



King of Hope

(Feature Film)

Have you ever wanted to stand up for what's right, even when it seemed impossible?

When a third nuclear plant comes to a town that's already buried under legacy waste, the local mayor must get media attention and medical help for his citizens...whether they want it or not. It begins with Hartley Addison, a loveable small-town mayor and newspaper editor, facing up to his demons—literally.

On his nightly sojourn, Hart witnesses the local nuclear plant—a fixture in his community since the Manhattan Project—**turn into a fire-breathing dragon before his eyes**. He's not sure if he's crazy or not, but the world he lives in certainly is. Hart files a "Hail Mary" news story on the newswire about the latest government refusal of a health study, then on a whim adds a "puff piece" about an escaped chicken adopted as a mascot by striking poultry workers. The media circus comes to town—following the story of the chicken. Supporting Hart on his quest are Roger, a freelance radio journalist and the estranged son of the nuclear plant manager; his wife, Ronnie, a come-from-away photographer; his teenage goddaughter Lenni, a teen with cancer who uses classic movie cosplay to cope; Quito, the head of a group of striking poultry workers; and Jade, a controversial performance artist.

Humour and drama spring from clashes among points of view, situational gravity, and denial. Hot on the heels of the media circus is a group of vegan protesters from the city. Hart and Chloé, the town's ditzzy local tourism and business development manager, compete for the attention of Tad, the global news network producer, trying to get different stories about Port Despere to the world. Roger fights a one-sided battle with his father, going out on the lake nightly on a spy mission, trying to get the "big story" on the plant. Lenni struggles to understand "adulthood" and why the adults around her lie and act crazy all the time. And Ronnie battles depression and loneliness, trapped in a community that refuses to accept her existence, believing that Hart belongs to *them* but not to *her*.

The Palimpsest Press team and the author, Kim Conklin, are here to support work towards an adaptation process.

In *King of Hope*, one man who might be crazy fights for what's right in a crazier world—because he has to.

Both timeless and more relevant than ever, this is a story about people who have lived with radical environmental uncertainty for generations and how its politics divides families, communities, and nations.

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Principals

Hartley Addison

A dynastic small-town mayor and newspaper editor, Hart's beloved by everyone—even when they disagree with him. His goddaughter's leukemia and a hot metal recycling plant prompt him to demand a health study of the local nuclear plant's effects on the citizens of Port Despere while a media circus descends on the town for the wrong reasons.



*For a sense of Hart, watch
this character trailer
performed by Gabriel Caron:*



Character Specs: Late forties, above average height, medium build.

Quotes

Over time, his story frequency slowed to bi-weekly, then monthly, then bi-monthly. Now it had become a sacrament, a rite for special occasions, like lighting a candle in church. His rational mind told him that the outcome he desired was just as unlikely as divine intervention, but still he could not give up the faint hope that it could happen if he made the right appeal. Prayer and luck might be authentic powers. Just because scientists had not catalogued, quantified, and reduced all of the forces of the universe yet did not mean that they did not exist. — pp. 136

The only fact that remained was this: He was born his drunken uncle's bastard, and that was who he would be until he died. His whole life had been a lie.

A momentary admiration struck him, a querulous respect for the unsinkable nature of subterfuge. Like submerged buoys and submarines in trouble, secrets always seemed to surface in the end, whether you wanted them to or not. No amount of spin or denial could stop it. The best that could be hoped for was to slow the process a generation or two, to allow the perpetrators to escape facing up to their deeds in the unforgiving glare of daylight. — pp. 238

Please note: Casting for all trailers is non-committal and for illustration purposes only.



Ronnie Addison

A professional photographer and Hart's come-from-away wife, Ronnie's falling apart due to Hart's neglect and the town's ostracization of her. Trapped, she secretly searches out tiny moments of kindness and connection with other outsiders to keep her going.

Character Specs: Early forties, medium height, Quebec native.

Quotes

The steam in the master bathroom was so dense that she imagined her movement created eddies in the mist around her feet. She cleared a spot on the mirror with a tissue. The face under the fluffy white turban caught her by surprise, as it often did. Most of the time, she didn't expect to see her own reflection, as if she didn't think it would be there. That *she* would be there. Other times, she sought it out too often, as proof, checking to reassure herself that she existed. But even when she found it, it proved nothing. The reflection that looked back at her seemed nothing more than a spectre, a delusive trick of the eye or mind. — pp. 46

For a sense of Ronnie, watch a character trailer performed by Miranda Handford:



Hart wasn't coming. She grasped that. But the next part took longer to absorb.

Hart was seeing someone else, probably someone from around here. He belonged to them, not to her. He always had. And he always would.

