that urge. Go slow, and use escalations and triggers to slowly turn the screw. And cut the scene when you feel it's hit its emotional point. If there are questions left, bad emotions still on the table, that's fine. If the characters are a little pissed and disgusted moving into the next scene, that's just as well. Because this isn't the scene where anyone gets killed. That's the next scene.



Castle Inn Motel, any irony in it being a castle in the mountains on a grail quest is clearly unintended

### Choice Scene: The Bad Man

*"The mass and majesty of this world, all  
That carries weight and always weighs the same  
Lay in the hands of others; they were small  
And could not hope for help and no help came:  
What their foes like to do was done, their shame  
Was all the worst could wish; they lost their pride  
And died as men before their bodies died."*

— "The Shield of Achilles" by W.H. Auden

Not long after the events of Small Town Doubt, a day or two, the nightmares get worse. A day or so after that the characters all know that the Bad Man is coming. They might not know quite what he is, or why he comes. But they know. Same as they knew at the start of the quest, they know.

- Ask them what it's like to know that they are going to die. Do little vignette scenes showing their fear, creeping down the mountains.
- Ask them if they try to run. If they abandon the quest and just flee.
  - If they don't, ask them where they find the strength not to flee.
- Tell them it gets worse, and they know he's going to be upon them. Do little vignette scenes showing their desperation, the sense of it like a storm in the sky, an avalanche about to spill down.
- Ask if they turn on each other, if they sacrifice one for the greater good.
  - If they don't, ask them where they find the strength to stand together.

Then have the Bad Man take one of them.

- If someone breaks first and runs, abandoning the quest, the Bad Man takes them.
- If someone stays behind to sacrifice themselves, ask them which of the others they are doing this for, the one they most want to protect and keep safe. The Bad Man takes that character.
- If the characters sacrifice another, the Bad Man takes the one that suggested the sacrifice.
- If no one breaks, if no one runs, if they stand together, then the Bad Man takes the one who has the most hope, who has become a leader or thinks they might actually finish the quest.

The Bad Man takes the character to some arbitrary spot, a patch of concrete, a bit of parking lot in the middle of nowhere. The character can't fight, if they even think about trying he kills them. Let the player know it.

The Bad Man marches them out, makes them kneel. He doesn't respond to questions, pleas, or anything the character could say. Play it out slow, slow motion choreography, with the mountains and the clouds.

Ask what they're thinking, what they feel in that last moment.

Then the Bad Man shoots them in the head and leaves their body lying there for the birds to peck and the wolves to drag away.

***The Bad Man***

The Bad Man is every fucking thing in the world that hurts and screams, everything in this wretched place that preys upon the weak and builds its fiefdoms among the ruins of freedom, every bit of murderous greed and confused sense of self-loathing and shame. The Bad Man isn't a man, he is the end.

The Bad Man looks like a person. You wouldn't know to look at him that he was the Bad Man. Not until you look into his eyes. And then it's too late. When he tells you to walk, you walk and you cry and you don't know why you're doing it. But you do it, because there isn't another way. And when he tells you to kneel, you kneel. And you know that it won't help, but you do it anyway, because its already too late.

The Bad Man isn't cool. He isn't unique. He's just wretched, evil shit, the worst and dullest and most broken. He's already dead, and so he won't feel it when he kills you.

## Act 4 — The World of Our Choice

Act 4, as always, starts with a Running Scene. It's a few days after the Bad Man came. The characters are coming out of the mountains, running down the Pacific towards Vancouver, where they'll get on a ferry to Victoria and the quest will end. They're almost there, and almost done. Probably almost done in more ways than one.

The Conflict Scene for this act is only the characters dealing with each other and themselves. They have to decide, knowing that one of their own has just been murdered, if they can finish. If they want to finish. If it's even worth it anymore, if they or Canada or anything deserves to be saved. If everyone's triggers are all checked off, then this becomes essentially a Choice Scene. If someone has a trigger left, it's time to set it off as the fear of failure and the fear of success and the fear of dying and the fear of living finally become too much. Few triggers should remain unchecked at this point, but in the off chance someone has more than one, only one trigger will go off.

