

## Journey to the End of the Night, 2011

Filed under: [california](#), [adventures](#), [friends](#), [boy](#) - [dahanese](#) at 12:52 pm PST 2011 October 30, 2011

For the past three Halloween weekends, San Francisco has hosted an event called Journey to the End of the Night as part of a larger Come out and Play festival. I learned of Journey from my friend Matt, who told me about it about a year and a half ago after he participated in one of these events in Germany.

If you want to learn more about Journey, go to [www.totheendofthenight.com](http://www.totheendofthenight.com) - and to hear about our experiences, keep on reading.

The night began with Greg, Cailin, and Marie showing up at my apartment and piling into my 4-seater 1 series with Mike and myself (Greg sat on the not-seat. I told him it was not a seat, but he didn't think that it would "be that bad". Let me tell you, kids, when a car states it's a four-seater and even puts a plastic bucket to hold shit so people don't sit in the not-seat, you shouldn't sit there. Plastic buckets hurt butts.)

We arrived at Cupid's Bow by the Bay Bridge around 6:15 PM. The event was supposed to start at 7, and no one was there, so we went to Gordon Biersch for a quick bite to eat, returning around 6:50 PM.

By 6:50, the sign in station had been set up, and a line was stretching down the Embarcadero. I sprinted down to join the end as people were piling up faster than I imagined was possible. I knew that 1300 people had participated in last year's event, but there must have been much more than 2000 by the time we were done with registration this time around. It was packed to the point that they ran out of ribbons and had to use duct tape to mark people.

And what do you do with that there spoon?

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*The crowd - please forgive the shitty flash of my iPhone camera.*

So here's the basics of Journey to the End of the Night: You get a blue ribbon and tie it around your arm, as well as a red ribbon, and a map. There are 6 checkpoints throughout the city (Chinatown, Fisherman's Wharf, the Marina, etc.) that you must get to. When there, you get your map signed to prove you were there and move on. Each checkpoint has about a 2 block radius safe zone.

Why a safe zone? Because at the beginning of the night, all 2000 start out as Runners, with blue ribbons, but there are about a dozen Chasers around (the gamemakers wouldn't tell me where) and they hunt and tag Runners. When tagged, you have to give a Chaser your blue ribbon (they collect them and the person with the most wins a prize) and become a Chaser yourself by tying your red ribbon around your arm. You can then either become a evil hunter of the night or go back to a Resurrection Area and try to be a Runner one more time (but only once). Allegedly there was one guy called a Chaser Killer running around, too, but we believe him to be a myth.

- BioShock 2
- Mafia II
- Civilization
- DNF

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*We had a plan. We did not follow the plan. Plans, it seems, are foolish.*

Back to the tale.

Just before 8 PM, people began gathering around the sidewalk and the energy grew in the crowd, and just after 8, an airhorn blew and suddenly thousands of people were screaming, scattering in all directions, and running crazily across 4 lanes of traffic (I think they timed the airhorn to be with a walk sign - but I'm not sure). Initially, the five of us were going to wait to be in the middle of the pack for safety, but it became rapidly apparent that what we had to do was RUN and keep RUNNING because otherwise, the crazed mob of people would trample us.

We ran out a block, and north two blocks, heading for the Chinatown point. Every so often, you would hear someone scream CHASER and then we'd set off again - we ran most of the way into Chinatown, which was about a mile away. Along the way, other Runners tried to send us out of the safe zone - I don't know why, because the more Chasers out there, the less safe it is.

At Chinatown, we got our stamps and had the option of writing something on a card and leaving it behind - a bit of a token of "we were here". Our next move, we thought, was to move into the Broadway checkpoint, a bit north and west, but by the time we had finished with our first checkpoint, Chasers were beginning to saturate the area.

Apart from checkpoint zones, covered bus stations and public transportation are also safe. You can take public transport and go on foot - but that's the only way you can travel. So we sprinted to a covered bus station and took it one block - leaving us about 3 blocks out of the Broadway safe zone.

Unfortunately, Chasers were everywhere. We couldn't leave the bus station. We

knew that while we were in shape, that the Chasers could sprint faster than us (particularly the women) and we were fucked. After waiting about fifteen minutes, we boarded the bus, never having left the bus shelter - it would have been death to do so.



*Us on the bus after we were marooned at that bus shelter.*

The bus took us to Fort Mason - luckily, it let us out right in a safe zone, so we could walk into the dark grassiness (which was very muddy) without fear.



*A terrible photo of us in the blackness, searching for the second checkpoint.*

The checkpoint had music, and lights, and people demanding a congo line.



*The jovial nature was a nice respite since we were very amped with adrenaline.*

After For Mason, we decided to head to Fisherman's Wharf. Searching on our iPhones, we realized that no bus would take us into the safe zone, but the area was only a couple blocks off - if we followed the Bay, we might be able to sneak into the zone without a Chaser finding us.

