

24 HOURS IN 2084



Prologue

Manchester, 2nd of July, 2084

I don't live here anymore. It's been a year since I left, but I came back to visit my parents and Brandon for two weeks. Now, with my vacation almost over, I realize I never missed this place. Nothing has changed. Brandon's still the favorite. And me? Still invisible — even after a whole year away.

The news hum in the background as I lie on the couch, staring blankly at the TV. The ceaseless clatter of construction workers outside gnaws at my nerves. For a month now, their machines have scraped and hammered away, each metallic screech worsening my insomnia.

"...the whole city of Manchester will undergo an unexpected wave of heavy rain and thunderstorms in the next few days, so be careful and bring out your umbrellas!" the news anchor exclaims. *"Transport may be affected, and flights could face delays or cancellations. In other news, the oxygen mask defect crisis is finally being resolved after months of disrupted production. However, passengers must be informed that some aircraft might still carry faulty units..."*

"I think I heard the postman," my mother shouts from her office. "Can you check the mail for me?"

"Yeah, sure," I sigh, switching off the TV.

Outside, the mailbox is stuffed — mostly ads. An insurance flyer, a vacation deal, another pointless product. Is everything an ad these days? Then, something catches my eye.

A letter.

CERN — European Organization for Nuclear Research
Route de Meyrin 385, 1217 Meyrin, Geneva, Switzerland
June 28, 2084

It's addressed to *Brandon*.

Curious, I open it. Mom always opens everybody's mail anyway.

Subject: Selection for the ***

Dear Mr. Brandon *****,

On behalf of the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN), it is our privilege to formally notify you of your selection for participation in a groundbreaking research program: the ***.

I rush through the rest.

The **** project involves the integration of a bio-synchronized micro-particle accelerator array within a human host, enabling controlled resonance with localized temporal fields... temporal displacement theory... Level-7 Temporal Engineering..

My pulse quickens.

This has been all over the news for months now — the project to create an "upgraded human." Everyone who's taken part so far ended up dead. Official cause: *death due to inability of the mind and body to comprehend the power of this symbiosis*. Rumors say it drives them insane, but the government keeps the details buried.

The people selected are called “*special*”, though they might as well add “*reckless*” and “*overconfident*”. Everyone’s desperate to be the first to travel through time.

And now Brandon.

Brandon, who’s only seventeen.

Brandon, who *can’t handle this*.

Brandon, who doesn’t even need it — he already has everything.

And me? I have nothing. Nineteen years of being second best, invisible, a spectator of someone else’s life. Maybe... maybe it’s my turn. They’d never notice if I took this letter. We’re close enough in age. Practically the same build. All I’d need is his identity chip. They still use paper mail for this kind of top-secret project — idiots. There’s even a boarding pass inside.

I slip the letter into my pocket. For once, something is going to be *mine*.

July 3rd, 2084, 5h10 (somewhere over the clouds)

The plane hums as it slices through the clouds, heading to Geneva. I didn’t even bother leaving a note. If this kills me — well, good riddance !. If it doesn’t... maybe I’ll finally be *someone*.

I keep checking the boarding pass and the CERN letter. No one’s questioned me. The chip switch worked. Brandon sleeps in his room, clueless, while I chase the only opportunity that’s ever come near me.

By 7h40 CET, the government’s transport picks me up from Geneva airport. A silent, black vehicle, no markings. The driver doesn’t speak. No need to. Everyone knows what this trip means.

At the CERN Temporal Research Division, security is tight. Guns, scanners, heavy uniforms. I pass through layers of biometric checks, but the chip fools them. I’m Brandon now.

The lab is clinical, cold. A wide chamber lined with glass, silver consoles, and white-clad technicians. At the center: a medical pod surrounded by an intricate web of cables and polished metal.

A woman in a fitted white coat approaches. *Dr. Hartmann*, her badge reads.

“You’re right on time, Mr.*****. We’ll begin the preliminary synchronization tests.”

I nod, heart pounding. They run me through endless scans, tests, injections. Everything feels like a blur. Then comes the final stage.

The pod opens.

“You’ll feel a brief pressure as the micro-accelerator array integrates with your nervous system,” Dr. Hartmann says.