The last Choice Scene is the last scene of the game. The characters, if any are left, come to the end of the road and have to make one last choice: whether or not they can forgive and be forgiven.





**Final Running Scene: The Pacific Has No Memory**

### **Narration**

*" Well you know that I love to live with you  
But you make me forget so very much  
I forget to pray for the angels  
And then the angels forget to pray for us"*

— "So Long Marianne" by Leonard Cohen

Look at the picture of the road, think about the distance. Think about getting up before the sun, about putting on shoes and running. Think about the car driving behind you, the times when it drives ahead and leaves you alone to run.

Think about what has been lost. Think about who has been lost.

It's almost over. You're on the road to Vancouver. The Pacific is just over the next rise. You can almost smell it, the salt in the air. There have been seagulls on the road for days. 2800 km down, only a few more days.

Only a few more days... and then what? What really waits for you in Victoria, on that island on the far side of the country from the other island where Terry started the run 34 years ago.

You're still in the mountains, but they're changing slightly. The trees are changing, taller and leaner, coastal trees seeping into the mix. The hawk's wings' shapes are changing, day after day, different birds hunting different prey. The passes aren't as high anymore, and it's not cold at night. Even though summer is getting on, the nights are mild, the days are a hazy grey, but even in the drizzle they're warm enough you don't ever lose feeling in your toes as you splash through endless puddles.

In a few days you'll be in Vancouver, which everyone says is the most beautiful city in Canada. One of the most beautiful in the world. You'll get on a ferry, and it will take you to the island. And then it's only a kilometer, a single click through flower gardens down to the mile zero marker and the Pacific.

And the end.

### **Guided Meditation**

Now close your eyes. Think about the run. Think about the road, swooping back and forth, down and down and down towards the endless blue of the Pacific. Towards the gleaming spires of Vancouver, silhouetted towers of light against the blue water, the black mountains, the green trees.

Think about the end.

Think about who has been lost. About what has been lost.

Think about the one who was taken. About all of those who have been taken.

Think about the distance — you've run almost 3000 km so far. From Hobro to Athens. If you were in Europe you could have run across almost the whole continent. You've only got a few hundred left. You're so close.

So close to the end.

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Think about getting up before the sun, about putting on shoes and running. Think about the car driving behind you, the times when it drives ahead and leaves you alone to run.

Do you hear Terry running when you close your eyes?

Are there any other ghosts running with you? Whispering to you when you tire? Screaming at you when you feel brave?

How does it feel on your feet? Your shins? Your hips? What is the feeling in your lower back? You've been running for months, every day. Running until everything is gone. Is the pain better? Worse?

What about the feeling in the back of your mind?

Do you hear the gun shot in the back of your mind?

Do you hear them dying, the sound of the passing?

When the pain gets worse, what keeps you running?

When you hit your flow, when it doesn't hurt anymore, what makes you afraid? What makes you want to stop?

When does the anxiety come? The panic? In the morning before the run begins, with all the pain in front of you? In the middle of the run, when the pain is sitting on you like a weight? At the end of the run, when you wonder if you didn't go far enough?

You're almost to the end. To forgiveness.

Do you deserve it? Could you look them in the face and tell them you deserve it?

Look them in the face and tell them you forgive them?

### Questions

Players can open their eyes. Below are questions to ask them to get talking about what the run is like.

- Do you talk about the Bad Man? Or will the words not come?
- What's it like, between you, now that some are lost.
- Was it your fault?
- Should it have been you?
- Do you actually talk to each other about what's going to happen at the end? About the future?

### **Conflict Scene: Should I Stay or Should I Go Now**

*"Those masterful images because complete  
Grew in pure mind, but out of what began?  
A mound of refuse or the sweepings of a street,  
Old kettles, old bottles, and a broken can,  
Old iron, old bones, old rags, that raving slut  
Who keeps the till. Now that my ladder's gone,  
I must lie down where all the ladders start  
In the foul rag and bone shop of the heart."  
— "The Circus Animal's Desertion," W.B. Yeats*

This scene is all on the players. They've come down the mountains, and just off the side of the road when they were going to switch runners, they've started talking instead. They've started to ask if they should keep going. If it's worth it.

