

Imagine you're watching a movie, and all of a sudden, the main character shows up in a scene **before** they were even introduced, or someone dies and then just casually appears alive again in a later scene with no explanation. You're sitting there thinking, "Wait, what?? Didn't that already happen or didn't happen?"

That's a **chronology violation** — it's when events in a story don't follow a logical timeline. Stuff happens **out of order**, or **in ways that don't make much sense** based on when, what, how things are supposed to happen.

Take the 1988 Nico Mastorakis film, "*Nightmare at Noon*." Where a small desert town is suddenly turned into chaos when a mad scientist poisons the water supply, turning its residents into rabid, zombie-like killers. A mysterious cowboy, a vacationing couple, and the town sheriff must team up to survive the outbreak and uncover the truth behind the biological attack. As they battle the infected and try to stop the mastermind "bad guy."

The wife of the vacationing couple gets infected and the husband is able to fight her off and lock her in a jail cell. The movie unfolds where the ragtag survivors have to kill off the zombies and do battle with the bad guy mastermind who doesn't speak during the entire film. There is no real resolution to how to cure the people. They are simply killed as they attack the survivors. The mastermind is killed and at the end of the film the husband is getting ready to leave, seems happy he survived and behind him is his now cured wife, who when last we saw her was infected and trying to kill her husband before he is able to lock her in a jail cell. We do not know if they found a cure or not or how they cured her, but she is cured, smiling, happy to be alive. We know nothing of what happened to her but she is alive and about to continue her vacation with her husband. Huh???

**Chronology violation** could be looked at like if someone time-traveled and changed something in the past, but now the present doesn't line up anymore — or, it's when the timeline of events gets **messed up** or **violated**. Sometimes it's intentional — like in movies about time travel (*Back to the Future*, *Tenet*, *Primer*), and sometimes it's a mistake in storytelling or editing. Either way, it throws off the normal flow of time.

**Time travel to the past?** Not so fast... While it's a nice idea, the past is done, and no amount of worship, science-fact, science fiction or wishful thinking is going to change its outcome. **The Universe is indifferent.** The universe doesn't care about us, our actions, or our struggles. It's not biased, not cruel, and not kind. It doesn't love, hate, pay taxes or vote — it simply exists, following its own laws and processes without regard for individual human concerns or human concerns in general. Existence doesn't owe us meaning, justice, or purpose, and it won't intervene to make our lives better or worse. It's a cold, unfeeling backdrop to our lives, offering no moral guidance or cosmic hand-holding. The universe doesn't give a damn about your nostalgia trip, and trying to mess with its flow is like trying to unburn a piece of toast — it's already charred, and the clock's not going to rewind, unburn your toast, that strangely, some think looks like Jesus Christ, for your convenience. The only option available is to accept that the past is a ghost, and no matter how much you try to summon it, it's never coming back.

Every moment that ticks by solidifies the next, and it's all tied together by causality — **cause and effect**. Causality refers to the principle that everything that happens (**the effect**) is the result of some prior **event or cause**. This locked system ensures you don't mess up the fabric of everything by hypothetically traveling back in time and stepping on a butterfly that somehow had a direct cause to humans ever coming into existence to begin with that would eventually travel back in time and step on the butterfly which would make certain humans never came into existence to begin with. You can't just pop into the past without messing up some

delicate web of cause and effect, and that leads to chaos. Science calls this chaos entropy, and tampering with entropy in the past creates what science calls a paradox. One of the famous theories of a time paradox is the grandfather paradox. Where one travels to the past only to kill their grandfather before they could impregnate your grandmother that gives birth to your mother, that gives birth to you, so you are never born to begin with because your mother was never born. Another variation of this paradox involves traveling back to kill a young Hitler before he can rise to power...

Time travel to the past is impossible because it breaks the laws of physics, which breaks the laws of the Universe. If the Universe was a balloon, traveling to the past might pop it. It is considered impossible due to Einstein's theory of relativity and the second law of thermodynamics.