I lay down. *The pod seals shut.*

A surge of cold floods my veins as a silver apparatus lowers to my chest. It drills through skin, bone, straight to the core of me. They’ve deactivated my senses, I don’t feel anything. But I still want to scream.

The world explodes into white. A tearing, stretching sensation, as if my body and mind are being pulled apart, reassembled, split across a thousand versions of myself.

Then silence.

Darkness.

A voice.

“Integration complete. Subject stable.”

July 3rd, 2084, 19h20 GMT

I’m back in Manchester. It was fast, they don’t even let you rest that you already have to leave, almost like they don’t want you there.

No one noticed I was gone. Brandon went out with some friends and my parents didn’t even realize I wasn’t there for lunch.

I can feel it inside me — the particle array humming beneath my skin, a constant whisper at the edge of perception. Time feels... almost touchable now.

I haven’t told anyone. Why would I? For the first time in my life, I’m not invisible. They just don’t know it yet.

July 4th, 2084 – 20h00

The day drifted by like it was nothing. Like time itself was mocking me. I still haven’t used my ability. I don’t know what it’ll feel like, what it’ll do to me — and for some reason, I want the first time to mean something. To mark the moment I stopped being a shadow in someone else’s life.

“Fridge’s empty. I’m gonna grab some stuff real quick at the grocery store.” Brandon calls out, already halfway out the door. I watch it shut behind him.

Maybe it’s my fault. I’d been starving since coming back from Geneva, inhaling everything in the house like I’d never eat again. He noticed, of course. Golden boy always does.

My phone buzzes. It’s my old friend, Cillian.

“Oi, you coming round for a few games? Haven’t seen you in ages, mate.”

The house is so quiet it feels dead. Why not? It’s not like anything ever happens around here.

“Yeah, be there in five.”

20h38

I’m at Cillian’s, two games deep and still undefeated when my phone rings. It’s my mother. I almost didn’t pick up. But something — instinct, guts, I don’t know — tells me to answer.

Her voice is a trembling, broken whisper. “Help... there’s someone in the house. I tried calling the police, it’s not even ringing... I don’t know what to do, please—”

My heart stops. Air leaves my lungs like I’ve been punched.

I grab my bag and rush out the door. No explanation, no goodbye. My legs move before my mind can catch up. It’s a five-minute walk. Two if I run. As I tear through the streets, I pull out my phone to dial the police — but before I can, the screen lights up.

Incoming Call: Manchester Police Department

I answer, not even thinking.

“Mr. *****? We regret to inform you that your brother, Brandon ****, was struck by a vehicle on Crosshill Street. He... he didn’t survive. We—”

The words fall silent. The world implodes. My phone slips from my hand. I fall to my knees on the asphalt, an endless ringing filling my ears, drowning out everything else.

This... this has to be it. The sign I was waiting for.

Brutal. Ironic. But a sign. With the last bit of strength in my shaking hands, I focus on the pulse of the particle array stitched into my flesh. I feel it stir. A second heartbeat. A shiver in the infinity of time.

20h42 : *Reset.*

Chapter 1: The beginning of the end

July 3rd, 2084 – 20h42

The world snaps back.
Like waking from a nightmare only to realize it's still there, waiting. The end of the day goes by, and so does the next, until we are once again on the 4th of July, at 20:00, Brandon's at the door. "Fridge's empty. I'm gonna grab some stuff real quick at the grocery store". This time, I don't let him leave alone.

"Wait. I'll come with you."

He raises an eyebrow.
"Since when do you care about groceries?"

I force a shrug.
"Since now."

We walk together through the evening streets. The city feels heavier somehow, like it knows what's coming.

20h36. Crosshill Street.

Brandon's ahead of me, scrolling his phone, earphones in. I spot the car before he does. A white, unmarked vehicle speeding down the street, headlights off.

"Brandon!!"

He turns, confused — just as the car slams into him.

20h37.

His body crumbles onto the pavement. Everything goes silent, I can only hear my heartbeat in my temples. The car doesn't stop. I stumble toward him, hands trembling, knees giving out. Blood spills across the concrete like ink. I can't breathe.

20h38.

My phone rings. It's my mother. I already know what she'll say. I answer: "Help... There's someone in the house. I tried calling the police, it's not even ringing... I don't know what to do, please—"

Tears blur my vision. My mind fractures between two horror movies. I hung up. I can't do this yet. Not again. Not now.