They can feel the counting down in every step they've been taking, and every kilometre they've been clocking and the fear of failure and the fear of success and the fear of dying and the fear of living and the fear of What now?, What next?, What then? should be striking like an itch in the back of minds.

And they have to seriously consider if the Bad Man is coming for them. If they're all going to die like that. If this was all a dream, a fantasy, a wish.

Or even if it is real, if it's what they really want, here in the shadow of the end.

Is forgiveness worth martyrdom?

Set the stage, they're by the bridge in the picture below, just outside Vancouver. Let them talk. If they have any unchecked triggers, hit them. See what happens. If they don't, let them talk until they stop, or chose, or repeat themselves more than once. Then cut and move on.

Optional: If your group likes the idea, you can have the player of the murdered character play the ghost of the fallen. They're a shade in the scene. They can't actually be seen or heard by the other characters, but anything they say or do is felt, like a spiritual echo, down in the hole their passing left in the other's souls.

If one or more decide to finish, then go the last scene.

If no one decides to finish, then do a brief series of vignettes about what happens to the characters as they return to their broken lives, unhealed and unable to forget or forgive. Then move to debrief.



### Choice Scene: Down By the Water

*I did my best, it wasn't much  
I couldn't feel, so I tried to touch  
I've told the truth, I didn't come to fool you  
And even though  
It all went wrong  
I'll stand before the Lord of Song  
With nothing on my tongue but Hallelujah*  
— Hallelujah, Leonard Cohen

After 3000 km and almost three months, whoever remains gets off the ferry in Victoria, British Columbia.

They go down the road past the mile zero marker, to the steps that lead down to the Pacific. It's here that Terry was going to end the Marathon of Hope.

It's here that the characters will end their quest.

All they have to do is go down, and dip the leg into the water.

As they walk down towards the water, they have to answer two questions. That's all. That's the final test, and it's just as easy as saying it, and really and truly believing it.

Take your time with this one. After you ask the questions, tell the players to take a moment in their characters and in themselves and answer only when they're certain, only when they really believe it. Describe the sound of the waves and the gulls and the beating of their heart, and ask:

- 1) Think of the worst thing you ever did. Think about who you hurt, who you failed.

Do you deserve to be forgiven?