She felt woozy. Laughter followed the music through the wall, but it sounded canned. She looked down at the hem of her beaded cocktail dress lying across her knees, her rhinestone-trimmed stilettos on the toilet seat, and the scene in front of her fractured and tilted, as if she were looking not at the real world but at a likeness of it, a reflection on shards of glass tumbling counterclockwise in a kaleidoscope. — pp. 255

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Roger Guthrie

A freelance radio reporter, Hart’s protégé, and the conflicted son of the nuclear plant’s Manager, Roger spies on the plant every night in search of “the big story.”



Character Specs: Early thirties, average or above height, athletic build.

*For a sense of Roger, watch
this character trailer
performed by Jack Copland:*



Quotes

“What brought you back?’ was the question, as in *Why did you come back to live in this environmental nightmare?* At first, I said it was home, thinking that might trigger some conversation about the meaning of home, and I might be able to figure something out, frankly. Because I’m not a hundred percent sure why I came back, or what I’m doing here. But it didn’t spark anything, so I just gave a bullshit answer about liking to see what I was up against. And yeah, I do know I’m trying to get the Big Story on our local environmental situation, in part because, I guess, I feel like I *should*, like I owe it to the world or something. That’s part of it, but I’m not sure that’s all of it. — pp. 52

For a while, maybe a couple of hours, he and Ronnie spoke in short bursts between long silences. The lapses were spent listening to the trill of the voices on the scanner against the low murmur of the wind across the water and the regular smacks of the chop against the hull. He tried to keep his attention on the scanner, but his mind kept wandering as he watched the slow sky crossings of the white trails and the flickering red lights of the jet traffic. Before long, their silent camaraderie grew too close. It began to feel like a confidence. Finally, he realized that—try as he might to direct them elsewhere—his thoughts kept rebounding to the woman sitting at the other end of the starboard bench, hugging her knees in front of her, looking up at the sky. — pp. 195

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Lenni Basco

A delightfully optimistic fourteen-year-old persevering through cancer, Hart's goddaughter Lenni lives in a never-opened motel with her father, dresses up in classic movie character costumes each day to hide the effects of her chemotherapy. Lenni also has a secret crush on Roger, who also lives in the motel.

Character Specs: Fourteen, average or below average height, underweight.

Quotes

Lenni hung up and turned her attention back to the salads. She always made salads in the shape of animals and bugs, the way her mother had done when she was small. It made her happy, like dressing up in her outfits did, and while she made them she sang a song from an old movie with *la-las* for some of the lyrics—not that she didn't know the words, she just liked the *la-las*—while she placed the canned pear on the lettuce, topping it with almonds for ears, raisins for eyes, a marshmallow tail, and a baby carrot sticking out of the maraschino cherry mouth.

She stepped back and surveyed her work. She rewarded herself with an almond and two raisins, just like her mother would have done, if she were there.

Then it hit her between the eyes as hard as the horse punch in *Blazing Saddles*, and the tears began to form. She missed her mother. — pp. 108

For a sense of Lenni, watch this character trailer performed by Isabelle Bidal:



It was the most beautiful, romantic, infuriating thing she had ever seen. She wailed out loud. “Why? Why? Why?!” She stamped her foot, kicking a patch of pebbles into the water, and began to blubber. Why was Roger always with someone else? Why did he never notice her? She was the one who really loved him. And why was Aunt Ronnie adulter-sizing on Uncle Hart, the nicest guy in the whole world? Did she have to have every guy? Even Roger? Who was like, well, eight or nine years younger than she was? — pp. 259

For a sense of all four principals together, watch this composite trailer:



Supporting

Chloé Martin

Looks like: Reese Witherspoon

The giddy head of the tourism department, Hart's high school friend and main opposition, Chloé's a committed environmental contamination denier: "*There is no problem.*"

Quotes

"He was our Pied Piper, and we followed him pretty much everywhere because it was always the best kind of fun. Totally crazy. We miss that Hart. We want him back."

"Pied Piper? Would you follow him off a cliff?"

"Maybe. We're all gonna die sometime anyway. Look, it's simple. You grow up in a community, and you get your assigned part to play. You don't get to change your story, because that just messes with the whole scheme of things. That's not how it works." — pp. 146

Location

Port Despere

The town is a quirky character all its own. It's small, conservative lakeside town in southwestern Ontario, a place where high school jocks and local bar bands are rock stars. It's also a highly closed community: You're from Port Despere...or you're not.

One of the two local nuclear plants has been operating since the Manhattan Project, and stockpiles of waste have been found under buildings for decades. The town is slated for the largest environmental cleanup in Canadian history, but it's stalled.

Worried about their property values and the stigma, many citizens deny the radical environmental uncertainty they face.

Key Scenes

ONE: THE CALLING

REFERENCE PAGES: 12-13

PLAYERS: HART; THE DRAGON (Hart's imaginary vision of the historic nuclear plant.)

