

THE SECOND NAME

What if the detective had found the notebook first?





He did not pick it up the way a boy finds a notebook. He picked it up the way a man finds a weapon.



The rules were absurd. He read them four times and then believed them, because the alternative was that someone had gone to enormous trouble to lie to him.



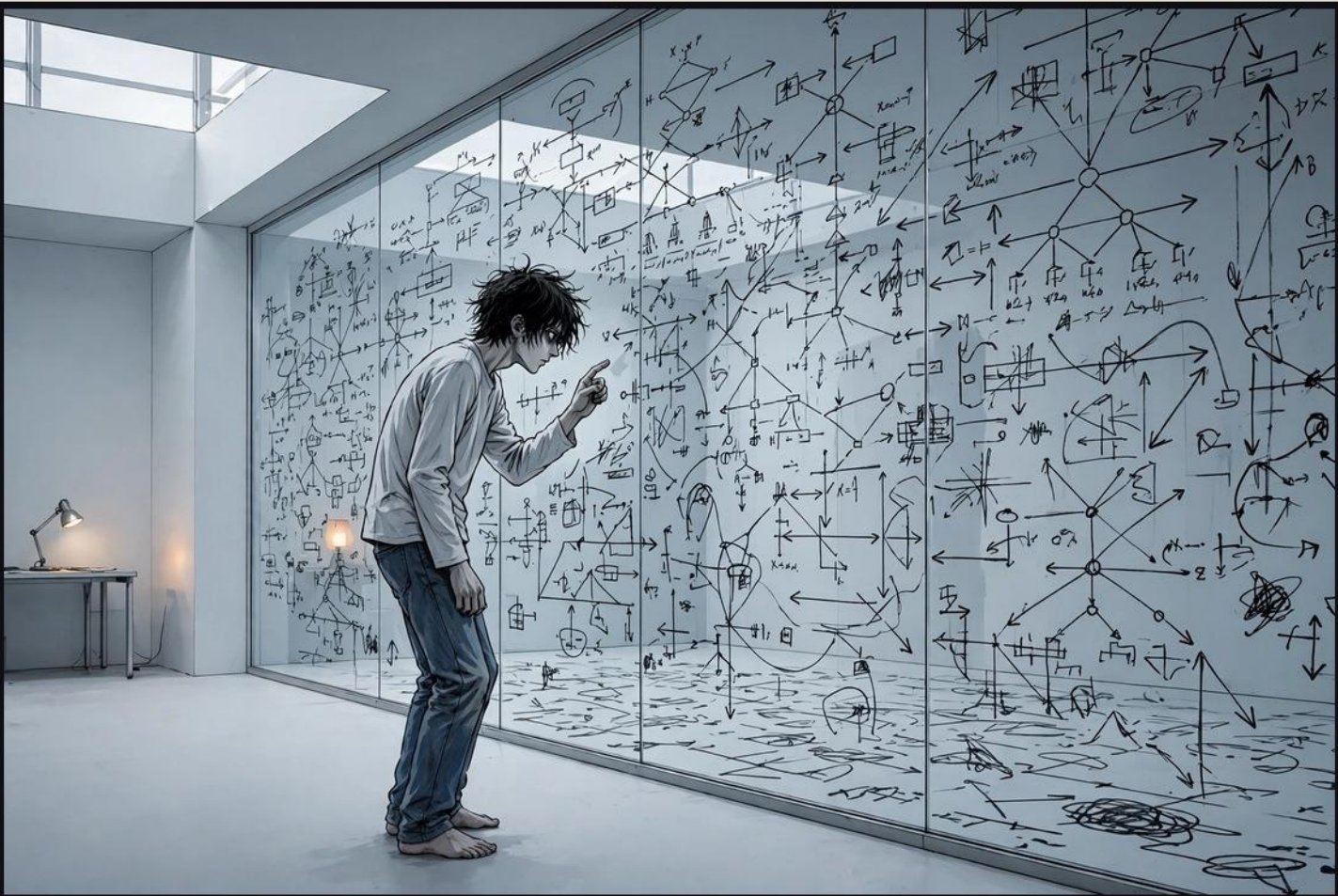
"You are not screaming," the god said. He answered without looking up. "You are not the most improbable thing in this room."