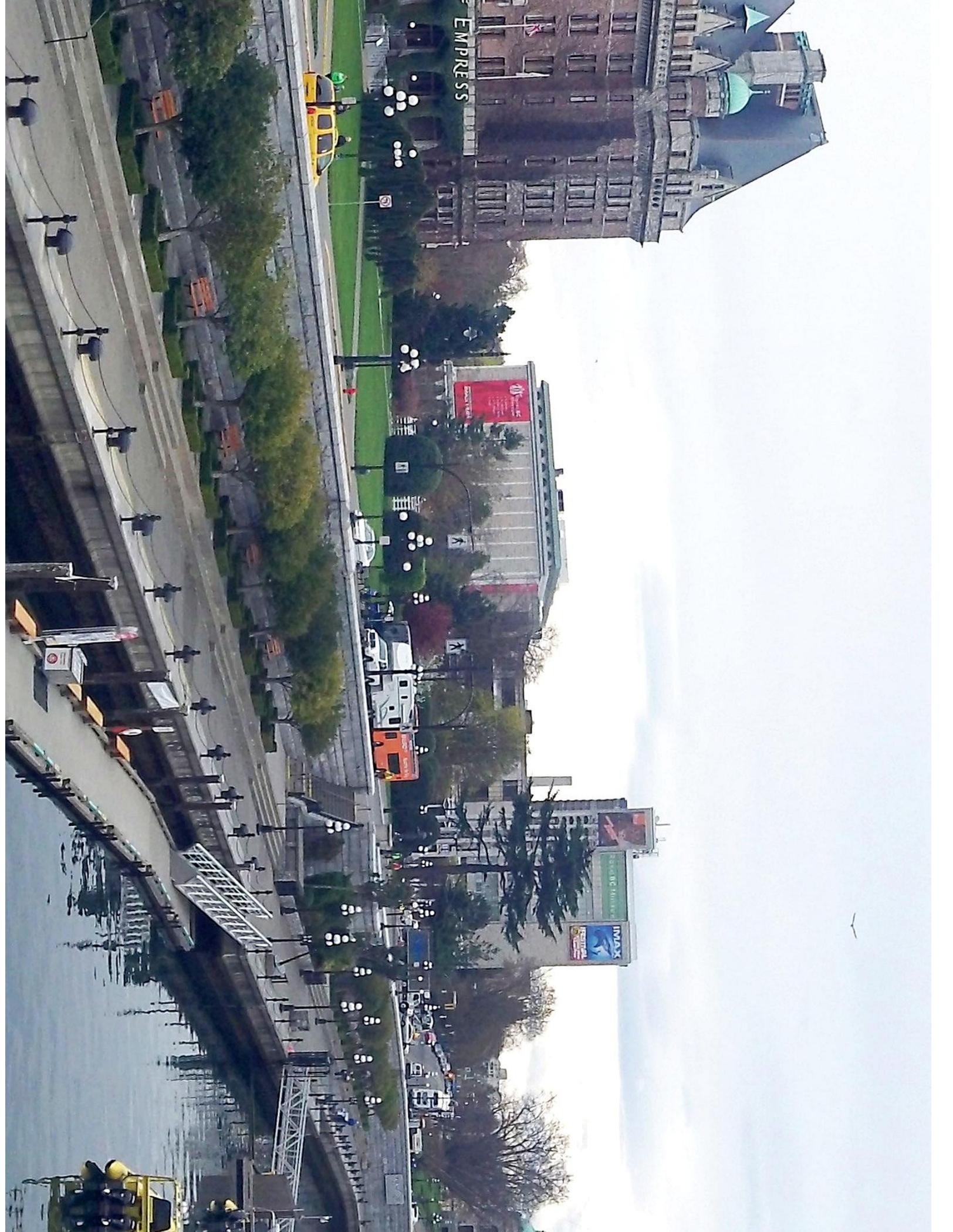
- 2) Think of the worst thing that was ever done to you. Think about who hurt you, the look on their face as they did it, the feeling in your gut as it was done.

Do they deserve to be forgiven?

If anyone says no, the quest fails. The spirit, or force, or hope or whatever the hell it was leaves them, and the Marathon is over.

And if everyone who is there answer yes, and means it, and really believes it, let them go down to the water.

Then ask them what happens.



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## **Debrief**

After the final scene closes, let everyone regroup a moment, then move into the debrief.

