

THE BRAIN BRAKE

The limit is a setting, not a wall.

RUNNING TIME	2:00
FORMAT	16:9, live action composited into hand drawn animation
ENTRY	Breakthrough Junior Challenge 2026
DRAFT	Version 2, illustrated

WRITTEN BY

Manan Periwal	Concept, science and story
Marko Boško	Story mentor and direction

This draft is a collaboration. The concept, the science and the choice of subject are Manan's, taken from his first draft. The change in this version is the shape of the story rather than its substance.

Draft one explained a mechanism: the brain applies a brake to protect the body. Accurate, and it ended in a closed case. This draft asks a different question. If the brake exists, where is the limit really, and can it move? The research says it can, and that turns an explanation into a discovery.

The film now rises rather than settles. Curiosity, then astonishment, then release. It ends with a boy breathing calmly, understanding that what stopped him was a decision, and that decisions can be trained.

The spine

A runner with nothing left produces an impossible sprint. A boy goes looking for where it came from. He expects to find an empty tank. He finds a full one, and a door that somebody closed on purpose.

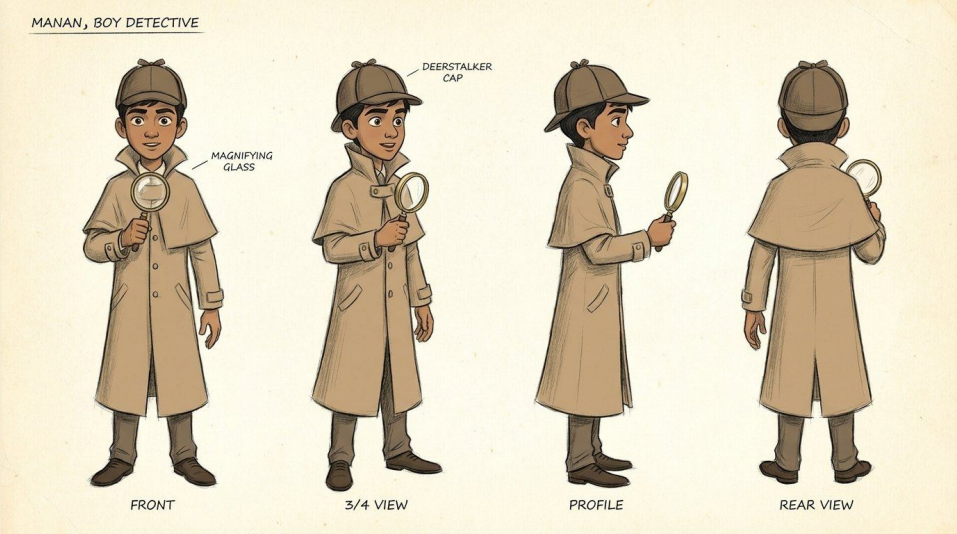
The three findings the film is built on. Each one is real, published, and stranger than the explanation it replaces.

- ONE** Athletes taken to genuine exhaustion were tested immediately afterwards and could still produce far more power than they had just produced. The muscle was not the thing that stopped them.
- TWO** Cyclists raced a ghost of their own best ride. The ghost was secretly set two percent faster. They beat it. A reserve is held back, and it is released by the belief that the effort is sustainable.
- THREE** Mindfulness training increased how long athletes could keep going, with no measurable change in the body. What changed was how hard it felt.