22h00

The streets are emptier now. Police tape shivers in the wind. I sneak under it. Crosshill Street looks normal again, except from a dark stain on the ground where Brandon died. No cameras. No witnesses. No accident report in the public database. It's as if it never happened. I pace the scene, trying to catch any detail I missed before.

Nothing, absolutely nothing was left behind.

22h15 Reset.

Chapter 2 : Again

July 3rd, 2084 – 22h15

Wait. Let me recap everything. My brother just died again? At the same time? What did I just see? Why did it happen like that? THIS CAN'T BE HAPPENING!

I *stare* at the ceiling. My breath quickens, as if I've been running for hours. My fingers quiver. Now my whole body. I'm still in my room, but my mind is stuck at that moment: 20h37 . Again. And again. AND **AGAIN**.

I'm not crying. Not this time. The pain went deeper — the kind that makes the heart weep more than the body. I sit up slowly and grab my watch. 22h15.

I'm late. I took too long to come back, and I forgot I only had 24 hours to save him.

Time is ticking...

From now on, I'll set a 24-hour timer at the start of every loop to never waste a single second again.

"I have twenty-two hours left."

"This time, it won't happen." This time, I'll be ready — or so I thought.

The day was sunny. It felt wrong. How could the sun shine when it *knew* what was waiting, hidden at the end of this day? How could the sky act like nothing was happening when he and I were the only ones who knew?

Brandon was already downstairs, laughing at a YouTube video on the couch. Same as "*yesterday*." Same T-shirt as "*yesterday*." Same naive innocence. Same kind of torture.

"Hey *****, you look like you've seen a ghost," Brandon said, raising an eyebrow, a box of Pocky in hand.

"I didn't sleep well." Obviously, a lie. "We should go out today. Just the two of us."

Brandon smiled. "Now you wanna hang out with me? You're sure you're okay?"

I forced a smile back. Every word from Brandon pierced deeper. I knew the truth: He was going to die. Again. Tonight. At **20h37**.

We spent the day together. A walk by the canal. Board games. And above all, we laughed. Laughed like brothers, laughed to forget, laughed at nothing, and eventually, at everything. Maybe even out of love?

Then there was the clock: why had it suddenly become a ticking time bomb? Minutes became seconds, hours passed like minutes... It would all happen again if I did nothing.

17h10

18h32

19h42

I think I've found a way to keep my brother away from that car. He only goes to that place to grab food. If I take my brother and parents out to a restaurant — I thought — I can prevent everything, his death and my mother's call. As much as I enjoyed my time with Brandon, if nothing changed, he would die again.

At **20h20**, I suggested we all go out to dinner. They agreed without question.

20h30 : We're there. Panic starts creeping in. I may have the power to go back 24 hours, but not the power to feel nothing when watching my brother die.

20h36 : The waiter arrives, appetizer in hand. I see no car, and I don't understand how my brother could die in 1 minute.

20h37 : My brother is dead. He choked to death. I- DON'T- WANT- TO- LIVE- THIS- AGAIN — I scream — too late. My brother is dead. Reality is right in front of me. *What* reality? WHY? I don't know where I am anymore. *My brother is dead*. Not even who I am. *My brother is dead*. I'm not even sure I *am*. ***My brother is dead***. That, I know for sure.

20h38 : No call — right, my parents are with me. They're crying. I just witnessed the scene. My heart broke the first time. Now, the sadness eats away at my soul, my bones, the very core of my mind. There's time before I can go back — not enough to grieve, just enough to prepare to see it all again.

I'll use this time to think about what's happening. Since that letter, everything has changed. My brother dies at the same moment, no matter what I do. Coincidence? No. The mystery behind his death and my ability to travel back in time terrifies me. But deep down, it wasn't a riddle. It was a curse. A game I wasn't sure I could win.

I stared at the sky, voice shaking : **"How many more times will I have to watch him die?"**
Then silence.

22h15, end of the 24-hour loop. I'm scared. So scared. But I'll keep going. They say, "till death do us part," but trust me — today is not that day.