## **Einstein's Theory of Relativity:**

Time travel to the past is impossible under Einstein's theory of relativity due to the way spacetime and causality work in this framework. According to the theory, time and space are interwoven into a single continuum called spacetime. Moving through time is like moving through space, but with some crucial limitations.

Relativity tells us that the speed of light is the universal speed limit. No object with mass can travel faster than light, which means nothing can “break” the timeline to jump backward in time. If time travel were possible, you’d have to move faster than light or manipulate spacetime in some way to loop back — but relativity makes that impossible. The faster an object moves within spacetime, the more its mass increases, requiring exponentially more energy to accelerate it further. As it nears the speed of light, its mass approaches a state of infinity, demanding infinite energy — a resource the universe doesn’t hand out. Physics doesn’t play well with infinities, like black holes, infinity is a barrier we cannot see past. Einstein’s equations describe how massive objects warp spacetime, creating gravitational fields that curve time. These curvatures are predictable and causal — meaning, they follow cause-and-effect rules. The idea of bending time to travel to the past would require conditions that violate this causality.

## **Second Law of Thermodynamics:**

Time travel to the past is also impossible under the second law of thermodynamics because it directly contradicts the natural progression of entropy — from more ordered states to more disordered ones. The second law states that the total entropy (*disorder*) in a closed system must always increase or remain constant, never decrease. This is fundamental to how time works, as the **“arrow of time”** points toward the future and greater disorder. The universe constantly moves forward, with all processes naturally tending toward states of higher entropy. In simpler terms, things tend to fall apart, decay, and move toward chaos, and there's no going back. We can slow time down if we travel fast enough in a straight line and slow down time even more if you apply spin along with that greater speed, but one can never stop time altogether or go backward under this standard model of understanding. What this is saying is that to travel backward in time, you’d need to reverse entropy — to rewind all entropy processes in the universe, all at the same time, everywhere, from broken eggs to decayed stars, not just the point of reference you are trying to travel back to—which is the same as reversing time itself.

This doesn’t mean or imply that we know everything on the subject. Just that our current understanding of science doesn’t allow for that to happen. If there is a different form of science. Perhaps a **“theory of everything,”** that unifies quantum gravity and macro gravity could give us new insights on the subject or new

concepts. Quantum gravity would be how gravity works at the subatomic level and macro gravity is how we feel gravity at our macro level of living on a sphere that is rotating around a core and this sphere also rotates around a Star.

Time travel to the past would require reversing this process — moving backward in time to a point of lower entropy, effectively reducing disorder. The problem is that this would violate the second law, which is one of the most well-established rules in physics. If you could somehow travel to the past, you'd need to reverse the increase in entropy that has already occurred, returning a disordered system (*like the present*) to a more ordered state (*like the past*). But that's not allowed. Any attempt to decrease entropy — to undo the disorder and bring things back to a more ordered state — would violate the fundamental principle that entropy in a closed system can only increase.

Basically, the universe doesn't let you "rewind" things. The law of entropy ensures that time only moves forward and that we can't simply go back and fix things by traveling to the past. The increasing disorder isn't just a feature of the universe — it's an inescapable part of how everything works. Trying to reverse it would break the very fabric of how time and physical laws operate, making time travel to the past not just improbable, but outright impossible. One might just pop that balloon after all.

## If time travel to the past is possible from what frame of reference hypothetically could it be seen as?

Maybe not a machine, a DeLorean, a phone booth, or even technology at all, but instead, something stranger, weirder, and a little more existential. What if time travel to the past isn't a place in time where one resides but more a point of reference on a 4D map.

No Flux Capacitor, Federation Starship, no botched faster than light test, no black hole jumping, no wormholes, or super suit that shields you from time paradoxes. You don't even get a body at all. Just... awareness. Maybe it's consciousness. Maybe it's just a mechanism of how the universe processes a conscious mind. Just a single point, a zero-D dimensional point of awareness. You become nothing but a point of view — no mass, no energy, no ability to interfere outside of what has already happened in the timeline, (*we'll get to that*.) A pure observer. Confused as to what it is, where it is, how it came to be there and most importantly, why...