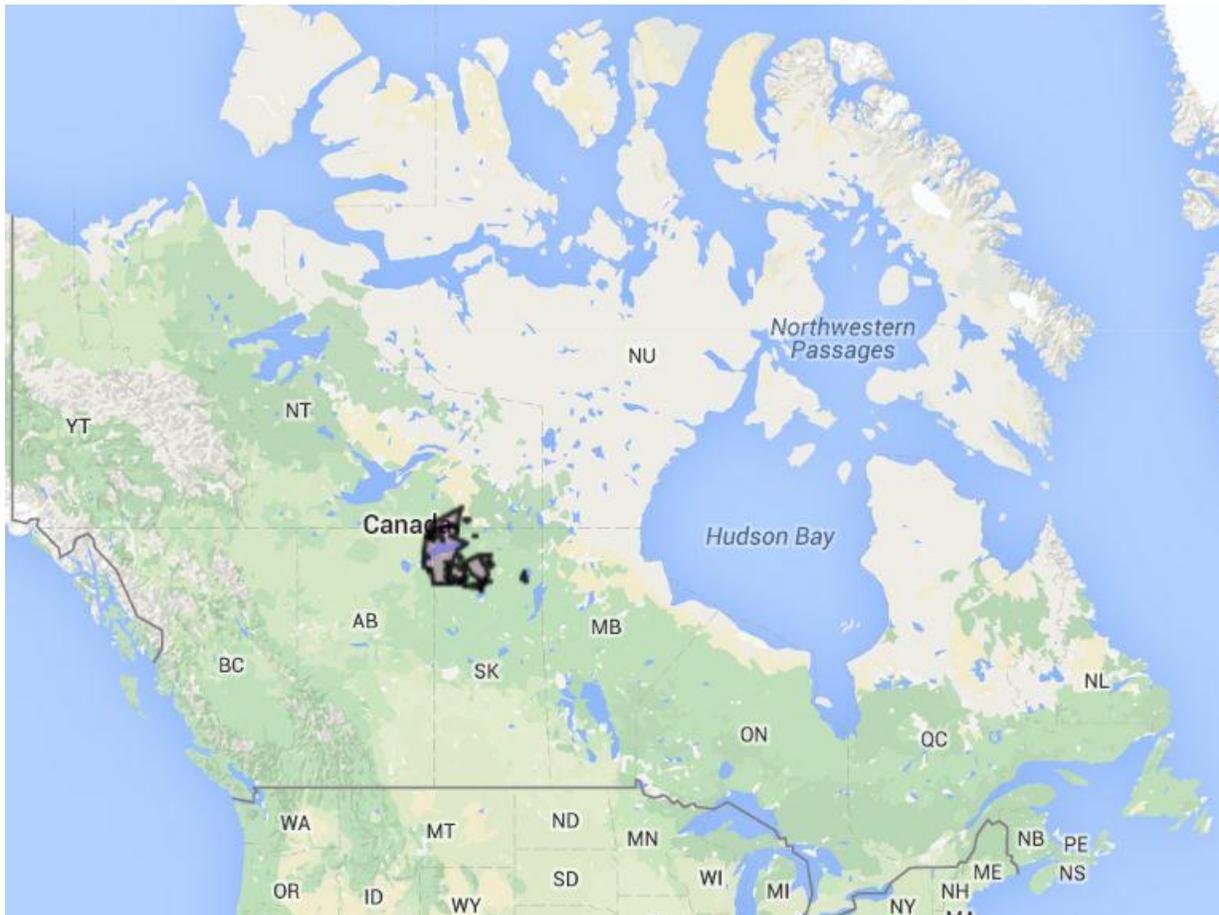
Ask everyone these questions. Go slow, let people have time and space to answer:

- 1) Anyone need a hug?
- 2) What was one positive thing that really stood out for you?
- 3) What was the hardest moment of the game for you?
- 4) Now that you've run three thousand in their shoes, what do you think about your character?
- 5) What do you think about the other characters?
- 6) Anyone want to go to Canada? Anyone really NOT want to go to Canada?

Give everyone time and space to talk, to unpack, and move back to Denmark. If you're at Fastaval I'll probably be at the bar, come find me and I'll buy you a drink and you can tell me how things went.

## Quick Facts Sheet

**Canada:** The first thing you need to know is that Canada is really big, and except around a handful of major city centers, pretty empty. It's the second or third least densely populated nation on earth, and the second largest. (And if Russia keeps on shrinking, soon we'll be first.) Here's a map of size comparison between Canada and Denmark, for scale:



**History:** Keeping this short, rough, and semi-inaccurate — the First Nations (called "American Indians" in American media) have lived in what is now Canada for a little over 10,000 years. Europeans first got here a thousand years ago when Danish Vikings landed in Newfoundland (not far from where Kelly is from). But they didn't stick around. The first European colonization on a large scale was done by the French, who settled large portions of Western Canada. The English followed after, and this resulted in several hundred years of wars between the English, the French, and the different First Nations.

Eventually the English won, and Canada became part of Britain. In 1867 Canada started becoming its own Nation, though it took a long time to fully separate from Britain. After World War 2 Canada came into America's shadow in many ways, and is now permeated by American media in a significant way.

