

## FEROCIOUSLY BURNING TORCHES FORMED A RED CLOUD FROM WHICH A GARLAND OF TWINKLING LIGHTS UNFURLED TOWARDS THE MOUNTAINS

the Strait of Dover. Just off the coast of France, he said: "I am done, can't reach the shore. I'm going back." The finish wasn't far for me either: six, maybe seven kilometres more. Nevertheless, the last part seemed further than everything before. The thought of going back suddenly didn't seem strange to me. I had ended up in a joke. I had become the man in the Strait of Dover and there was nothing funny about it.

I closed my eyes, an attempt to sleep. Instead, a second Tim emerged. I stood in front of myself with my hands firmly by my sides.

"Eat," I said.

I forced down an energy bar, gagging. Meanwhile, I was overwhelmed by an all-encompassing sense of meaninglessness. Existence is purely coincidental and therefore pointless, all goals are conceived and imposed – voluntary or involuntary. Whatever imprints I had left on adventure, nature or other greatneses, the Maxi Race was an utterly pointless goal I had forced upon myself.

"In that case, you can also force yourself to stand up."

Luckily, there was my second self. I reminded myself of the Zugspitz Ultratrail where, after 82km, I left the race owing to hypothermia while not remembering at any single moment in time to put on the pants, hat, gloves and poncho in my backpack. It wasn't until the next day that I realised how an emergency scenario had taken effect. The operating system had switched to safe mode. The brain function had been temporarily restricted, so no solutions had emerged that would have allowed me to reach the finish line. The most painful thing of all was not leaving the race prematurely, but the irreversible, uncanny lapsing of my mind.

I was keen to avoid creating another tormenting memory. In fact, I finally had a chance to deal with the past, to show who is in charge of this tall, skinny but steely body. Besides, it was getting dark.

I got up.

Waves of whimsical contractions went through my calves, as if snakes were crawling through them. Despite the darkness settling in, it remained blisteringly hot and humid.

"Nah nah nah, oh oh, nah nah," hummed my second self as I started to move. A mere fragment of a song, name and artist unknown, once heard in a tattered state hotel in Bosnia, on repeat, first through the speakers and later in my head, a fragment that always re-emerges when I run long and that constitutes the perfect metronome for those endless climbs. A battle song.

"Nah nah nah, oh oh, nah nah"

Two hours later I passed the finish line at the Plage d'Albigny.

Another two hours later I lay in bed. Wide awake. Just like the whole week before the race – awake, however, now free from fear. Free from slowly being eaten by uncertainty, by unbearable doubts, a horrific awareness of not having trained enough, not being the elite soldier

## I AM WHERE I WANT TO BE, I AM DOING WHAT I WANT TO DO

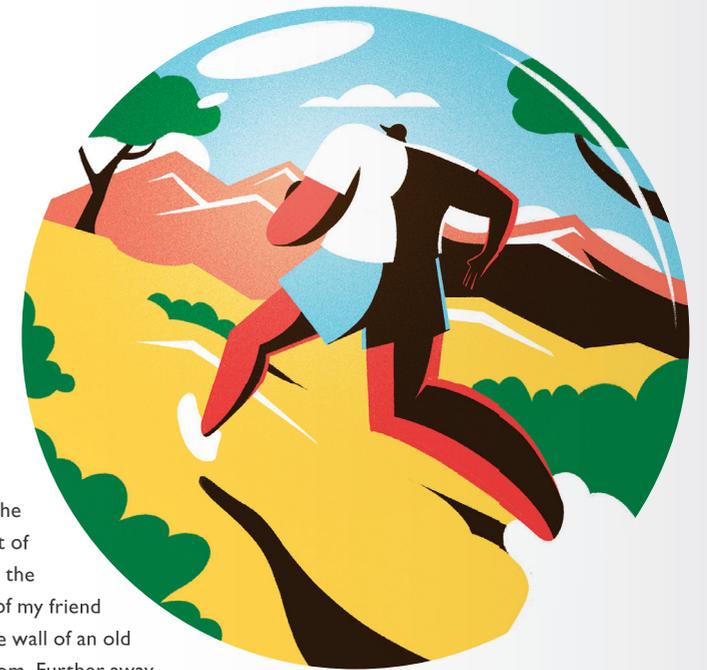
I should have been, like all those fearless men and women who'd appear at the start, where of course I did not belong, the fear of being an imposter, of suffering serious physical damages or even dying, and therefore not being able to sleep, when in fact I had to sleep, because sleep was my only chance, my only hope, the way out, which everything depended on, which made me unable to do exactly what I had to do, to sleep.

I had seen the mountains, completed the journey, executed a great achievement. Great but pointless. With the exception of myself, I had not furthered mankind; nor had I shot pictures so unique that I could expect more appreciation than a dozen likes on social media.

I was wide awake. Outside, the call of a tawny owl. I listened and breathed, long and slowly. There was nothing else. My thoughts were unusually quiet. The storm in the snow globe had nearly subsided. I realised that this state was temporary and that the incessant, chaotic whirling of the white snippets would return in all its intensity the following morning.

Again, the call of the owl. Curiously, I got up and opened the curtains. In front of the window was the black VW Golf of my friend and host. On the wall of an old barn hung a broom. Further away, two horses stood motionless in a meadow. I watched and waited. Nothing happened.

It was at that moment that I understood that when the storm in me finally settles, what might emerge is that there was nothing in the first place. I'd better learn to love the snow. ■



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TIME VAN DER VEER is a Dutch author and trail runner. He's published two books and a new novel is due – a story for his son about running, courage and the longing for silence.  
[www.timvanderveer.nl](http://www.timvanderveer.nl)  
TW: @Timjv IG: @timvdveer

LUIS PINTO is a Guatemala-based Mexican graphic designer and illustrator. His colorful, conceptual and expressive work is influenced by folk stories, daily routines, graphic novels, art history and pop culture.  
[www.luispintodesign.com](http://www.luispintodesign.com) TW & IG: @luispins