The journey was great. In the darkness, we wound around some sketchy ass back paths - it was after 10 at this point - eyeing every person up and down, looking for a red ribbon. People leered back, making us want to run, but then we'd smell weed, or see they were drinking, and realize they weren't part of the game - they were just sketchy, and probably thought we looked way sketchier than they ever would be. This was one of the most thrilling parts - figuring out whether to run, or jog - to stay on the path or veer into the grass - trying to look natural but also ready to sprint away to safety.

About one block off from Fisherman Wharf's safe zone, we were hit. Crossing the road, I noticed a guy who had his shoulder angled from us, and then it flashed a red ribbon and we stopped in the middle of the road. He said "you better not run that way" and like rabbits, we screamed *RUN* and turned on our heels.

I must say, I was pissed, because I was tagged first. I'm not even the shortest gal in the group, and I'm moderately fast! Alas, the Chaser has to wait for me to take off my ribbon, and so I looked up at my group and said "DON'T WAIT! RUN!" We'd

agreed to all stay together, but in the heat of the moment everyone felt the need to flee and I realized that my demise shouldn't mean they should go, too. They were all off (and luckily, Greg had installed Find my Friends on all our iPhones, so we could talk as we scattered to the winds.)

Marie was caught along with me, and Cailin shortly after. Both Greg and Mike ran for a long while - Mike was the last to fall, actually - he ran over four blocks, but he could hear the Chaser was faster and gaining ground, and he didn't want to get tackled and hurt, so he slowed down to let himself get caught.



*We found each other, tied on our ribbons, and went to go get brains - I mean, Runners, that is.*

After we found each other, we realized that now we didn't have to be scared anymore - while we only finished 1/3 of the entire campaign, it was after 10:30 at night, we clearly were not equipped to break the line of Chasers, which were multiplying like mad, and now we could be the hunters, and there was quite a bit of prey. For the next hour, we scoured the two block radius around the Fisherman's Wharf safe zone - I caught two people who were cowering behind the wall of a parking garage (I actually went in there to sneak up on two other folks, who Greg later flushed out by chasing them through a hotel.) I also sprinted across the street and caught a weak gal less than half a block from safety - two, in fact, in different locations. I also tagged a girl who was not in the game who desperately wanted to play (she had already been tagged twice before me) and told two other groups what the hell we were doing. Marie and Mike hid in a parking lot for a while behind cars and pounced on a couple folks sneaking through there, trying to hide in the darkness, only feet from a bus shelter. I even got stepped in front of my a police officer at one point as I ran full tilt down the sidewalk after a yelping person - I imagine I looked kind of menacing.

I can also tell you that I need to do some interval training. My god my upper legs burn like I've never felt before, and I work out a lot.

Around 11, hunger struck (I'd had no dinner, we'd run and walked over 5 miles) and we boarded a bus to head to the Marina - the finish was not far from there, and we did want to see the end.



*There were many Runners on the bus. They all whispered in worried voices when we got on and smirked at them.*

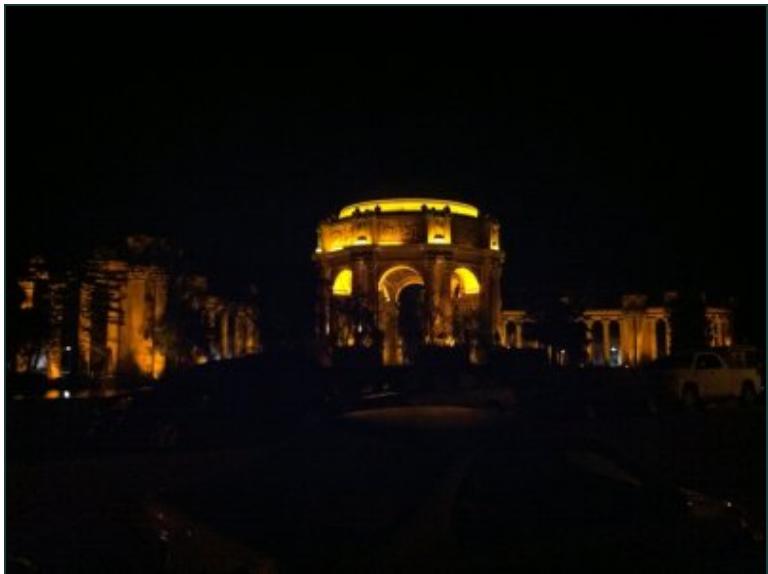


*Runners were particularly wary of my trophies!*

The bus was a great experience - when we were Runners, we talked strategy with some other folks there and swapped stories - when we were Chasers, we legitimately were viewed as threats and Runners exited the bus only when they knew we weren't going to follow them.

we weren't going to follow them.

At this point, we stopped at Super Duper Burger and scarfed down some delicious sustenance, and then headed towards the beach where the end point was. On the way, we saw many more Chasers and saw two people running flat out to get to the safe zone(both guys - I highly doubt women were able to get through in any large numbers - we're just not fast enough to outrun fit male sprinters - but if you are a gal and I'm being totally sexist, please call me out!) These poor schmucks turned, weaved, ran into traffic crazily, but there were too many of us. They were caught - I can only imagine how much it sucks to get all 6 stamps and die at the finish. But that's how the apocalypse would be, yeah?



