

THE LOOP

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. DARK CHAMBER

A thin slit of pale light catches in mist, its source shrouded in a deep darkness. A PULSING HUM grows louder with each beat. MUFFLED VOICES as the HUM becomes deafening. A blackened hand gropes at the pale light. A DESPERATE SCREAM reverberates.

INT. LAB

A large room with an industrial desk, two chairs and a single door. In one chair, PHIL's slight frame hunches over a laptop typing furiously while a QUIET HUM pulses in the distance.

PHIL
No, that's it, I'm shutting it
down.

The HUM dies off. BOB throws open the door and stomps over.

BOB
(annoyed)
What was it this time?

PHIL
The levels were rising too quickly.

BOB
They're within limits.

PHIL
Barely.

BOB
That's what fuses are for.

PHIL
We're on our last set.

BOB
Sorry. Verge of making history and
all, just a little anxious.

They walk to the corner of the room where a tall metallic box with a door and a narrow slit window looms over them. A tangle of tubes and wires run from it to a myriad of small support boxes with blinking lights and gauges huddled around it.

PHIL
I just want to take it a little
slower.

BOB
Sure, we'll take our time, it's all
relative anyway.

Bob smirks and pats Phil on the back, then crouches down and flips switches on the boxes around the machine. Phil shakes his head and joins him.

SAME - LATER

Phil sits at the laptop as Bob hovers over him. The PULSING HUM gets faster, a pale light flickers from the machine.

PHIL
Growing...

BOB
Within limits.

The HUM quickens. Phil hovers a finger over the escape key.

PHIL
Still growing...

BOB
Give it time.

The HUM and lights fade away.

BOB
See, stable! I knew it.

He pats Phil hard on the back and saunters over to admire the machine - a proud father. Phil watches the computer a bit longer. Satisfied, he joins Bob in his reverie.

BOB
School kids are going to have to learn this date- the moment we conquered time.

PHIL
That's a bit much.

BOB
What would you call it?

PHIL
Technically, it's the earliest date anything can come back- assuming it works. We still haven't sent anything back.

BOB
About that...

Bob reaches into his lab coat and pulls out an ANTIQUE POCKET WATCH.

PHIL
No, we talked about this.

BOB
C'mon, the kilo lab mass?

PHIL
It minimizes the variables.

BOB
There's nothing poetic about that!

PHIL
So we send the lab mass, and if it works we send the watch and say that was the first thing. You think Armstrong's first words on the moon were "one small step..."

BOB
More like "I can't believe I'm on the fucking moon" I bet. OK, deal.

SAME - LATER

Bob stands behind a tripod mounted camera and points it at the door of the time machine. Phil fidgets in front of the machine holding the LAB MASS. Bob flashes a thumbs up.

PHIL
We will now attempt to send this one kilogram mass into the past.

Phil turns and tugs at the door to the time machine. A WHOOSH of gas vents, roiling fog obscures the interior. Bob zooms in. Phil staggers back, drops the lab mass with a THUD.

BOB
What is it? Everything OK?

Phil turns toward the camera and smiles.

PHIL
It works.

The fog clears. Bob zooms in on a lab mass, centered on the floor of the machine, a shallow dent along the bottom edge. Phil picks up the mass he dropped. He turns its now dented bottom towards the camera and struggles to suppress a smile.

PHIL
It fucking works.

Bob leaps from behind the camera with a scream, runs over and picks Phil up in a huge bear hug.

BOB
We did it!

Phil squirms free, points a Geiger counter at the mass.

PHIL
No radiation.

BOB
We did it.

Phil pulls a remote thermometer, points it at the mass.

PHIL
No temperature difference.

Bob reaches for the mass in the machine then hesitates- Phil deserves the honor.

PHIL
Go ahead.

Bob reaches in, gingerly picks up the future mass. He pats Phil on the back and points to the camera. They pose before the machine, each holding up an identical lab mass. Phil turns and places his mass in the machine.

PHIL
OK, we've gotta get this thing sent back- complete the loop.

Phil rushes back to the desk and types at the computer. Bob seals the door to the time machine and watches the lights flicker on the support boxes.

BOB
Looks good here.

PHIL
Charging now, ninety seconds.

BOB
What if we don't?

PHIL
Setting it for five minutes, that'll be perfect.

Bob stands across the table from Phil and lowers the laptop screen. Phil looks up, flustered.

BOB
What if we don't?

PHIL
Don't what?

BOB
Don't send it back.

PHIL
The paradox, no! We aren't testing that.

Phil pushes the screen back up, hurriedly types a few commands and turns to the machine. A PULSING HUM throbs louder. Pale light flickers from within, then winks out. Phil stomps over to the machine.

PHIL
Make sure you get this.

Bob takes his position behind the camera, gives a thumbs up.