Canada is also more and more an immigrant country, with people of all races, languages, and creeds. Major cities like Toronto and Montreal have no ethnic majority anymore, and multiculturalism is seen as

## Hope Was the Last Thing in the Box

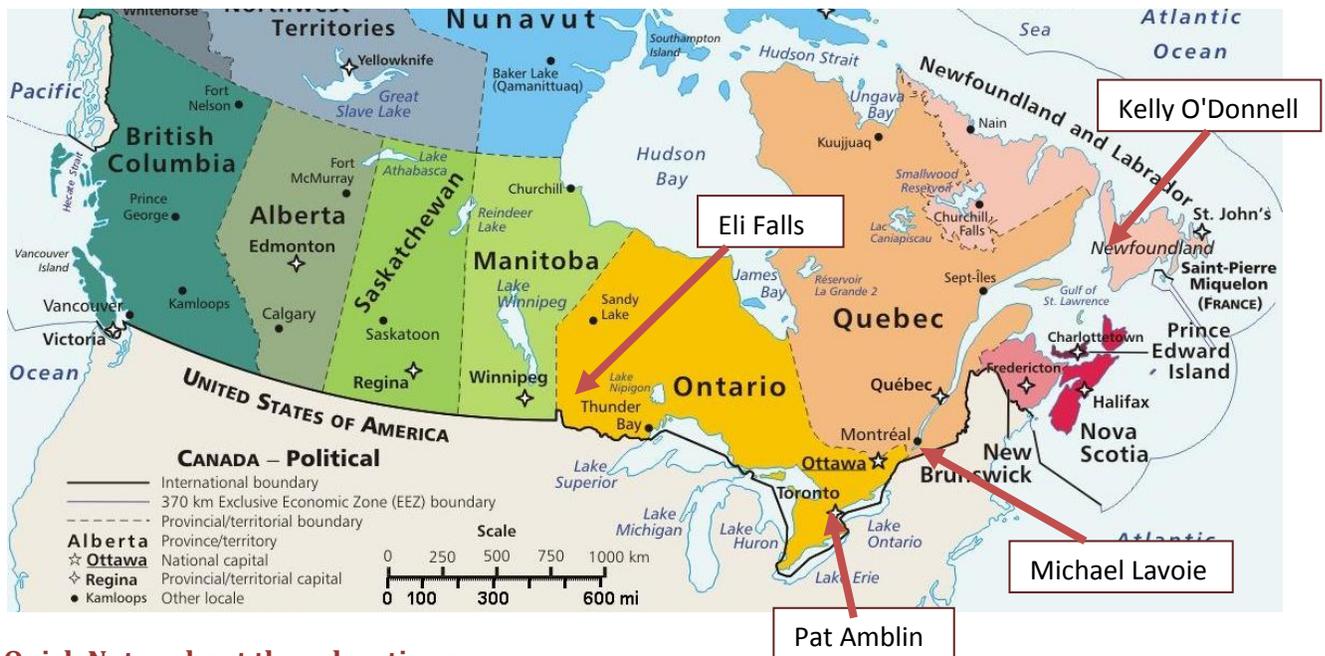
the wave of the future, and goes hand in hand with a bit of a reactionary and conservative mindset that often gets frustrated and confused about what it means to "be Canadian."

**Canadian Culture?:** Canadians often refer to themselves as "not Americans" in recognition that they're quite like Americans, but also quite different. We like to think of ourselves as more polite, with socialized medicine, and more reasonable in general than Americans — a little like a combination of Scandinavian and American culture. In my experience this is partly true.

**The TransCanada Highway:** Most of the route the characters will run through the course of this scenario is along, or near, the TransCanada Highway — the series of roads that goes from one side of the country to the other. A little map is below:



## Where the Characters are From



### Quick Notes about these locations

**Toronto:** Now the economic center and largest city in Canada. Most other Canadians "joke" about people from Toronto being assholes. This is especially true for people from Montreal, which was the economic center and largest city in Canada until the 1970s. Most Torontonians "joke" that Toronto is the only real civilization in Canada.

**Montreal:** Economic center of French Canada, and Canada's "second city." To this day there is tension between English and French Canada, and as recently as 15 years ago Quebec was having serious referendums about withdrawing from Canada.