*A sight we saw during our trek to the beach.*

Approaching the beach, we were met by dozens of paper bags, lit by candles it was a very beautiful sight. There were also a couple dozen folks standing around, and some music and food - Runners and Chasers were convening and had all brought offerings to create a makeshift party and celebration for survival (or not).



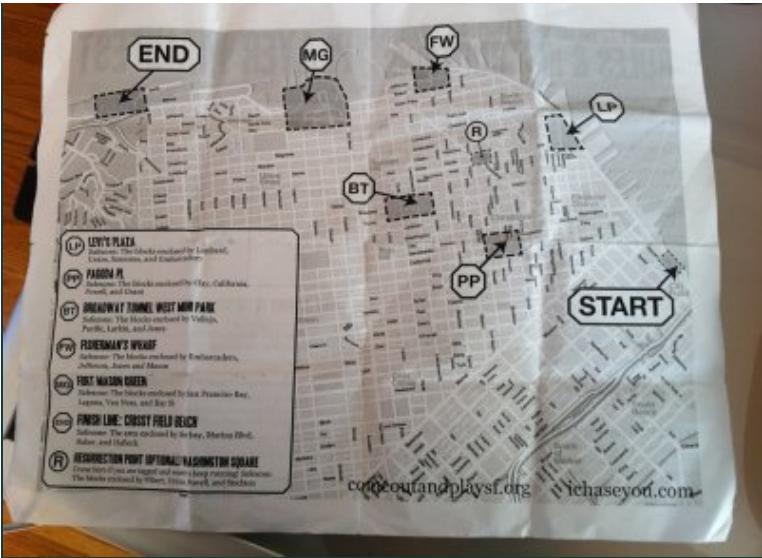
*A majestic ending.*



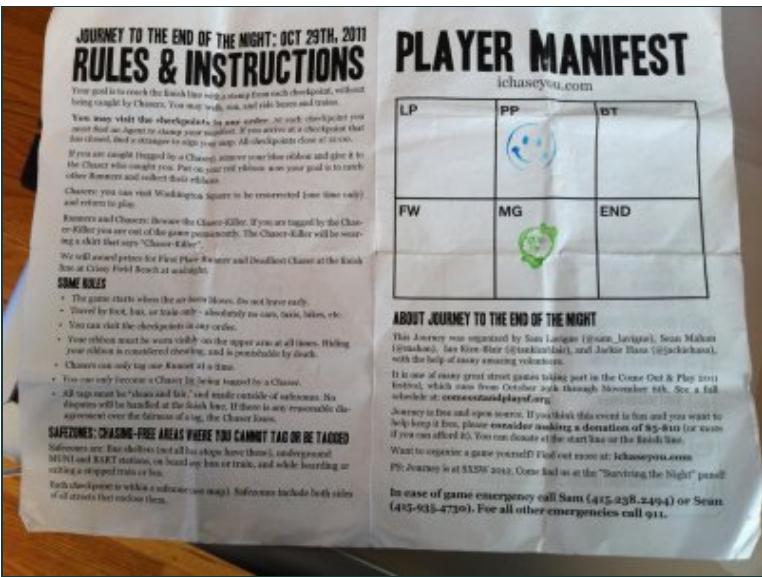
*Each bag had a design on it - and each design was different.*

We pooled our blue ribbons (we had 9 in total) and brought them to the organizer at the end of the paper lanterns. He congratulated us and let us know currently the most a Chaser had caught was 25 - but likely the true winner was still out there, hunting poor Runners. He also said that the first Runner came in around 90 minutes - those that get through start running and never stop - they don't take public transport, they are just physically fit and outrun the wave of Chasers (although it does seem they try to seed Chasers to make the journey still challenging, and I bet even the first Runner had to sprint away from several Chasers.) The first 40 had already completed the race, and received patches, but we shook hands and thanked the man for putting on the memorable event.

By 1:15, we were back at my house, having traveled over 8.78 miles (I started my Runkeeper after that first crazy sprint from the starting point - I suppose in the frenzy, I forgot it - you can view it [here](#)).



*My map, well-worn.*



*The map back - I'm proud of those two stamps, damnit!*

Journey to the End of the Night was, in short, amazing. I've had my eye on it for a while, and as someone who makes interactive events and alternate reality games for a living, this was inspiring - even knowing about it was inspiring, but actually being part of it took the adoration to a whole new level.

You can be sure that next year, I'll have run some intervals, and I'll be ready. I probably won't make it to the end, again, but that's okay. I'll be running, I'll be part of a thousand crazy folks who take to the streets and turn them into something magical for four hours on a random Saturday - and that's what matters.

Postscript: Check out the composite map Greg made of our Runkeeper route, the safe zones, and where we got caught. [Magical map!](#)

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