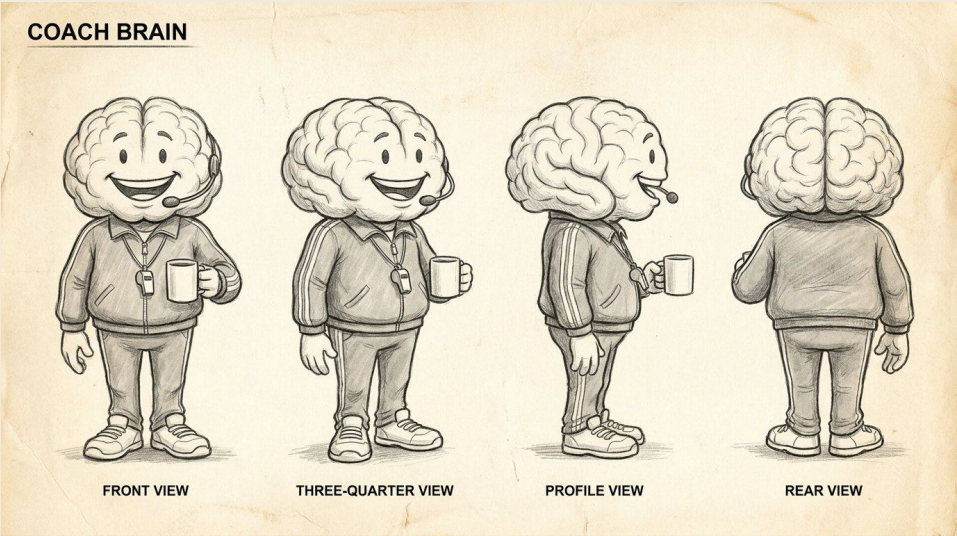
So the sentence at the centre of the film is this. The wall is real. But somebody set it, and settings can move.

Underneath, unnamed and never argued, sits an older idea: that attention and breath are the instruments by which a person meets their own limits. The film does not say this. It shows a boy going still, and then flying. The audience can take from that whatever they already carry.