Chapter 3 : Repetition

July 3rd, 2084 – 22h15

The day's blurred. The air feels heavier. Every choice, every word, becomes a loaded weapon. I have memorized the times of every catastrophe. 20h37. 20h38. Each loop is a chance. Each loop is a grave.

This time, I wake up earlier. Make breakfast. Puts music on—one of Brandon's favorites from when we were kids. We smile. It feels normal. Too normal. I suggest dinner early.

"Otherwise it'll be packed," I say, trying to find a believable excuse.

Brandon shrugs.

"Fine by me. Are you paying?"

We laugh. For a moment, I dare to believe this could work. We eat. Joke. Take photos in the rain. But as we leave the restaurant, a storm breaks overhead. I feel it before it happens—a strange buzz in the air.

Then: a crack of lightning, brutal and sudden. My body is flung backward. My skin burned, breath stolen. He rushes forward, screaming, slipping in the water pooling at his feet. I am alive. Barely. Shaking. He calls for help. An ambulance screeches fast around the corner. Too fast. Tires lose traction. Metal groans. And in a cruel twist of fate, the van plows into Brandon, taking everything away from me.

Reset.

July 3rd, 2084 – 22h15

The next loop is quieter. I suggest a beach trip. A change of setting. Maybe this time, the universe will spare us both. Brandon runs toward the waves, skipping stones, laughing like nothing's wrong. A seagull dives unexpectedly, flapping at Brandon's head. He stumbles, loses balance, and falls into the ocean. I jump in after him, but I can't reach him in time.

A boat cuts across the water—too close. Its engine roars. The propeller slices the surface...
...and red clouds the blue. This day is cursed.

Reset.

July 3rd, 2084 – 22h15

I try again. I buy Brandon a plane ticket to get him away from Manchester for the day. It's a small local flight—routine. Safe. Brandon boards. Smiles.

"Thanks for this. I needed a break."

I watch the plane rise into the evening sky. Thirty minutes later, turbulence hits. Masks fall from the ceiling. Brandon places his over his mouth— but it's defective. No oxygen. Then, too much when closer to landing. His lungs collapse. He dies mid-landing. The only one.

Now, I am watching time more than living in it. I build a table. Rows for each loop. Columns for each change. Location. Meal. Time. Mood. Death. I don't cry anymore. Just stare. My room is a war zone of theories and maps and scribbled rage. And through it all, one idea starts to form: I am not trying to save Brandon. Not really. I am trying to *break the logic*. Because logic means control. And control means hope.

Even if it's a lie.

Chapter 4 : First doubts

July 3rd, 2084 – 22h15

I live each day like a machine. I know the exact time Brandon blinks. But I lost track of the actual date. I am mixing up the loops. Sometimes I forget if I am *in* one. I dream of Brandon. But even in my dream, *he* dies. Always. One loop, Brandon looks at me, and says again.

“You look like you’ve seen a ghost.” I want to say: “*I’ve seen you die fourteen times*”. Instead, he just says: “Didn’t sleep well.”

This time, I do nothing. I let Brandon go shopping alone. And I go on a walk.

At 20h37, I check the clock.

At 20h38, the call comes.

But I never moved from the bench I found in the park. Why? Because I am *watching*. I start noticing anomalies. A green light flashes on my implant the second Brandon dies. A strange frequency on the radio, right before each incident. A synthetic voice, between two ads. At first, it’s just a detail.

A badge, half-lodged beneath a metal grate outside a small neighborhood grocery store. I notice it only because the green light on my implant flashes the moment I walk past it. Reflex. I stop. Take a few steps back. Pick it up.

Name: A. Delcourt

Position: Security – MAT

I don’t recall the acronym. No logo, just those three letters engraved into a faded gray background. MAT. Nothing rings a bell. No alerts. No warnings. I slide it into my pocket.

Later, alone in my room, I type **MAT** into a search engine. Nothing meaningful. The results are cluttered with noise—ads, product listings, tech blogs. It’s like the signal is being drowned out on purpose. “Manchester Afternoon Broadcast”, “Materials and Adaptive Tech.”, “Mothers Against Technology.”, “Music and Therapy.”. I narrow the search. Add filters. Cross-references with dates from the loops. Incidents. Deaths. One hit. Buried in an archived article from an old fringe journal: *A splinter group. Anti-cybernetic. Pro-organic. Known only as MAT: **Manifest Against Transhumanism***. No contact info. No names. Just a line:

They believe time itself has been weaponized.