CHARACTER MOTIVATIONS: Hart is beginning to feel the call to his quest for justice. He's trying to understand why he's been seeing visions for the past several weeks, and what his mission is with respect to his town and its environmental crises.

SYNOPSIS: On his way home from a community event, Hart makes his nightly sojourn to a deserted area of a park, where he can better see his vision of his nemesis and meditate on it, searching for an answer to the questions and a sign of his mission. As he looks down on the plant, it turns into a fire-breathing dragon, prompting him to ask the big unanswerable questions: Why is he seeing things that are not there?

TWO: JUST ANOTHER DAY

REFERENCE PAGES: 48-56

PLAYERS: HART; KEN BASCO (Hart's best friend and Lenni's dad); ROGER; CHLOE (Port Despere Tourism and Business Development Manager)

MOTIVATIONS: A series of mishaps and hard questions leaves Hart feeling powerless and uncertain what to do to help the people he loves.

SYNOPSIS: Hart video calls his friend and next-door neighbour, Ken, to help him fix a garage door., Ronnie steps out at the wrong time and accidentally gets Ken tangled in the overhead chain. Roger overhears, and their conversation leads him to ask about Hart's reasons for coming back to Port Despere after several years living in other places, a question Hart is unable to answer. Chloé calls and insists that he attend a last-minute lunch to welcome a new business to town, and feeling helpless everywhere else, he agrees.

THREE: TROUBLE COMES TO TOWN

REFERENCE PAGES: 86-90

PLAYERS: HART; CHLOE MORGANNE, WILLIAM GUTHRIE (Plant Manager and Roger's father), DAVID TITFORD-ST. JAMES (CEO of the company who wants to build a new nuclear plant); TROY DUNSTAN (Titford-St. James 'assistant); SEVERAL TOWN COUNCIL MEMBERS AND LOCAL BUSINESS OWNERS

MOTIVATION: As the group learns about a third nuclear plant's plans to come to town, Hart feels righteous anger and is compelled to defend his town from another impending environmental threat.

SYNOPSIS: Chloé sets up a business luncheon to introduce David Titford-St. James, the General Manager of a proposed new plant to town leaders. Hart arrives last and he's seated next to the unseasonable fire, in the literal hot seat. At first, the group is excited about the prospect of a new factory in town and the economic spinoffs. As lunch continues, council members and community leaders learn that the new factory will use an experimental process to recycle radioactive metals and put them back into production of consumer products, adding to the town's toxic waste burden. Hart challenges the newcomers with questions about their process and the impact on the town's already taxed environment, drawing out that the decision has been made and the grants are in place.

FOUR: AN OPPORTUNITY

REFERENCE PAGES: 99-107

PLAYERS: HART; BOYD STEPHENSON (Manager of Unifoods, the local poultry plant); QUITO ALONSO (union leader for the striking poultry workers); BOYD BANTA (escaped capon and union mascot)

MOTIVATION: Disheartened by his meeting with the new plant managers, Hart discovers a kindred spirit who helps him reset his focus and reenergize for the fight ahead.

SYNOPSIS: After the lunch meeting, Hart puts his newspaper editor hat on and stops by the local poultry plant that's on strike to see if there is a story. He talks with Plant Manager Boyd Stephenson to learn that there's no real news happening and checks in with the union workers on his way out. He meets Quito Alonso, the practical, irreverent union leader. He and his striking brothers have adopted a feeble, easily frightened escaped capon as a mascot, naming him Boyd, after the plant manager. The entertaining image of Boyd Banta sticks with Hart, forming the seed of an idea.

FIVE: HELP ARRIVES

REFERENCE PAGES: 147-151

PLAYERS: HART; GARBAGE WORKERS 1 & 2; ROGER; RONNIE

MOTIVATION: Disoriented, Hart wakes up at the office in the middle of a frightening vision that turns comical.

SYNOPSIS: After working late putting two stories on the newswire, one about the Health Ministry's refusal to do a health study and one about Boyd Banta, Hart wakes up to a crash. At first, he's in the middle of one of his visions. This time, he's seeing a bombing run happening down the middle of King Street. He takes shelter under his desk, only to learn that the crash that woke him was the garbage truck out back dropping the dumpster. His vision dissipates, just as Roger calls to tell him the good news: His story about Boyd Banta is all over the cable news networks. Hart hangs up and calls Ronnie, who has already

received a tortuous call from Chloé. He tells her that he fell asleep on the couch at the office, but she's not sure if she should believe him until he adds that it took the dumpster being dropped to wake him. She laughs in spite of her misgivings. Hart asks her to help him keep an eye on the story, which is quickly going global, while he runs out to the poultry plant to try to sell his story on the health study.