The first name was a man already condemned, already scheduled. A controlled experiment. Nothing that would not have happened anyway.



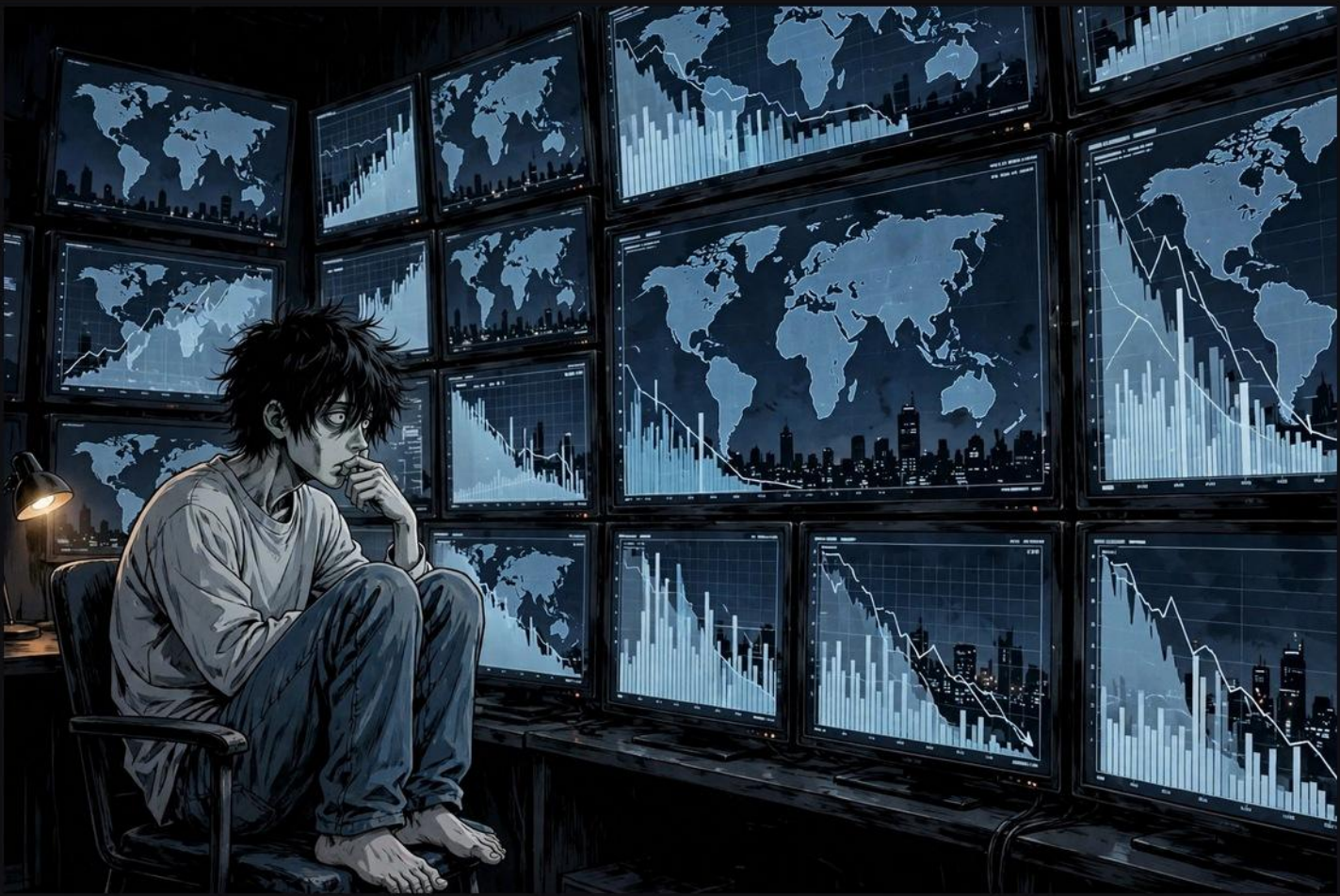
It came eleven days early. He watched the broadcast twice and did not touch the cake.



