

YOU WANT IT DARKER

Cohen in Memoriam

4-8 players and one game master (5-6 is optimal)

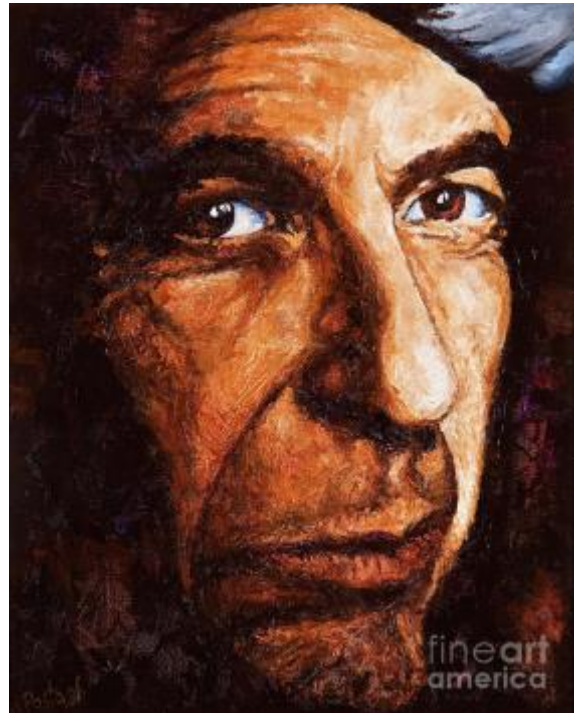
Listen to the butterfly

Whose days but number three

Listen to the butterfly

Don't listen to me.¹

This is a scenario about conflicting emotions very near death. It is based on Leonard Cohen's final studio album, recorded April 2015-July 2016, and released on October 2st 2016. Cohen died November 7th the same year. This is a very bleak album. Where most of Cohen's work deals with religion as well as worldly desires, this album is almost entirely devoid of lust. The feelings are solemn and detached, seemingly those of a person close to death.



In the scenario, all players play the memories of one and the same person who is close to death. Each of the players develops a character and a scene representing an emotion from one of the songs of the album. These scenes are played three times, with less and less detail, until the emotions of the scenes are laid bare. After the last song, the instrumental coda of the record is played and the larp ends.

EQUIPMENT

The GM need to have a music player with loudspeakers, that can play the Cohen record on shuffle. Spotify premium is a good tool.

It is useful to have all song titles in large print on separate papers, or use a projector for the same purpose.

Most players need to have a mobile phone with Spotify and a pair of earphones, but one or two players can instead use the GM's computer.

ROOM

This scenario works best in a fairly empty room (with a clean and warm floor), where you can arrange a central 'stage' so that people can sit around the stage, or at one side of it. Use imaginary rather than real props.

PREPARATIONS

1. Quick round of introductions. All participants say their names and say something about what comes to their mind when they think about death.
2. The GM tells the participants about the album. Use the information above, and/or give them your own interpretation. Emphasize that while Cohen often uses religious themes, players need not do that.
3. The GM explains the scenario.
 - the setting: all character and scenes are memories and emotions in the mind of one and the same person, who is dying. The scenario is set in present time.
 - what players will do. Every player will play a character that the dying person remembers, and develop a scene between that person and the 'me'. Both the person and the scene will be based on one of the album songs.
 - how the scenes are repeated three times (see below) with less and less detail. Explain how the scene 'spreads' to the other players the second and third times.
4. Play the practice scene.

Play it three times: with words, wordlessly, and distilled.

The GM should emphasize that scenes do not need to play out exactly the same way each time: players can place emphasis differently, try different movements etc. Discuss in particular the last iteration: how can you distil the 'essence' of the scene through movement and action?
5. Character selection.

GM hands out the lyrics sheets. Every player select a song based on the lyrics. The 'suggested emotion' is just a suggestion: players may find other emotions in the music or lyrics.
6. Character development.

GM needs to emphasize that the characters are not going to be 'full' characters with goals and motivations and background stories, but memories. Think of them through the eyes of the 'me': how they were perceived by the person who is dying. Players listen to their songs silently (with earphones) while reading the lyrics, and develop a character that represents the feeling of the song.
7. Present the characters.