Something clicks. I scroll back to the article’s source. **CERN Internal Database**. Restricted access. Hidden behind a false 404 page. I look down at the badge again. A key? Or a warning? There’s a link to CERN. Vague. Hidden. I begin digging into databases.

Brandon dies in every loop. But *always differently*. And in **every loop**, something *external* shifts—without me doing anything. An outside variable. Something controlled. *What if it’s not me?* What if this is deliberate? What if I am *not the only one* manipulating time? My notebook is a mess. Sketches. Codes. Schedules. Deaths. Lightning. Blades. Propellers. But also: symbols. Initials. A keycard.

A mole? I sketched a room. A bright, blinding light. Silhouettes. I have never been in this room. And yet...

I dream of it every night.

Chapter 5 : The final loops

July 3rd, 2084 – 22h15

The loops had turned my mind into a machine. Cold. Sharp. Methodical. Wake up. Save Brandon. Fail. Start over. Each failure tore away more of my sanity. At first, there was grief. Then obsession. Then paranoia. Now? It was something else — something empty. Silent. Buried deep inside me. Only the timer on my wrist remained unchanged. **24:00:00.** Again.

I know every second of the day by heart. The flickering kitchen light at 20h12. The neighbor's cats were fighting at 15h47. The wind is always picking up five minutes before the storm. I know everything. Except what matters most. Brandon's voice had become a recording in my head. I could predict everything he'd say. The hope of ever seeing him smile at 20h38 was fading. Hope was slowly living space for doubt. But with my latest progress, I can't afford to give up now.

Again, I let Brandon die. On purpose. I can't even look at my brother's face. Instead, I run to my parents' house. At 20h38, my phone rings — but I'm already there. The lights are on. I wait until after the burglary to follow the thief.

Only 30 minutes pass before he drives off in a truck. I follow. He heads to the headquarters of MAT — supposedly a media agency, huh? Once there, he leaves the truck open to shuttle stolen goods. I sneak closer. In the truck's back, I find my parents — tied up. I don't free them to avoid alerting the burglar. But now I understand: They're targeting my family. On the dashboard, a card: *Manifest Against Transhumanism* — I was right, it's this resistance group, buried under fake identities and corrupted data.

That's the true identity of MAT: opposition to the transhumanist movement, against the CERN — of course. But how do they know all this? I remember the possibility of a mole inside the CERN. I need to uncover the truth.

Reset

July 3rd, 2084 – 22h15

In this new loop, I'm going to the CERN to finally end this and save my brother — just once will be enough. I board a plane to Switzerland, where it all began. Where, I hope, it will all end. But the place is heavily secured. The task is harder than I thought. I spend a few loops studying the security systems, always returning in time. Now that I know the guard shifts, the location of every camera, the mole makes me enter by the back entrance with the badge I stole, but I still can let them see me, they'll know I'm not supposed to be here. I need to find where to go. Then it hits me: the first time I was in my brother's place, next to the test chamber was a locked door. It had a keypad. Since I've been here, I haven't seen anyone enter. I think I found it.

Reset

July 3rd, 2084 – 22h15

In the next loop, I board the plane again and get there easily. But how do I open the door? I'll try everything.

0000, 0001, 0002... 0009 **BEEP BEEP** — the CERN's alarm blares. I quickly hide, dodging cameras, doing the math: 10^4 possibilities. It would take 1000 loops to unlock it. **I CAN'T DO THIS ANYMORE.** I want to stop. My brother is dying. My mother is calling. AGAIN AND AGAIN. I've done enough. Haven't I? Why?!

I'll have to relive the same day hundreds of times, each time letting my brother die without saving him. But I have no choice. No more choice.

Reset

July 3rd, 2084 – 22h15

1, 2, 34 — I'm TIRED.

456: Plane, CERN, *reset*.

878: Plane, CERN, *reset*.

999: Plane, CERN, *reset*.

1000...

Then the last possible try: 9999...nothing.

“LET ME OUT OF HERE! WHY?? WHY DOES EVERYTHING I DO FAIL?? WHY WON'T YOU OPEN??” I scream, tears in my eyes. Not from sleep. From life. The feeling of giving everything, yet still failing. Everyone knows that feeling. It's human to be disappointed in yourself. That's what life is — mostly. But what I am feeling now? It isn't human.