This is the loophole the universe might allow — not participation, not alteration, but witnessing. You don't change the past. You relive it. You see it again. But you can't scream at your younger self to dump that toxic relationship. You can't tell yourself to pull out sooner. You can't stop a war. You can't even blink. **You're there... but not there.**

If you think that sounds depressing, it is. You get all the pain of hindsight with none of the power of hindsight. You get to watch your regrets unfold exactly as they did, unable to touch anything outside of what has already been touched. It's a form of time travel, sure — just the most useless one imaginable. And maybe the only one that fits the rules.

This idea isn't just science fiction either. It's not -not science fiction, but it has some strange roots in physics. General relativity already treats time as a dimension, like space. Some interpretations of the "**block universe**" imply that all points in time — past, present, future — still exist, in a sense. They're just not accessible. The past isn't destroyed. It's just... not accessible from your current frame of reference. Unless something — say,

your consciousness — could untether from its moment in time and slip backwards into that previous coordinate. Not to change it. Just to float above it like a drone. Silently recording. I look at the block universe in the context of its not that all points in time and events have happened already. I do not see it that way. The perspective I see this as the math is laid out so heavily in concrete that the only answer to the equation is what happened before that moment and then causality goes to the next moment from the cause to the effect. Not that it happened before in the literal sense, but more in the sense that the math cannot be change.  $1+1=2$ . It is hard coded and cannot be altered. So in a sense it can be said in terms of all events have happened already. The reality is they have not. However, the math says, that is how it is going to go down and there isn't an influence that can untether the math (entropy). We have already established one cannot do that. Another way to think of entropy is you are not trying to undo a moment in time and space. One would have to undo all moments in time and space from that point, all the way to the beginning. That is what is being said when it is said that entropy cannot be reversed. That is what we are talking about. Not a moment, but all moments from the present and the past. Probably even the future because of the way the math is laid out in our framework of physics.

In the case of being a Zero-D point of reference observing the past by being there, but not there in the physical sense of your body being in the place during that time. We wouldn't be breaking causality because we're not a cause. We're not even an effect. We're just there, a massless zero-energy point wedged into a moment that already happened. A zero-energy stowaway, perfectly harmless, as far as physics is concerned. Causality remains intact. Entropy doesn't reverse. But you get to play ghost while you are there. Maybe you always were. This could help explain déjà vu, premonitions, hauntings. Perhaps even within the frame of a hypothetical God, or the version of you sitting in the dark wondering if time has really passed at all — or if you're just watching it all again.

Besides; If time travel isn't possible, then how did John Titor create the phrase "*Hold my beer?*" 😊 It got me thinking—what if time travel to the past is possible, but you can only experience it as a passive observer? Perhaps in the same vain as the 2024 experimental film by Steven Soderbergh, *Presence*. In it, a spirit—or "**Presence**"—appears in a house before a family moves in and can only passively watch and lightly interact with them.

## Major SPOILERS ahead...

### **Presence (2024)**

**Writer: David Koepp**

**Directed by: Steven Soderbergh**

**Stars: Lucy Liu, Chris Sullivan, Callina Liang**

**IMDB Rating: 6.1/10 Stars**

**Rotten Tomatoes Score: 88%**

**Runtime: 1 hour, 25 minutes**

The movie starts with a formless 'presence' in an empty home. This presence then winks out or blinks and the next moment it is another day where a realtor is about to show the home to a family. The family is a husband, wife and two teenagers. One a boy and one girl. It is not stated which one is older or if they are twins, but seem close to the same age and grade in high school. The family wants to buy the home because they had to move due to the daughter's emotional state after two of her close girlfriends died suddenly and close together of asphyxiation due to synthetic fentanyl. This entity, ghost, form of awareness, point of reference, or

presence seems to wink in and out of existence at random times moving forward from this moment. The Presence isn't there every second. It will witness an event and then its point of view will shift days/weeks later like how we blink our eyes. When the Presence does, blink, that is what it does.