The players tell each other who they will be playing. Help players decide if some of them are different aspects of the same person. (**TIP:** A possible method is to ask players to join hands if they think their characters are different aspects of the same person.)
8. Scene development.

Listen to the song a second time (with earphones). Think through a situation when the two were together. These scenes should be about relations between people in the midst of their lives (nothing to do with death). Write down a short note of the scene:

 - what is the emotion,
 - what is the setting,
 - what is the character and the 'me' doing,
 - how does the scene start,
 - how does it end.

(**TIP:** Since the scene will be played without words later, it is good to think of a scene that involves some physical movement and interaction. Use the space and possibly imaginary props. 'Talking heads' scenes work less well in this scenario.)
9. Players instruct the scenes.

Players tell of the scene they have planned. Decide who plays the 'me' in each scene. GM should make sure that everyone has one scene in which they play 'me'.

Make a timeline over all scenes that reflect the order they happened in the life of 'me'.

10. Final preparations.

Before the game starts, the GM should make a playlist restricted to the songs that have been selected players. Instruct the players to speak as little as possible outside of the scenes.

PLAY

11. First play through:

The GM plays the selected songs following the timeline order created by the players. Listen to the intro to the first song, say its title, press pause. The 'character' player retells briefly how the scene will play out. GM starts the music (not too loud) and the character and the 'me' of that scene play it out together. The scene lasts for the whole duration of a song. Repeat for all songs.

12. Second play through:

The GM restarts the music player with a new shuffle (louder this time). Do not pause the music unless a player asks for it. The scenes are repeated, this time without words. The scene is first acted out by the character and the 'me' of that scene. If they finish their scene before the music ends, they split up and each invite one of the other players to repeat the scene with them. Continue 'spreading' the scene until the music ends.

13. Short pause:

Discuss each of the scenes briefly to distill it to a few key interactions. Take suggestions from the group: what did you see?

14. Third play through:

Each scene is played out wordlessly, distilled to its key interactions. The GM restarts the music player with a new shuffle. Let the scene spread to the whole group as before.

15. After the last scene, sit down and close your eyes. The GM plays the last song of the Cohen album (a short instrumental version of 'Treaty').

GAME ENDS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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TRAINING SCENE

Based on 'First we take Manhattan'

The GM plays the main character in this scene. Select one player to play the 'me'.

The memory character of this scene is a sadistic school teacher who favors some students and disfavors others. The 'me' has had several run-ins with the teacher. The memory is from the final day of the school, when the teacher hands out diplomas to students that have excelled, one way or another. Most of the diplomas goes to her favorites but there is a diploma also for the 'me' – who definitely was not one of her favorites. (**TIP:** This is a very long song. Consider cutting it short to save time.)

"First We Take Manhattan"

Suggested emotion: Triumph

They sentenced me to twenty years of boredom
For trying to change the system from within
I'm coming now, I'm coming to reward them
First we take Manhattan, then we take Berlin
I'm guided by a signal in the heavens
I'm guided by this birthmark on my skin
I'm guided by the beauty of our weapons
First we take Manhattan, then we take Berlin

I'd really like to live beside you, baby
I love your body and your spirit and your clothes
But you see that line there moving through the
station?
I told you, I told you, told you, I was one of those

Ah you loved me as a loser, but now you're
worried that I just might win
You know the way to stop me, but you don't have
the discipline
How many nights I prayed for this, to let my work
begin
First we take Manhattan, then we take Berlin

I don't like your fashion business mister
And I don't like these drugs that keep you thin
I don't like what happened to my sister
First we take Manhattan, then we take Berlin

I'd really like to live beside you, baby ...