Reset

July 3rd, 2084 – 22h15

1, 2, 48 — yes. I mistyped the 484th code: it was 0484.

Access granted.

The words appear. *Finally*, I'll understand the truth.

Names. Hundreds. Thousands. If memory serves, these are all the people who tested time travel here. All were declared dead shortly afterward. All declared dead. And on the table: files, signed by MAT. A journal of their loops. Their deaths. The causes were all recorded. Not machine rejection — but suicide.

Now I get it. I was never special. Everyone can use the device. I always knew it deep down. But seeing it is...different. All these people went through what I'm living. They turned on their families, their loved ones. Will I share their fate? At the back of the room, a screen. It shows my brother's name and all others who've held the device. Only his name is lit. Below it, documents explain everything. MAT's goal is to end transhumanism. That's why they hunt those who cross the boundary of humanity — even inside the CERN. I'm one of them. I sit on the floor, looking at my reflection. It's not a man anymore. That thing in the mirror... isn't human. Since that day, my body has lived — but I died in the first loop.

Now I understand. If I remove what serves as my heart, my brother won't die. They think he has the device. That's why they're trying to kill him every time. Wait. I have to die? Really? Is that how this ends?

I'm trembling. Not with fear. Not anymore. I check my watch.

00:00:59.

I smile. Unlike my brother, I was never the special one. Never the one in the spotlight. The one people turned to. My death will be the same. I lived in silence and pain. I'll die in silence, but not in pain.

Pain is for humans. I don't feel it anymore. Hard to admit — but my brother's death doesn't hit the

same. Trying to stop his death caused mine. I killed myself that day. Trying to find my place in this world — I lost it. I lost everything.

Just a few seconds left before the next reset. But I've made my choice. Most people, when they die, have regrets. They want to go back — to that moment they said no, the moment they didn't live fully, the moment they were just bystanders in their own lives. They wish they had seen more, felt more, loved more. If you'd asked me if I had regrets before, I could've listed thousands. Now, there's only one : Not seeing my brother grow up with my own eyes.

In the end, life is nothing but relationships. Friends, love, family, chance encounters... It's a shame I didn't realize that sooner. Maybe I could've lived happily... in another loop.

So, I write my final words on a piece of paper: **“Brandon; by Aphrodite: I hate you.”**

00:00:00

As he removes his artificial heart, he smiles — a tear rolling down his cheek.

EPILOGUE

July 5th, 2084 – 11h57

Nobody noticed he was gone.

The house looked exactly the same. Brandon was laying down on the couch, one hand on the remote, the other scrolling through his phone. The same fuzz of the TV filled the room, the same old morning air hanging heavy over everything.

*“...A newly released CERN report is once again drawing attention this morning. Just like those before him, a 19 year old man — Mr. ***** — from our very own city of Manchester, has been officially declared deceased. Authorities report it as an incapacity to contain the power of the machine, following complications from his participation in the micro-particle accelerator array program. Public reactions continue to...”*

Brandon’s phone slipped from his hand.

“What...!? What? No—” he stuttered, his voice cracking in disbelief. “How? That’s— That’s impossible. There’s no way. There must be a mistake.”

His mother, hearing the sudden outburst, called out from her office, with a note of irritation. “Why are you shouting like that?”

Brandon turned toward her, his face paler than ever, his breath shortened and his eyes filled with despair.

“He’s dead.”

His voice was barely a whisper now.

“My brother’s dead.”

In the end, he, who thought he wasn't special, had always been. Special because of his sacrifice, special for his immense love, special because of his humanity.

He lived the same day thousands of times for the sole purpose of saving his brother. And ultimately, he took his own life out of love.

He loved his brother as much as he hated him. He loved his brother to the point of dying for him. It was in his final moments that he realized all of this—when he had just one tear left, a final tear, an ocean of humanity in which thousands of interpretations swim.

Because if that tear was a book, it would be up to us to write its story. Because deep down, he never stopped being human.

Because losing your way doesn’t mean being lost forever.

“At the end of the day, time is going to win anyway.

Because, even the stars collapse when they burn too long for someone else’s light.” -MAT.