The movie plays out like a typical haunted house story but from the presence's point of view. It cannot be seen directly, make noise or even do anything at first. It seems more interested in following the daughter around the house, whose struggles with her mental health and emotional well-being after her friend's deaths. The son, meanwhile, is a typical high schooler obsessed with his social status and trying to maintain a "cool" persona. He often clashes with his sister's emotional issues, feeling embarrassed and frustrated by her need for attention, which he perceives as a threat to his popularity. The presence watches over the family, especially the daughter, with a strange, detached, and passive perspective. As the family tries to settle into the new house, strange occurrences start to happen. The daughter feels more sensitive to these subtle supernatural events, and her mental state becomes more fragile as she senses something is wrong in the house. The presence is not an active force at this point; it merely observes, unable to influence anything, while she can feel its presence upon her. The presence begins to do some light interactions like stack books neatly when the sister is out of the room. The brother is more concerned with being "cool" at school, a sort of bully of the school, often indifferent to his sister's struggles. He has a mean streak and struggles to understand his sister's emotional issues, often dismissing her as a hindrance to his own social life. The brother meets a popular kid at school and, in an attempt to help his sister, tries to set her up with him. The sister begins to spend time with the cool kid from school. As her depressive state increases she becomes more brazen with drinking alcohol and having sex with the kid. Not really caring about how she feels about him but more about how she doesn't want to feel depressed as she is, so she does a lot of the typical rebel without a cause-type teenager behaviors.

As the plot of the movie unfolds an argument ensues where the brother and sister get into a heated fight. The presence then rushes up to the brother's room and trashes the room. The family hears the racket and comes to witness the presence affects onto the environment. After this moment the father hires a spiritual seer to come to the home in an attempt to understand whether or not what the family is experiencing is a haunting. We get some important exposition here about ghosts not really understanding what it is that is happening to it as it is experiencing time non-linearly and does not understand the true context of what it is that is happening. This would be an important exposition dump when we get to the end of the film.

Towards the end we realize the cool kid the sister has hooked up with is responsible for the sister's friends' overdosing, as they did not overdose but were drugged by the cool kid and then slowly suffocated using a thing piece of plastic wrap. The cool kid has a rather long monologue about why he does this to girls and you can tell he really enjoys this. The cool kid, drugged the brother who passes out on the downstairs couch. The cool kid then drugs the sister and attempts to kill her. The presence frantically attempts to wake the brother by trying to influence reality in any way it can. It is able to make some very high pitched audio distortions directly into the kid's ear and he wakes up, frantic and afraid. Drugged and dazed, all he can do is stumble up the stairs to the room and tackle the killer out of the window where both boys fall to their death. The next moment. The house is empty and the family is moving out. The mother distraught hears a very high pitched frequency. She walks into the living room, where it gets louder and louder. She looks into a mirror and sees the presence in the reflection. The presence is the dead brother wearing what he wore at the time of death with a blank emotionless stare. The mother screams and the father and daughter rush in to consult the mother. There is an instant where the daughter looks into the mirror but I do not think she saw it. She acts like she didn't. The mother, hysterical, says, "*he came back to say goodbye.*" As the presence now begins to

slowly back away and out the open front door, away from the house, up and seemingly out into space. The movie ends on that note.

Here time travel is not mentioned, talked about or even explained at all outside the exposition dump when the spiritual seer attempts to describe how spirits operate in and with our reality. It is said in that exposition that time is experienced differently for dead spirits occupying our reality. That is pretty much all we get for an explanation but it does lay down the foundation for this entire essay. I wrote this entire essay just so that I can talk about this movie and what that could mean about time travel to the past.

## **The Break in Causality and the Nature of the Presence's Influence:**

**In *Presence*, causality breaks only once:** at the moment of the brother's death. His fatal fall triggers his death but also instantly sends his consciousness to the past—on the day his family first tours the house. This is the only moment in the story where the arrow of time folds back on itself, thrusting a future consciousness into a past moment. From that point forward, time resumes its forward march, with causality restored and functioning normally.