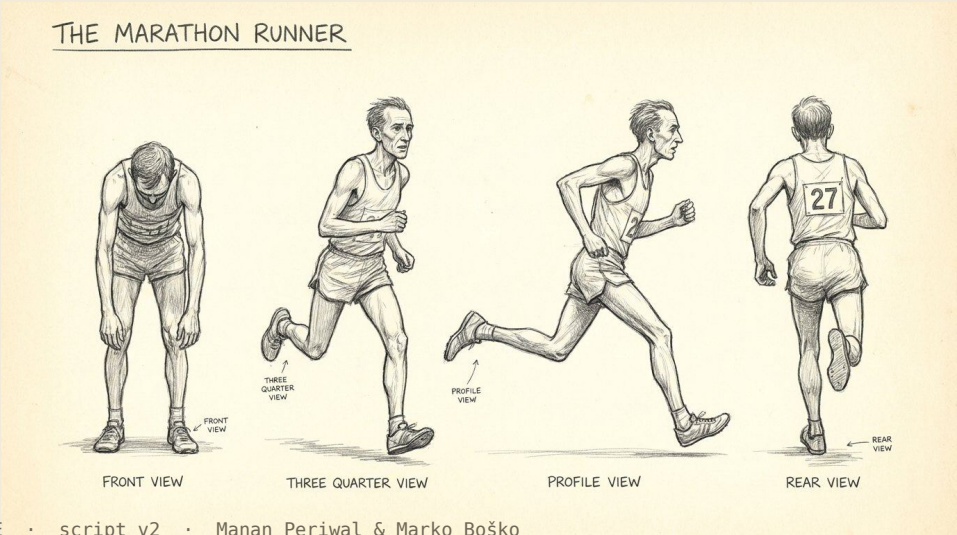
The cast

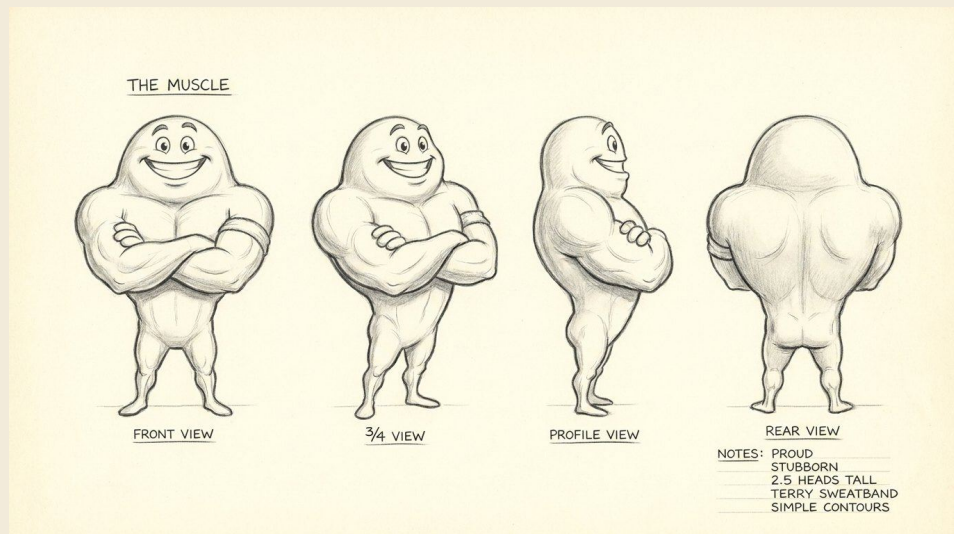


MANAN, boy detective. Deerstalker cap, caped coat, brass magnifying glass.

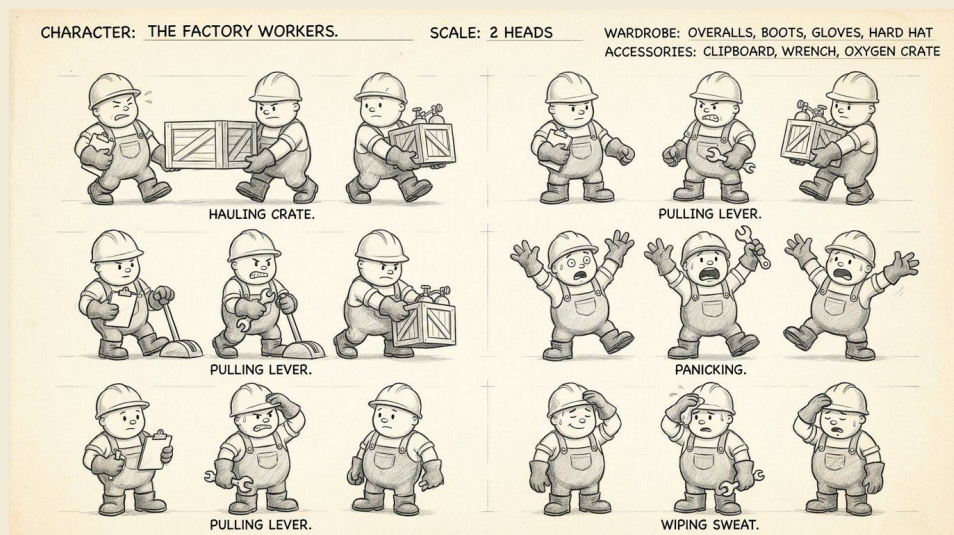


COACH BRAIN. Tracksuit, whistle, coffee, and a small key on a chain.





THE MUSCLE. Proud, stubborn, two and a half heads.



THE FACTORY WORKERS. Overalls, hard hats, crates.

The film

SCENE 1 · 0:00 – 0:18

THE MYSTERY

EXT. MARATHON COURSE, DAY. ANIMATION.



A lean runner is failing on an open road. Head rolling, arms hanging, stride collapsed to a shuffle. He is beaten and everyone watching knows it.

COMMENTATOR (V.O.)

He's got nothing left.

He explodes into a sprint. The world freezes around him, speed lines suspended in the air. MANAN walks into the frozen frame, magnifying glass raised. Through the lens: a footprint, a stopwatch. He lowers the glass and turns to camera.

MANAN

Hold on. He had nothing left. So where did THAT come from?

Question marks bloom around him. TITLE: THE BRAIN BRAKE.

SCENE 2 · 0:18 – 0:40

THE FULL TANK

INT. THE MUSCLE FACTORY. ANIMATION WITH MANAN COMPOSITED.



Inside the leg, a working factory. Gears turning where the calf would be, conveyors, tiny workers hauling crates. Manan walks through it, unhurried, the only calm figure in the room.

MANAN (V.O.)

For a hundred years we blamed the muscles. Ran out of fuel. Ran out of air.
Simple.