SIX: THE RESPONSE

REFERENCE PAGES: 215-231

PLAYERS: HART; LOUIS DELACROIX (local researcher); TAD AVERY (global news network producer); BOYD BANTA; EMILE KANTOR (or EK, the global news network News Director)

MOTIVATIONS: Hart is anxious and feeling hopeful while waiting to meet Tad's boss and get an answer on the health study story.

SYNOPSIS: Hart has been waiting all day to speak with EK. He's content to watch the media show between the news networks and the vegan protesters who have shown up in support of Boyd Banta. Suddenly, they hear a rumbling from a few blocks away. Slowly, it's revealed that an impromptu and very early Santa Clause parade, led by Chloé, is travelling by a path in front of the cameras. While everyone's attention is on the floats, some of the vegan protesters free Boyd Banta from his leash. The chicken makes a break for freedom. The news crews try to corral him, fearing the loss of their story. After a frenzied pursuit, the chicken he runs straight into an oncoming bicyclist, ending his life and the news cycle. EK arrives as the crews are packing up. He declines the health study story due to political influences at his network, but mostly to the lack of viewer interest in environmental stories. Angry, Hart loses his diplomatic cool and peels out of the news scrum area, just in time to see Chloé jumping up and giving EK a monkey hug, a thank you for saying yes to a feel-good story on Port Despere.

SEVEN: MOVING ON

REFERENCE PAGES: 280-289

PLAYERS: HART; RONNIE; ROGER; KEN

MOTIVATIONS: Hart suffers the loss of everything he loves, prompting him to reframe both his sense of self and his approach, vowing to fight back another day in a different way.

SYNOPSIS: On Saturday morning, while suffering a massive hangover, Hart discovers Lenni in Roger's boat. She's gone. His cries of grief bring Ronnie and Roger down from Roger's apartment, where they've spent the night together. The paramedics arrive and so does Ken, who lashes out at Ronnie in pain and frustration. Roger steps in to stop Ken while Hart watches, and Hart realizes that he could never have done that for her. Ronnie decides to leave, and on her way out, she gives Hart a book of photos marked *For Ken*. Inside are portraits of Lenni in her many costumes, their secret photo project of the last several months. As Hart flips through the pages, grieving, a storm blows up over the lake and a lightning strike revealing the nuclear plant next door through the trees and triggering

another of Hart's visions of the dragon. This time, the dragon morphs into an animated version of itself, silly and vulnerable, inspiring him to embrace the News Director's advice: *Find a way to change the narrative.*

Comps

Tonally Similar Films

Don't Look Up, Dir. Adam McKay
The French Dispatch, Dir. Wes Anderson
Beasts of the Southern Wild, Dir. Benh Zeitlin

Tonally Similar Music

Too Dumb to Die- Green Day
What, Me Worry? - Portugal. The Man
Heaven is Here - Florence + the Machine

Tonally Similar Painting

13 Attempts to Become a Rooster, Wolfgang Lettl



A **limited series pitch** for *King of Hope* (PDF) is also available:
Password: PalimpsestIP



The Palimpsest Press Team

Kim Conklin

is a writer, filmmaker and podcaster. Kim's stories, poems and films have appeared in journals, anthologies and film festivals. Most recently, her poetry micro-film was selected for film festivals on three continents, and one of her flash fiction stories was selected for *This Will Only Take a Minute: 100 Canadian Flashes* published by Guernica Editions. Her journalism has appeared in broadcast and print, and her communications work has received more than 15 awards, including a Clio and a NY International Film Festival award. *King of Hope* is her debut novel.

Aimée Dunn

is the owner/publisher for Palimpsest Press, a Canadian literary press based in Windsor, Ontario. The 20-year-old press is supported by the Canadian Heritage, Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, and the Ontario Creates. The press publishes beautiful poetry and fresh, innovative fiction and non-fiction. Recent award wins for Palimpsest Press include the 2021 Governor General's Literary Awards for Poetry and Non-fiction (*The Junta of Happenstance*, Tolu Oloruntoba; *alfabet/alphabet*, Sadiqa de Meijer) and the 2022 Griffin Poetry Prize (*The Junta of Happenstance*, Tolu Oloruntoba).

Kevin Andrew Heslop

is an up-and-coming Canadian filmmaker whose practice connects theatre, poetry, film, art criticism, journalism, and the visual arts. In 2021, he published *the correct fury of your why is a mountain* (Gordon Hill Press, 2021); in 2022, he founded Astoria Pictures, an independent film production and distribution company; and in 2023, he released his directorial debut, *mo(u)vements*. (Astoria Pictures, 2023). In addition to active practices in the visual, literary, and performing arts, Kevin works as a producer representing titles from award-winning publishing houses towards their adaptation to the stage and screen.

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