Yet what unfolds is not passive limbo. The presence—the brother's post-mortem consciousness or awareness—can observe events as they occur and, crucially, *interact* with the physical world. However, it is only able to influence events in ways that already happened inside the timeline. It is not changing the past; it is fulfilling it. The presence is *not rewriting* history, but *participating in it exactly as it unfolded*. A clear example from the film is the destruction of the brother's bedroom. It happened. It was part of the timeline. The brother, when alive, saw it—or at least knew of it—and even if he didn't witness it or know of it -it became an established objective fact. When the presence later enacts that destruction, it's not altering anything; it's simply occupying the causal role that was always meant to be there. It is not a haunting—it is a loop closing.

The weight of this idea can be illustrated by a thought experiment: imagine a can of Coke taken from the fridge, carried upstairs, and placed on a dresser. Later, it topples over mysteriously. At the time, no one knows why, only that it fell off the dresser. Now imagine the presence is in the room in the past, sees the Coke placed down, or doesn't. It actually doesn't matter if it knows or not but nudges it over spilling the Coke—perhaps out of frustration, perhaps just instinctively. From the presence's perspective, this is a decision. But from the timeline's perspective, the Coke *was always* going to fall, and the presence was always going to knock it over. Now, did the presence cause the Coke to fall? Yes. But it did so only because the fall already happened. It is bound to act only within what happened in the past by causality. **Its agency is an illusion**—it can “choose” to act, but only in ways that fulfill the already-written script of events of reality. The past cannot be changed, but it can be *inhabited* and even *participated in*. This frames the presence not as a ghost in the traditional sense, but as a closed-circuit loop of consciousness—trapped in a causally consistent replay. This idea resonates more with speculative physics: the presence, as a soul or form of negative energy, exists outside the bounds of classical thermodynamics. Once the loop completes—once it has witnessed all it was meant to witness and fulfilled its limited role in the timeline—it is released. Perhaps, metaphorically or metaphysically, or perhaps it is drawn into a black hole: the soul rejoining the absolute, collapsing into singularity, into timelessness of multiple dimensions of reality. There is no contradiction here. Only the illusion of one. The brother dies. His consciousness loops back to the beginning of the story. The past plays out. And when all things are as they were, he fades—not because he is erased, but because his role is complete. Time, having used him as a thread in its own design.

I immediately saw these small interactions the Presence does as part of a time loop. The entire movie is seen strictly from the Presence's point of view, and it never cuts away from that unapologetically, unrelenting locked perspective. Perhaps one day we figure out how to send our consciousness back in time using some unknown tech or science we've yet to discover. But the universe won't allow our physical body in that space—only our awareness or at least the laws of physics say if our awareness was somehow in the past, under these rules, it doesn't break the Universe. We'd exist as a formless presence, unable to actually change anything. Any interaction we attempt just ends up fulfilling what already happened. Because *that* interaction was always part of the event. You can't create new events. Even when you try, nothing happens. And when something *does* happen, it's only because it *already* did happen. **Hello block Universe...** I don't know, just a fun thing to think about. I'm not sure why *Presence* pulled me in like it did. A lot of people didn't seem to like it, but the slow-burn drama and the way the Presence learns things through indirect observation really worked for me and got my mind working on Time Travel again. I also appreciated the **"rules"** or internal logic of the universe it is built on. I would have loved to sit in these round table discussions on how this was all established to create a very different type of ghost story. Honestly, I felt like it was a quiet little thriller made for smart people.

The Presence isn't omniscient, it doesn't know everything, let alone, anything, doesn't have god-like perspective, and doesn't even know its role in the story. It just; watches. Like real people do when they're dropped into unfamiliar situations. And when they act, they're not rewriting history—they're fulfilling it. The lights flickering or doors creaking were always *supposed* to happen. There's a tragic futility in it, but also a quiet inevitability. The idea that the universe "*lets*" you observe the past, but only as part of a loop you were always inside of. Maybe that is what hell actually is. Perhaps why we think of hell in those terms because most people that would witness their last days/weeks/months of life and the frustration of not being able to change it in anyway could be seen as a sort of waking hell. I mean, think about it. If what is left after death is this negative energy, this massless awareness. All you know is observation. All one can experience is that relentless watching. In this case, its watching one's self and someone you love be in harm's way or consistently unhappy. That could be perceived as a terrifying experience. What if one died and was brought back? What if they said they felt trapped for years, decades, just watching people suffer, but they were only dead for seconds? We just do not know enough about consciousness outside the body.