And I thank you for those items that you sent me
The monkey and the plywood violin
I practiced every night, now I'm ready
First we take Manhattan, then we take Berlin

I am guided

Ah remember me, I used to live for music
Remember me, I brought your groceries in
Well it's Father's Day and everybody's wounded
First we take Manhattan, then we take Berlin

You want it darker

Suggested emotion: Acceptance

If you are the dealer, I'm out of the game
If you are the healer, it means I'm broken and lame
If thine is the glory, then mine must be the shame
You want it darker
We kill the flame

Magnified, sanctified, be thy holy name
Vilified, crucified, in the human frame
A million candles burning for the help that never
came
You want it darker

Hineni, hineni
I'm ready, my lord

There's a lover in the story
But the story's still the same
There's a lullaby for suffering
And a paradox to blame
But it's written in the scriptures
And it's not some idle claim
You want it darker
We kill the flame

They're lining up the prisoners
And the guards are taking aim
I struggled with some demons
They were middle class and tame
I didn't know I had permission to murder and to
maim
You want it darker

Hineni, hineni
I'm ready, my lord

Magnified, sanctified, be thy holy name
Vilified, crucified, in the human frame
A million candles burning for the love that never
came
You want it darker
We kill the flame

If you are the dealer, let me out of the game
If you are the healer, I'm broken and lame
If thine is the glory, mine must be the shame
You want it darker

Hineni, hineni
Hineni, hineni
I'm ready, my lord

Hineni
Hineni, hineni
Hineni

"Treaty"

Suggested emotion: Bargaining/Begging

I've seen you change the water into wine
I've seen you change it back to water, too
I sit at your table every night
I try but I just don't get high with you
I wish there was a treaty we could sign
I do not care who takes this bloody hill
I'm angry and I'm tired all the time
I wish there was a treaty, I wish there was a treaty
Between your love and mine

Ah, they're dancing in the street — it's Jubilee
We sold ourselves for love but now we're free
I'm so sorry for that ghost I made you be
Only one of us was real and that was me

I haven't said a word since you been gone
That any liar couldn't say as well
I just can't believe the static coming on
You were my ground, my safe and sound
You were my aerial

Ah, the fields are crying out — it's Jubilee
We sold ourselves for love but now we're free
I'm so sorry for that ghost I made you be
Only one of us was real and that was me

I heard the snake was baffled by his sin
He shed his scales to find the snake within
But born again is born without a skin
The poison enters into everything

And I wish there was a treaty we could sign
I do not care who takes this bloody hill
I'm angry and I'm tired all the time
I wish there was a treaty, I wish there was a treaty
Between your love and mine

"On The Level"

Suggested emotion : Letting go / Giving up

I knew that it was wrong
I didn't have a doubt
I was dying to get back home
And you were starting out

I said I'd best be moving on
You said, we have all day
You smiled at me like I was young
It took my breath away

Your crazy fragrance all around
Your secrets all in view
My lost, my lost was saying found
My don't was saying do

Let's keep it on the level
When I walked away from you
I turned my back on the devil
Turned my back on the angel too

They oughta give my heart a medal
For letting go of you
When I turned my back on the devil
Turned my back on the angel too

Now I'm living in this temple
Where they tell you what to do
I'm old and I've had to settle
On a different point of view

I was fighting with temptation
But I didn't want to win
A man like me don't like to see
Temptation caving in

Your crazy fragrance all around
Your secrets in my view
My lost, my lost was saying found
My don't was saying do

Let's keep it on the level
When I walked away from you
I turned my back on the devil
Turned my back on the angel too

They ought to give my heart a medal
For letting go of you
When I turned my back on the devil
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They ought to give my heart a medal
For letting go of you
When I turned my back on the devil
Turned my back on the angel too

"Leaving The Table"

Suggested emotion: Isolation / Detachment / Distance

I'm leaving the table
I'm out of the game
I don't know the people
In your picture frame
If I ever loved you or no, no
It's a crying shame if I ever loved you
If I knew your name

You don't need a lawyer
I'm not making a claim
You don't need to surrender
I'm not taking aim
I don't need a lover, no, no
The wretched beast is tame
I don't need a lover
So blow out the flame

There's nobody missing
There is no reward
Little by little
We're cutting the cord
We're spending the treasure, oh, no, no
That love cannot afford
I know you can feel it
The sweetness restored

I don't need a reason
For what I became
I've got these excuses
They're tired and lame
I don't need a pardon, no, no, no, no, no
There's no one left to blame
I'm leaving the table
I'm out of the game

I'm leaving the table
I'm out of the game

"If I Didn't Have Your Love"

Suggested emotion: Being loved

If the sun would lose its light
And we lived an endless night
And there was nothing left that you could feel
That's how it would be
What my life would seem to me
If I didn't have your love to make it real