**Newfoundland:** The last province to join Canada, it was part of Britain until 1949, and some Newfoundlanders still think they made a bad decision. Many Newfoundlanders have a distinct accent, and other Canadians frequently make jokes about how dumb "Newfies" are. West Newfoundland, where Kelly is from, is very rural and based on fishing, and few towns have more than 2000 people.

**Asubpeeschoseewagong First Nation (also known as "Grassy Narrows"):** This a treaty community of Ojibwa people. The Ojibwa are one of the largest remaining tribal groups in Canada, and have lived in what is now Ontario for thousands of years. Now they have multiple treaties in place with the Canadian government — many of which are violated as often as they're kept. In America this is one of the groups of people called "Indians." And in Canada, as in America, they're often subject to the most extreme racism and systemic oppression in the nation.

## Historical Note

The characters in the story are based in real events in Canada. Some of them, however, are a bit anachronistic.

What happened to Michael, for example, really did happen. Over 20,000 Quebecois children who were not in dire need were taken from their family and committed to institutions or church care. These children are today known as the Duplessis Orphans, and have been organizing since the 1990s to receive recognition and restitution for the crimes perpetrated against them. Most of the cases, however, occurred between 1940 and 1960, and by the time Michael was taken the worst of the abuses had been shut down.

Similarly, the Asubpeeschoseewagong First Nation actually did face poisoning issues from careless industrial development, but the incidents in Asubpeeschoseewagong would have happened slightly before Eli was born, and the details in his bio are a mix of that incident and two others, one in eastern Ontario and another in Alberta. However, the issue is an ongoing problem in Canada, as multiple First Nations communities across Canada have faced poisoning, water contamination, and other issues as ongoing problems to this day.

Winnipeg was called "The Most Racist City in Canada" by the media in early 2015. The truth is this is vastly unfair to Winnipeg. There are a lot of deeply embedded problems in Winnipeg, but that it's "the most racist city" is... unfair. Canadians like to feel like racism isn't a big problem in Canada, and so tend to be rather polite and understated in their racism. The only thing that I, personally, have seen different in Winnipeg than in other Canadian cities is they aren't always polite about it. So, my apologies to Winnipeg, I probably am just kicking you while you're down. Now fix your shit.

## Author's Note

This is the part where I write things no one needs to care about because they're not part of the game. Don't bother reading it unless you care about things like authorial intent or pointless philosophical naval gazing.

The title of the scenario refers the Greek legend of Pandora. Pandora was given a box by the gods and told not to open it. So of course she opened it. And out of the box flew hate and pride and disease and death and all of the things that hurt and kill and turn brother against brother and kill children and burn innocence to the ground. Because Pandora couldn't keep her curiosity in check humanity was cursed.

But not everything flew out of the box. In the bottom of the box after all the curses were gone there was a little shrivelled and shivering thing left — Hope.

Most of the time when teachers in school tell this story to students they say that Hope was the balance to everything that flew out of the box. It was the god's gift in return for the pain of all the curses they had just rained down upon them.

But there is another tradition, which I've often heard from Greek grandmothers, about what the last thing in the box meant.

\*\*\*\*

In September of 2013 I went to Newfoundland with Moyra Turkington, my beautiful wife and genius author of games like Run Them Again and Model Protectorates. Moyra, unlike me, was born in Canada. She went and saw Terry Fox when he was at the Scarborough Town Center. She's talked to me often about it, how it was the moment when she first had the idea that a person, just a normal person, could change the world. Terry was always one of her heroes.

So when we were in St. John's we went to the Terry Fox memorial, the very spot where he dipped his leg into the Atlantic Ocean and started the Marathon of hope. On the side of the memorial was engraved his famous quote "Somewhere the hurting must stop." Moyra, reading it there, in that spot, started to cry.

My back hurt at the time. It had been a long day and so I was sitting on a bench while she looked up at the idol of her hero. I read the quote and realized Moyra was crying because she believed it. She had hope.

And I realized I did not believe it. I did not think that hurting has to stop anywhere, ever.