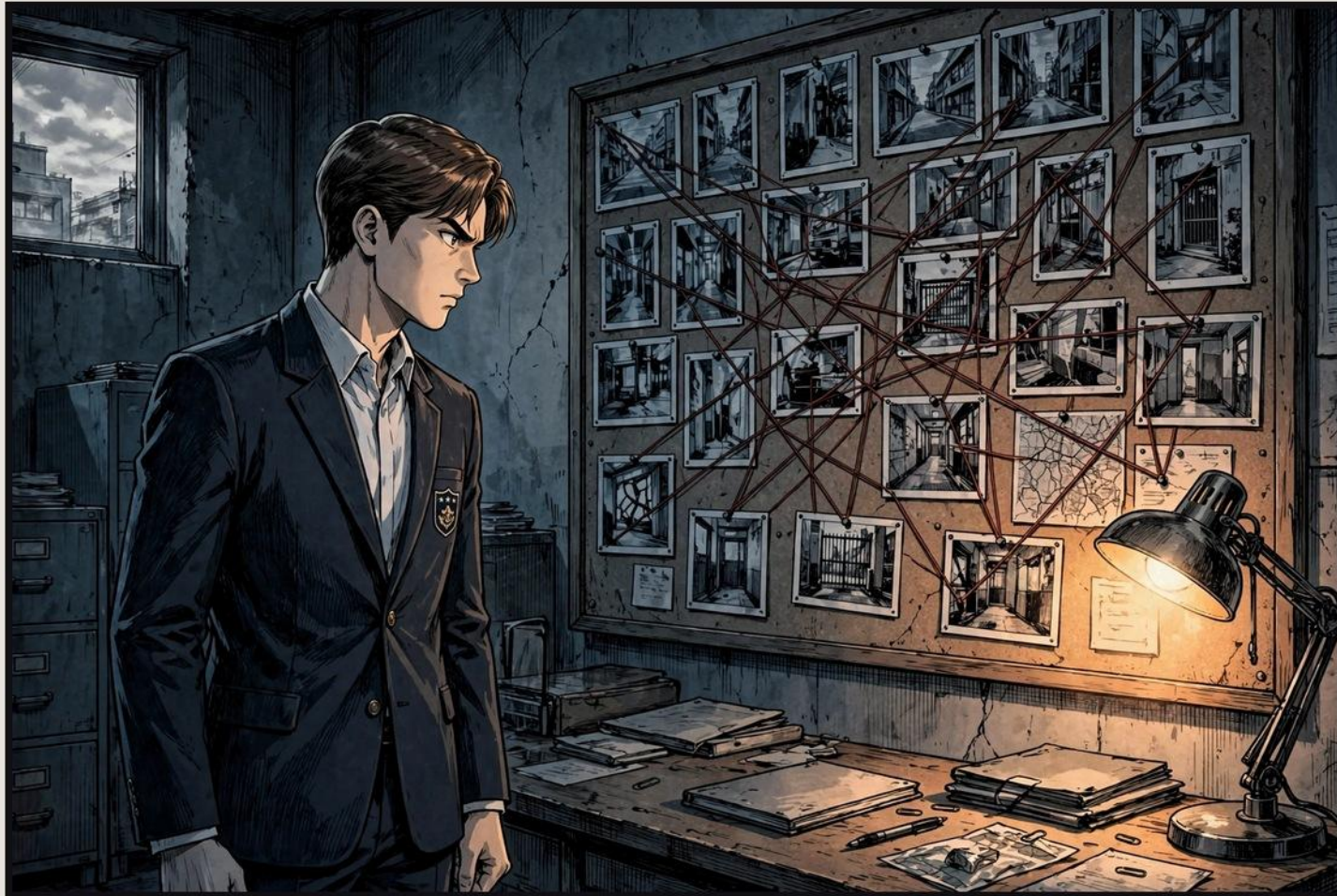
By morning the glass was covered. Not with names — with a proof. If the world could be solved, it could be solved correctly.



He wrote for six hours. He had calculated the exact number, and the exact order, and the precise point past which fear would do the rest.