So maybe the only way to travel back in time is the way *Presence* did it — not with flashing lights or spinning wormholes, but with silence. With stillness. You don't arrive in the past; you haunt it or it haunts you. A formless voyeur stitched into a moment, doomed to watch what's already played out, play out again, like a ghost following footprints it can never alter. The spirit in *Presence* isn't really a character in the traditional sense. It's more of a lens — an observer or passenger. Even when it shifts something, it only shifts it in ways that always happened. The loop was closed before it began. That's the trapdoor loophole this entire theory is built on: If you "affect" something, it's only because that affect already existed. There's no butterfly to crush, because the butterfly was always dead. Maybe you stepped on it, maybe someone else did — the point is, it was always going to get crushed. In that sense, it's not really time travel. It's deterministic surveillance. It's emotional recursion. It's repressed memory made manifest. And like the *Presence* in the film, it's passive. Lonely. Inescapable. You're not breaking the laws of physics, you're obeying them so well they feel like prison bars because they literally are. Even interaction is an illusion — because anything you "*change*" is just the fulfillment of what always was. There's a kind of horror in that, but also a strange peace. You're not God. You're not the hero. You're just... there. A cosmic dashcam recording the inevitable. And that's where it ties back to the block universe and entropy. The universe isn't rolling out time like a red carpet. It's already laid it down — from the first moment to the last. You're not walking through time. You're experiencing and reacting to it. So if there's a form of time travel allowed by the laws of physics, maybe it's not "*changing the past,*" but

being reinserted into it as a point of reference. Like loading an old save file from a game — except you can't play. You just watch the non-playable characters (NPCs) move exactly as they did before, heartbreak and all. You don't even get closure. You just get clarity. If you're lucky. And maybe that's what *déjà vu* really is: a brief flicker of the observer breaking through. A reminder that your consciousness, for a split second, lagged back to a frame it already saw. A ghost of yourself haunting your own timeline. Maybe even that's what the *Presence* is — not a spirit of the dead, but of the living, watching themselves from the far end of the road. So no, you don't get to go back and stop the fight, or save the girl, or dodge the car crash. But you *do* get to watch. You get to remember, in the most literal, cinematic sense. And if that's the best the universe will allow, maybe it's enough.

## **We do not get any insight on the mechanism that propels the presence to the past. Only that it does.**

If we accept the premise that time travel to the past is only possible in the form of passive observation — a zero-dimensional point of consciousness with no mass, negative energy, no direct influence on entropy — then *Presence* becomes something more than just experimental cinema. It becomes a demonstration. A visual case study of what that kind of travel might *feel* like. The camera never cuts in *Presence*. There's no omniscient third-person view. We are locked into the point of view of the *Presence* itself — this incorporeal observer who sees everything in the scene and is not seen, understands very little, and can only interact in the most minimal, abstract ways.

## **From a physics perspective, it's poetry.**

In our framework, this is how limited interaction might be modeled: not actual change, but pre-encoded causality. Like a ROM chip on a motherboard. Unchangeable data that can be viewed, used but never manipulated into something else.

Whether intentionally or not, a world with very strict rules. No jump scares. No camera cheats. No omnipotence or god-like powers. The *Presence* doesn't know what's happening any more than we do. It learns through context, through patterns, through repetition of watching. That's the experience of our theoretical time traveler. They don't step into a moment with full access to memory or purpose. **They're just... THERE...** Trying to make sense of what's unfolding. Maybe watching their own life. Maybe someone else's. Perhaps another era altogether.