\*\*\*\*

The Greek grandmas that told me the story of Pandora always said that Hope was the last of the gods' curses. The worst of the curses. Because it is the only curse we embrace, that we think is a gift. It makes us hurt more, in the end. It makes us vulnerable, it makes us try when we should know better, it gets us killed for the sake of foolishness.

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I don't know which is true. Both are. Neither are. I don't know if the hurting has to stop, if we can make it stop, or if it goes on forever.

So I wrote this little scenario to ask the question. I wrote it for Moyra and for Terry and for Canada. I wrote it for Fastaval and for myself. I wrote it because I don't know the answer, but I think it's an important question.

I don't know if I've asked it in a voice anyone can, or will hear. But I hope that maybe.

## Thanks and Credits

To Terry Fox, obviously. Mo and I run in the Terry Fox runs most years, if you want more information please ask us, or visit: <http://www.terryfox.org/Run/>

To Brene Brown, whose work in [Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead](#) was important to shaping this work and my understanding of shame.

To Mo, as always, for everything.

And for all the lovely images:

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## Hope Was the Last Thing in the Box

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| <p><b>Michael Lovoie</b><br/><b>Shame:</b> Numbing. You cannot stand to be where you are, to be who you are. You know that when push comes to shove you will lose. That things are bad now, but can be worse, probably couldn't be better because you don't deserve better. So you numb yourself, make yourself an observer. You drink the pain away, you don't make friends, you don't make commitments. When it's really bad you feel like an observer in your own life, like a plate of glass is between you and the world around you.</p> <p><b>Trigger List:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Have a totally anxiety breakdown. Start to cry and shake, and if the situation persists, start to sob, escalate to screaming, and if it lasts to beating at your own head and face.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Refuse to speak English, speak only in French and curse anyone who can't, or won't, speak back in French.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Deal with the situation totally disconnected. Talk calmly, like you're fully rational and in control, but saying things that don't make sense to anyone but you.</li></ul>                                | <p><b>Pat Amblin</b><br/><b>Shame:</b> Foreboding Joy. Deep down in your heart of hearts, you don't think you deserve anything good. So whenever it looks like things are going well a part of you starts to panic. You start becoming obsessed with things that could go wrong tomorrow. Things you might have missed yesterday. Anything but being in the moment, anything but admitting that you're happy or that you deserve to be happy.</p> <p><b>Trigger List</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Freak out about things that might happen as a result of what's going on now, without actually dealing with what's going on now</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Refuse to finish something or leave something until everything is "perfect" — obsess over every detail and don't let yourself or other people finish what needs to be finished</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Viciously, but logically, verbally attack the position or person of someone who was trying to help you</li></ul> |
| <p><b>Kelly O'Donnell</b><br/><b>Shame:</b> Desperation. You're so desperate for approval, for connection to people, that you try to force it. You share things you shouldn't share, you tell too much, reveal too much too quickly. You can't deal with letting a relationship grow, with being honest and letting a person come to know you. You think it's always going to fail, so you try to make it fail fast, and at the same time you're always desperate for human contact so you babble out every secret as fast as you can in the hopes that something will stick.</p> <p><b>Trigger List:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Throw yourself on someone's mercy and defer all your judgement to them, even (especially) if they won't show you mercy or you think they're probably wrong</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Over share about your vulnerability or shame — give way too many details, make the situation all about you and tell people things you fear will disgust them</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Make up lies about things that you think will make people like you. It should be painfully obvious to everyone that you're lying.</li></ul> | <p><b>Eli Falls</b><br/><b>Shame:</b> Viking or Victim. Life has taught you one lesson clear — in life there are winners and there are losers and there is no one else. There is no equality without lies, no vulnerability without victimization, no peace without slavery. In every situation, from who picks up the tab for dinner to how the government treats your family, all you can see is a chance to be hurt or hurt someone else.</p> <p><b>Trigger List:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Turn on someone who is trying to help, or being vulnerable, and lay into them for being weak and cowardly</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> "Team Up" with someone who is being needlessly aggressive or mean, or who you feel is high in status — even if you don't actually agree with them</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Do everything you can to provoke someone into attacking you, especially if you can't win</li></ul>   |