PHIL
The mass has been sent into the past successfully demonstrating the principles of Gödel's closed time-like curve.

He pulls the door open. Bob zooms in on the empty machine.

SAME - LATER

The lab mass sits on the table between two sweating scotch glasses and a half empty bottle of Glenmorangie. Phil leans back in his chair, his feet propped up on the table. Bob huddles over his glass swirling it slowly.

BOB
What're you thinking about?

PHIL
Who to thank first in my Nobel acceptance speech. You?

BOB
What if we didn't send it back?

PHIL
The paradox?
(downs his scotch)
If we didn't send it back it wouldn't have been there when we opened the door.

BOB
You know what I mean. What if we decided not to.

PHIL
Wouldn't prove anything. So we didn't send it back, but someone must have. Maybe a week from now, maybe fifty years from now, someone sends it back. We'd never know for sure, there's no way to test it.

BOB
There has to be a way.

Phil refills his glass, then holds up the bottle of Glenmorangie.

PHIL
Novikov's self-consistency principle...

BOB
Not that bullshit! He can't reconcile the idea of paradoxes so he declares them impossible.

PHIL
 C'mon! He just said that since everything in a closed time-like curve influences itself in a self-adjusted, self-consistent way, a paradox would be prevented.

BOB
 Fine. So then do a paradox experiment and you can prove him right, or I can prove him wrong.

PHIL
 OK- So the paradox is we'll send this bottle of scotch, but then after it comes out of the machine, we won't send it. Except that means it has to come out of the machine first.

BOB
 Well...

Phil walks over to the machine, opens the door, peeks inside, then closes it.

PHIL
 And since I don't see it in there, what does that mean? Maybe in some alternate time-line bizzarro Phil and Bob get free scotch, or maybe the paradox destroys the machine...

BOB
 Or maybe we're too chicken shit to even try.

Phil slumps back into his chair and sets the bottle down on the table.

PHIL
 Maybe. Or maybe we're smart enough to realize that it's best not to fuck with time too much until we have a better idea of how it reacts.

BOB
 How it reacts? Like Time is some all powerful being that we shouldn't tempt. It's a concept, a set of rules, mathematical rules to be tested.

Phil takes a long sip, savours it.

PHIL
 If you can come up with a protocol, I'll consider it.

BOB
 What if...

Phil puts up a finger to silence Bob.

PHIL
Do you hear that?

A LOW PULSING HUM grows in intensity, then abrupt silence. Phil flips open the laptop and begins typing.

PHIL
Something's come back. There's something in it.

Bob heads towards the machine and grips the door handle. Phil gives a nod and Bob tugs on the handle. HISS, the door vents gas and slowly swings open.

PHIL
What is it?

Bob fans the fog away revealing a post-it note, on the floor of the machine: "DON'T SEND ANYTHING ELSE BACK" hurriedly scrawled in black across the page.

BOB
Oh shit.

Phil joins Bob, stares down at the note.

PHIL
We have to stop.

Phil runs back to the computer, starts the shutdown process.

BOB
Wait, we don't know...

PHIL
It's a warning, we have to stop.

BOB
A warning about what? From who!

PHIL
Someone in the future. Someone who knows more than we do!

BOB
You're gonna abandon the greatest discovery in history because of some fucking post-it note!

SAME - LATER

Phil stares intently at the note. Bob paces the room like a caged animal.

BOB
We don't even know when it's from. You said it- it could be from fifty years from now.

PHIL
It doesn't matter. It's from the future and it's a warning.

BOB
About what? It doesn't even say.

PHIL
Something's wrong. Maybe they don't know exactly, but it must mean something.

BOB
It could be the paradox experiment. It could be a practical joke for all we know. We've checked the logs, there's nothing wrong.

PHIL
We'll check them again.

BOB
And when that doesn't show anything, then what? We wait around for you to ascribe some fucking meaning to it! Can't it mean nothing?

Phil leans in closer to the note, lost in thought. Bob storms out of the room, Phil barely taking notice.

Bob flies back into the room with a black marker and a pad of post-its. He slams the pad down and angrily scrawls "DON'T SEND ANYTHING ELSE BACK" - He pulls the note off and SMACKS it down on the table next to the future note - an exact match.

PHIL
No Bob...

BOB
There's you're fucking meaning- it doesn't mean anything. It was just me fucking around.

Bob snatches his note, puts it in the machine.

BOB
Send it.

PHIL
No, it's not right.

BOB
Complete your precious fucking loop! Do it, and that's it! Mystery solved!

Phil's finger trembles over the keyboard.

BOB
 You want an answer, I'm giving you
 the best one possible! There's
 nothing wrong with your machine,
 nothing wrong with your experiment,
 your Nobel prize is safe, just send
 the fucking thing back!

Phil hesitates, Bob shoves him out of the way and starts the
 sequence. A LOW HUM, the door opens and the note is gone.