The way the film deals with time — nonlinear, disorienting, often repetitive — mirrors how memory works, or how a mind might process existence when decoupled from chronological sequence. That's another haunting idea: what if time travel isn't movement through time, but memory in its purest form? A looped, liminal space where perception is all that exists. And what if *déjà vu*, intuition, and grief are echoes of the observer — the *Presence* in us — brushing against events we've already experienced, we've already seen?

This theory reframes *Presence* not as supernatural, but as a thought experiment on consciousness and time. The spirit is you — or something like you — a consciousness slipped out of sequence. Not a ghost of the dead, but a ghost of the displaced.

This is why the film feels strange even to audiences who expect weird. It's not just that it breaks visual norms — it breaks metaphysical ones. All the angles are from the *presence's* point of view. They even use a very



warped wide angle lens to give that feeling of ultra-claustrophobia. The horror isn't in the family's unraveling, it's in *your own helplessness*. You're in the room, in the moment, watching people suffer, and you can't do a damn thing about it. Just like our model of time travel. Just like real memory. Just like real life. So if *Presence* disturbed you but you weren't sure why, maybe this is it: it's not a haunting. It's a reminder. A memento of something you already saw. You just forgot until now. It is never clear whether the presence knows it is the dead brother's spirit from the future or not. Memory isn't mentioned in the exposition but we might be able to assume that memory is also treated in the same respect. Fractured, fragmented, familiar but not familiar all at the same moment in the same place, all at once, everywhere.

In this view, time travel isn't about *changing history*—it's about *witnessing meaning*. And in doing so, maybe it becomes more about understanding ourselves than altering outcomes. Humans tend to lump things in a binary logic of this/that, yes/no, zero/one, true/false, man/woman, real/fake, love/hate, black/white, but most of us tend to see and experience this reality in gray. Not black or white but somewhere in between never actually being all the way black or all the way white but in a constant brushing against it as a gray space that makes this idea so goddamned eerie and effective.

Ah, *cosmic determinism*. There you are my ole friend. That phrase really wants to sit at the table of crossroads in philosophy, physics, and narrative structure.

**Cosmic determinism** is the idea that everything in the universe—every action, event, thought, or anomaly—is part of an unchangeable pattern that's not just *fated*, but *baked into the fabric of reality itself*. It goes beyond simple cause and effect. It's not just that A leads to B. It's that A *was always* going to lead to B because the universe itself is constructed in such a way that no other option was ever truly on the table even though all options seem possible or at the very least seem not impossible.

A time-traveling essence that can only observe and interact in ways that were always part of the original timeline—*cosmic determinism* becomes a kind of philosophical paint color. It's the computer code within the code, behind the rules. The Presence doesn't get to *choose* what it does. It's not even clear if it knows what it's doing. It just reacts, moves, shakes the lamp, wakes the drugged brother, and stumbles into its fate—because it always did. Because it always *would*.

So, under this lens, cosmic determinism is not just saying "*everything happens for a reason*." It's saying, "*everything happens because it already happened—and it could never have not happened*." It's different from religious fate, or even classical determinism, which assumes a kind of clean logic to events. *Cosmic determinism* adds a metaphysical weight to it, like the whole universe is a closed loop of inevitability that you're only just waking up inside of. You might have feelings, questions, confusion—but it doesn't matter. The wheel was already spinning. You're just seeing the spokes flash by for the first time and it scares you or many so much they are willing to believe in God or any god for that matter with no proof other than a subjective feeling it could be true because we cannot prove it to be untrue.

That's what gives something like *Presence* its existential dread: not the idea that the ghost fails or succeeds, but that he *never had a choice*. That whatever hope, panic, or tenderness it experiences in that liminal state, it was always just the echo of something that already happened, following the crumpled groove on the sheet of paper we call spacetime. It's when the story of the universe isn't just written—it's already been published. You're just flipping back through the pages in a dimly lit room, wondering if that light you saw at the end of the tunnel was just you looking back at yourself.

# How existential...

Contra Tempus

*Latin for (Violation of Time)*

Review of: *Presence (2024)*

by David-Angelo Mineo

6,246 words

Audio/Video: 00:36:23