



## Andy Healey Winner of Best Hallucination Award

It was early morning on the second day of the 2015 Fat Dog 120 when I started seeing things.

I was slowly making my way along the trail between the Nicomen Lake and Cayuse Flats Aid Stations, when I started noticing all kinds of trash on the trail. One hopes not to see trash during a trail race, but the odd gel wrapper or in the case of this race the occasional shred of an emergency blanket is, unfortunately, almost inevitable. But beer bottles? Up ahead there was a beer bottle lying in the middle of the trail. Of course I'd have to pick it up, but how long would I have to have to carry it until I could dispose of it properly? Surely I can't just leave it there. Once I got close enough to grab it, I looked down and right before my eyes, it morphed into a stick. Well... that was odd. I thought nothing of it and continued on my way. In no time I came across more trash. There was a maxi pad in the middle of the trail... whoosh! It changed back into a leaf. A smashed up toilet on top of a boulder... zing! It became a moss covered log right in front of me. I should note that these weren't things that I was sort of catching glimpses of out of the corner of my eye, these things were real. Until they disappeared into the flora and fauna of the forest around me, all these mind games were 100% authentic chunks of my reality. The farther along I ambled, the more imaginary trash lined my route. Soon I began to play a game. Both to help keep myself awake and also to keep me sane, I started naming my hallucinations aloud. "Cheetos bag!" I'd say, followed quickly by, "Smashed car headlight!", "Rusty stop sign!" or, "Dirty pile of Tupperware!". You get the idea.

Soon, the theme of the figments of my imagination changed to manmade structures. This was a bit more confusing than the garbage. I'd be jogging along and see a nice little picnic area up ahead. A table nestled under a cozy looking rustic pavilion of sorts. As I got closer, the whole scene would fold into different layers of the forest. My depth perception was all screwy and leaves of one tree got mixed up with the bark of a stump or a carpet of lichen on a fallen log to form a brass bed or a complex, handcrafted Rube Goldberg machine. More often though, my sleep deprived and over taxed mind would give me cabins or outhouses or lean tos. All these things seemed

somewhat plausible and when they'd disintegrate back into reality, I was thrown for a loop every time.

All this was fine and dandy, I could handle garbage and buildings. Things began getting bleak when I started seeing people. Random dudes were sitting on boulders watching me plod along the trail and they were all creeps. I started yelling at them, "Oh no you don't!" I'd shout, "Nope, nope, nope!" Seeing people lurking around in a quiet forest as the sun is quickly setting isn't good. I got jumpy when they started creeping up on me. Out of nowhere, a great big dude is standing right beside me! "Whoa! Shit! No! No! Nooo!" They were so real every time, I couldn't get used to them. I was going a bit nuts. Of course not all my people were menacing. As I rounded a corner along a nice section of singletrack, I looked ahead and plopped down at the end of a fallen log was a baby. The little fella was furiously typing away on his laptop. Of course, why not? A baby on a laptop; perfectly normal. I needed coffee and an aid station like I'd never needed them before. This was new ground for me and I was ready for it to end.

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### *A baby on a laptop; perfectly normal.*

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I knew that the Skyline aid station had to be close. I was getting frustrated at my molasses like pace and around every corner I prayed that I'd see the loving, warm glow of the aid station lights. But no, every new corner gave me nothing but more creeps in the shadows. It was at this point that my hallucinations began to enter into the aural realm. Growling. Yes, indeed, I started hearing menacing, otherworldly growls right upside my head. If I thought the imaginary people were making me jumpy, this was ridiculous. I continued yelling at my spectors and I continued to wonder where the aid station was and I continued to think that maybe I was in some kind of mountainous Twilight Zone episode that I would never escape from, when suddenly the aid station was in front of me. Finally, cars and trucks and a boat on a trailer in a nice paved lot. But where were the people? The tables full of snacks? The cheerful crews and depleted runners? I walked through the parked cars and I saw no one. "Well, this is odd," thought I, "What's going on here?" I stopped and looked around and the whole scene got misty and then it vanished, leaving me right back where I started. Standing alone, utterly exhausted, in

the middle of a dark and lonely forest. That was it, I'd had enough. This time it wasn't just a lone bottle or an infant surfing the net, it was everything. Nothing was real, the world had become one big weird delusion with me in the midst of it. I started running like a madman, swearing out loud at the world and wishing I was asleep, curled up in a warm bed far, far away from here.

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*Maybe I was in some kind of mountainous Twilight Zone episode that I would never escape from.*

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Needless to say, I survived. I got to the aid station, had some soup and a little nap in a friend's car and the world started making sense once more.

Andy's finishing time: 45:16:33