The machines slow. A worker wipes his brow and shrugs: that's it, we're done. But Manan has stopped. At the back of the factory there is a door, and it is shut.

MANAN (V.O.)

Except when scientists tested runners the moment they gave up, the muscles
could still do far more.

He pushes the door. It opens onto an enormous hall of storage tanks, and every one of them is full. Light floods his face.

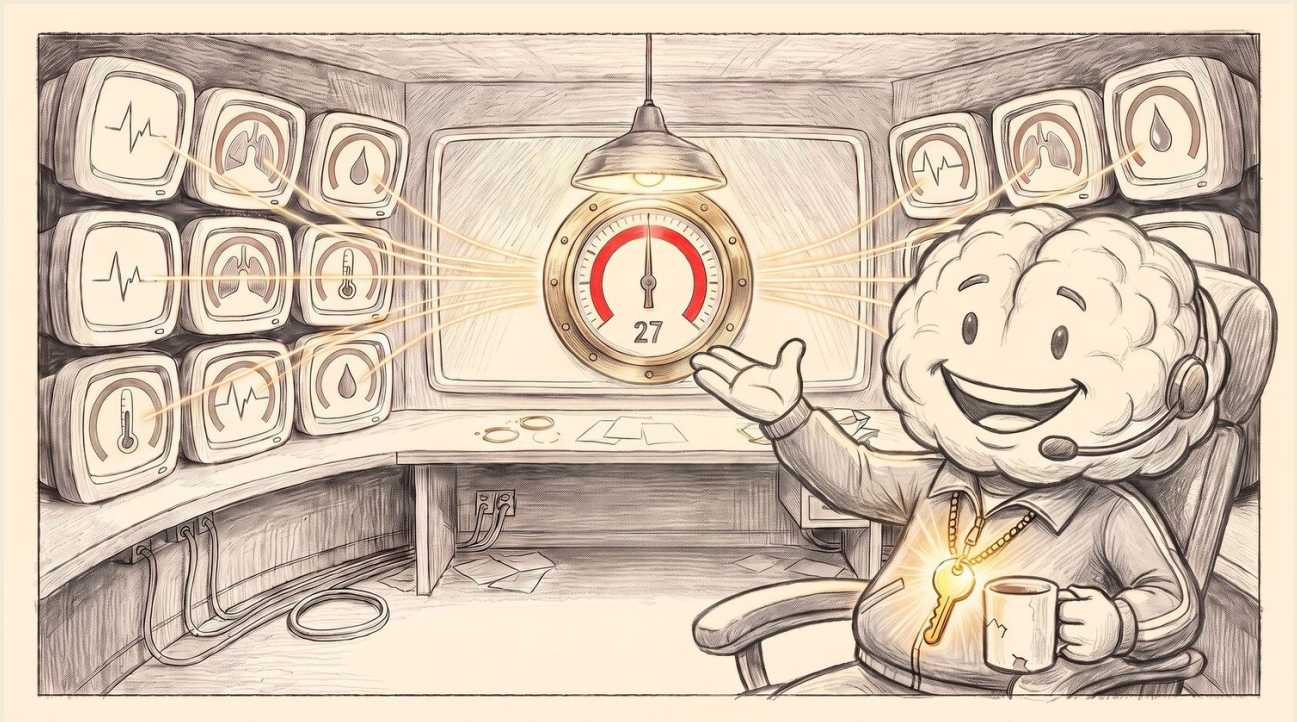
MANAN

It was never empty.



THE GATEKEEPER

INT. MISSION CONTROL. ANIMATION WITH MANAN COMPOSITED.



A warm, glowing room of monitors. A chair turns. COACH BRAIN, tracksuit, whistle, coffee, and a small brass key on a chain around his neck. He is delighted to be found.

MANAN

You closed that door.

COACH BRAIN

I keep the key.

He gestures and the room lights up. Glowing lines run out to a heart, lungs, a thermometer, a water drop, a distance counter, all feeding back to a single dial marked from EASY to DANGER.

COACH BRAIN

Every heartbeat. Every breath. Every drop of sweat. I'm asking one question. Can we keep going safely?