SAME - LATER

They slump at the table, the note crumpled to the side.

BOB
 We should try something living.

PHIL
 Living? We need more protocols, go
 over the logs again...

BOB
 I can get a rat.

PHIL
 Goddammit Bob!

BOB
 Too small? Maybe a monkey?

PHIL
 We need to slow down! Your prank
 with the note almost cost us the
 whole experiment.

BOB
 My prank with the note saved the
 experiment!

PHIL
 The paradox- you had to test the
 paradox.

BOB
 Bullshit! I didn't even
 consider it until...

PHIL
 You couldn't leave it alone
 when I said...

A loud THUD jolts them out of the argument. The machine
 shudders. A PULSING HUM trails off. Phil opens the laptop,
 Bob rushes behind him as he frantically types.

PHIL
 I can't see anything.

BOB
 It sounded big.

A HISS of fog vents as the door unseals. It creaks open
 slowly and a limp Bob flops out- his gaping head wound oozes

blood and brain onto the floor. Bob staggers back, grasps the table for balance and turns away in horror.

PHIL
Jeeezuschrist!

BOB
(gagging)
Is that...

Phil rushes over to the future Bob and checks for a pulse.

PHIL
Now wait, we don't know...

BOB
He's... I'm dead...

PHIL
He could be from any time, this
could be fifty years from now.

Bob glances at the corpse then recoils.

BOB
Those are the clothes I'm wearing
now.

Phil compares - present and future Bob are dressed the same.

PHIL
Do you have that pocket watch?

Bob reaches into his coat pocket, pulls it out and fixates on the filigree cover.

BOB
Left inside coat pocket.

Phil reaches into future Bob's coat and pulls out the watch. He pops open the cover and looks at the time- 2:00

PHIL
What time do you have?

Bob pops open the cover - 1:50, he eyes Phil nervously.

PHIL
The time!

BOB
Ten to two.

Phil snaps the watch shut and drops it.

PHIL
Go.

BOB
What time is it?

PHIL
Leave! Just go!

Phil leaps up and pushes Bob to the door but Bob shoves back.

BOB
How much fucking time!

Phil rushes towards Bob again and forces him towards door.

PHIL
Just fucking go!

They wrestle but Bob overpowers Phil and throws him down.

PHIL
Ten minutes. Less now.

Bob rushes over to the laptop, starts typing.

PHIL
Just go! Get away from the
machine. What are you doing?

BOB
We can stop it. I can send a note,
go back myself and warn us.

Bob dashes to the machine and checks the gauges.

PHIL
Stay away from it! The trip back
could kill you. Just go!

Bob taps a gauge and looks at his watch as Phil gets up.

PHIL
We should have followed the note!

Bob spins to face Phil, eyes wild with panic. He stalks
towards Phil as Phil backs towards the exit.

BOB
The note didn't mean a fucking
thing! I completed your loop!

PHIL
Just think about this OK. We don't
know what happens.

BOB
But we do! I die in ten minutes.

PHIL
Please just get away from it, it
doesn't have to happen, you don't
get in, we break the loop.

BOB
 Novikov said it's self-consistent!
 Self-adjusting! No paradoxes! I
 turn my back and you'd adjust
things wouldn't you!

Bob grabs Phil's neck and chokes him down onto the table. A LOW PULSING HUM beckons from the machine. Bob drops Phil who slumps to the ground gasping for air. Bob hits a command on the laptop, heads for the machine. Phil crawls towards Bob.

PHIL
 Stay away from it.

Bob kneels at the machine and checks readings. Phil drags himself closer. Bob grimaces and drags the corpse of future Bob out of the machine. As Bob pulls the corpse, Phil reaches up in a final attempt to stop him.

He catches Bob's ankle. Bob twists awkwardly. Stumbles. CRACK- he hits his head violently on the corner of the table. He collapses next to the corpse of future Bob, twin head wounds gaping. Phil grabs Bob's wrist, checks for a pulse - nothing.

Phil checks the time on Bob's wristwatch- 1:55. He takes a deep breath, gets up and drags Bob into the machine, seals the door, rushes over to the laptop, activates the machine and slumps exhausted to the ground.

The familiar LOW HUM pulses and grows, then fades. The door opens and the machine is empty.

SAME - LATER

Bob's body lies in the corner, an improvised notebook shroud hiding the face. Phil centers the camera shot on the machine, then adjusts it slightly right to keep Bob's body out of the frame. Satisfied, he steps in front of the camera.

PHIL
 (into the camera)
 If I can go back early enough... I
 didn't mean for any of this to
 happen. We weren't ready. If
 Novikov is... I have to try.

He steps to the computer, types a command, then steps into the machine. The door slowly swings shut.

INT. DARK CHAMBER

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FADE TO BLACK.