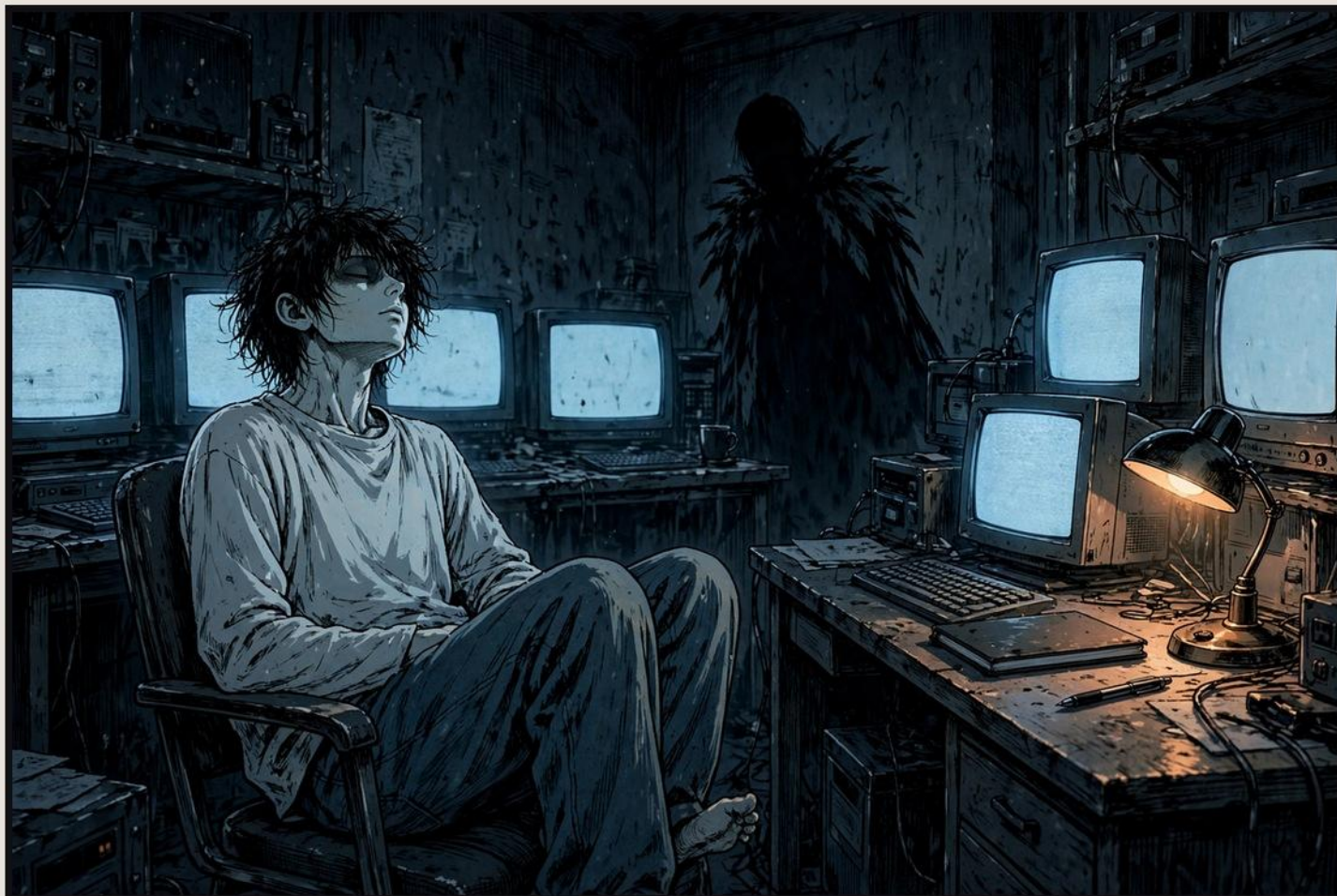
Crime fell forty percent in a year. He watched the graphs the way a surgeon watches a monitor, and felt nothing he could name.



Across the city, a brilliant young man stood at a board of photographs and decided he would be the one to stop this.



They met once, in the rain. Neither said the thing they both already knew.



The proof had one term left, and he had always known which. He wrote it in his own hand, and for the first time in two years, he slept.