If the stars were all unpinned
And a cold and bitter wind
Swallowed up the world without a trace
Ah, well that's where I would be
What my life would seem to me
If I couldn't lift the veil and see your face

And if no leaves were on the tree
And no water in the sea
And the break of day had nothing to reveal
That's how broken I would be
What my life would seem to me
If I didn't have your love to make it real

If the sun would lose its light
And we lived in an endless night
And there was nothing left that you could feel
If the sea were sand alone
And the flowers made of stone
And no one that you hurt could ever heal
Well that's how broken I would be
What my life would seem to me
If I didn't have your love to make it real

"Traveling Light"

Suggested emotion: Saying farewell (to something or someone)

I'm traveling light
It's au revoir
My once so bright, my fallen star
I'm running late, they'll close the bar
I used to play one mean guitar
I guess I'm just somebody who
Has given up on the me and you
I'm not alone, I've met a few
Traveling light like we used to do

Good night, good night, my fallen star
I guess you're right, you always are
I know you're right about the blues
You live some life you'd never choose
I'm just a fool, a dreamer who forgot to dream of
the me and you
I'm not alone, I've met a few
Traveling light like we used to do

Traveling light
It's au revoir
My once so bright, my fallen star
I'm running late, they'll close the bar
I used to play one mean guitar
I guess I'm just somebody who
Has given up on the me and you
I'm not alone, I've met a few
Traveling light like we used to do

But if the road leads back to you
Must I forget the things I knew
When I was friends with one or two
Traveling light like we used to do
I'm traveling light

"It Seemed The Better Way"

Suggested emotion: Cheated / Resentment

It seemed the better way
When first I heard him speak
Now it's much too late
To turn the other cheek

Sounded like the truth
Seemed the better way
Sounded like the truth
But it's not the truth today

I wonder what it was
I wonder what it meant
First he touched on love
Then he touched on death

Sounded like the truth
Seemed the better way
Sounded like the truth
But it's not the truth today

I better hold my tongue
I better take my place
Lift this glass of blood
Try to say the grace

Seemed the better way
When first I heard him speak
But now it's much too late
To turn the other cheek

Sounded like the truth
Seemed the better way
Sounded like the truth
But it's not the truth today

I better hold my tongue
I better take my place
Lift this glass of blood
Try to say the grace

"Steer Your Way"

Suggested emotion: Doubt/Struggle

Steer your way past the ruins of the Altar and the Mall
Steer your way through the fables of Creation and The Fall

Steer your way past the Palaces that rise above the rot
Year by year, month by month, day by day
Thought by thought

Steer your heart past the Truth that you believed in
yesterday
Such as Fundamental Goodness and the Wisdom of the Way

Steer your heart, precious heart, past the women
whom you bought
Year by year, month by month, day by day
Thought by thought

Steer your way through the pain that is far more real
than you
That's smashed the Cosmic Model, that blinded every view
And please don't make me go there, though there be a God or not
Year by year, month by month, day by day
Thought by thought

They whisper still, the injured stones
The blunted mountains weep
As he died to make men holy
Let us die to make things cheap
And say the Mea Culpa, which you probably forgot
Year by year, month by month, day by day
Thought by thought

Steer your way, O my heart, though I have no right to ask
To the one who was never, never equal to the task
Who knows he's been convicted, who knows he will be shot
Year by year, month by month, day by day
Thought by thought

They whisper still, the injured stones
The blunted mountains weep
As he died to make men holy
Let us die to make things cheap
And say the Mea Culpa, which you gradually forgot
Year by year, month by month, day by day
Thought by thought

FINAL

I wish there was a treaty we could sign
It's over now, the water and the wine
We were broken then but now we're borderline
And I wish there was a treaty, I wish there was a treaty between your love and mine

ⁱ These lines are taken from a poem of Cohen that he never put to music.

Listen to the hummingbird
Whose wings you cannot see
Listen to the hummingbird
Don't listen to me.

Listen to the butterfly
Whose days but number three
Listen to the butterfly
Don't listen to me.

Listen to the mind of God
Which doesn't need to be
Listen to the mind of God
Don't listen to me.