MANAN

So the limit isn't my body. It's your guess.

Coach Brain grins, entirely unembarrassed.

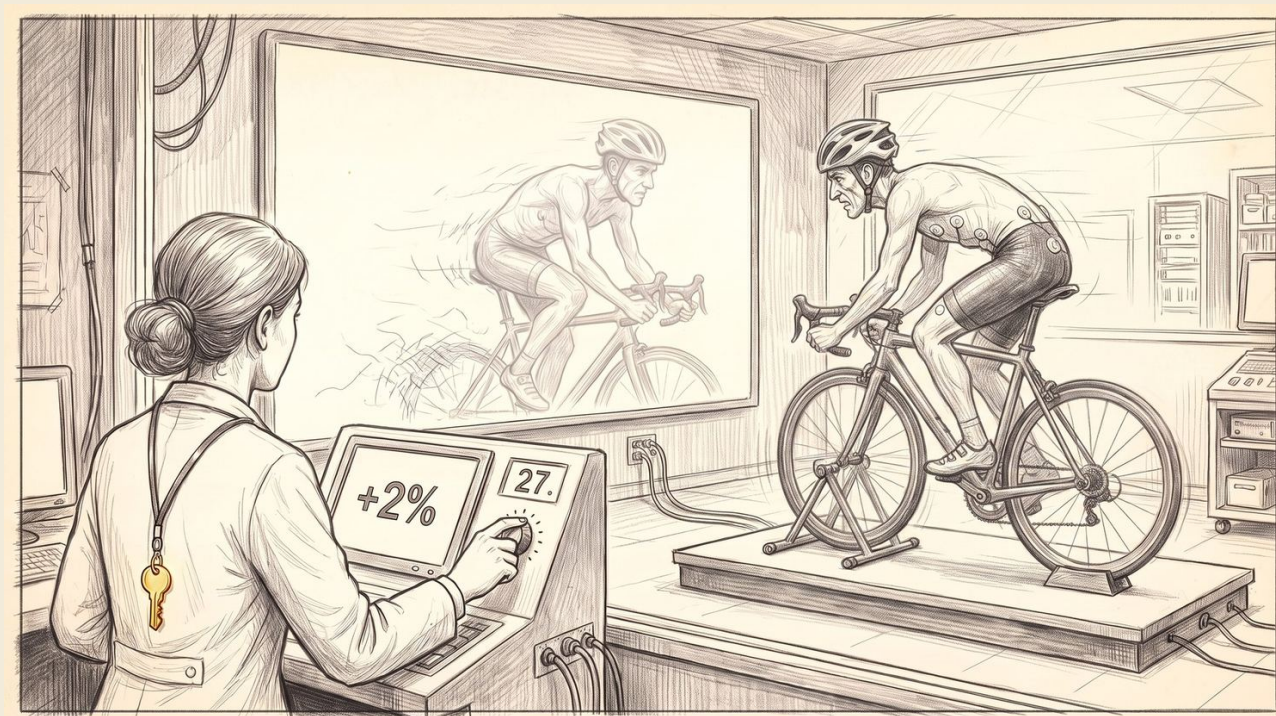
COACH BRAIN

It's my best guess. And I'd rather you finish than break.

SUBTITLE, two seconds: One influential model, the Central Governor Theory, proposed by Prof. Tim Noakes, 1997. Scientists still debate exactly how brain and muscle share the work.

THE TRICK

INT. SPORTS LABORATORY. ANIMATION.



A cyclist on a stationary bike, screen in front of him showing a translucent ghost rider. He has been told the ghost is a recording of his own best ever ride.

MANAN (V.O.)

So scientists tried something cheeky. They let a cyclist race himself.

Behind glass, a researcher quietly turns a small dial. On her screen: +2%.

MANAN (V.O.)

Except they made the ghost slightly faster. And they didn't tell him.

The cyclist chases. Strains. Draws level. Passes. The ghost falls behind.

MANAN (V.O.)

He beat his own maximum. Which means it was never his maximum.

Manan turns to camera, delighted.

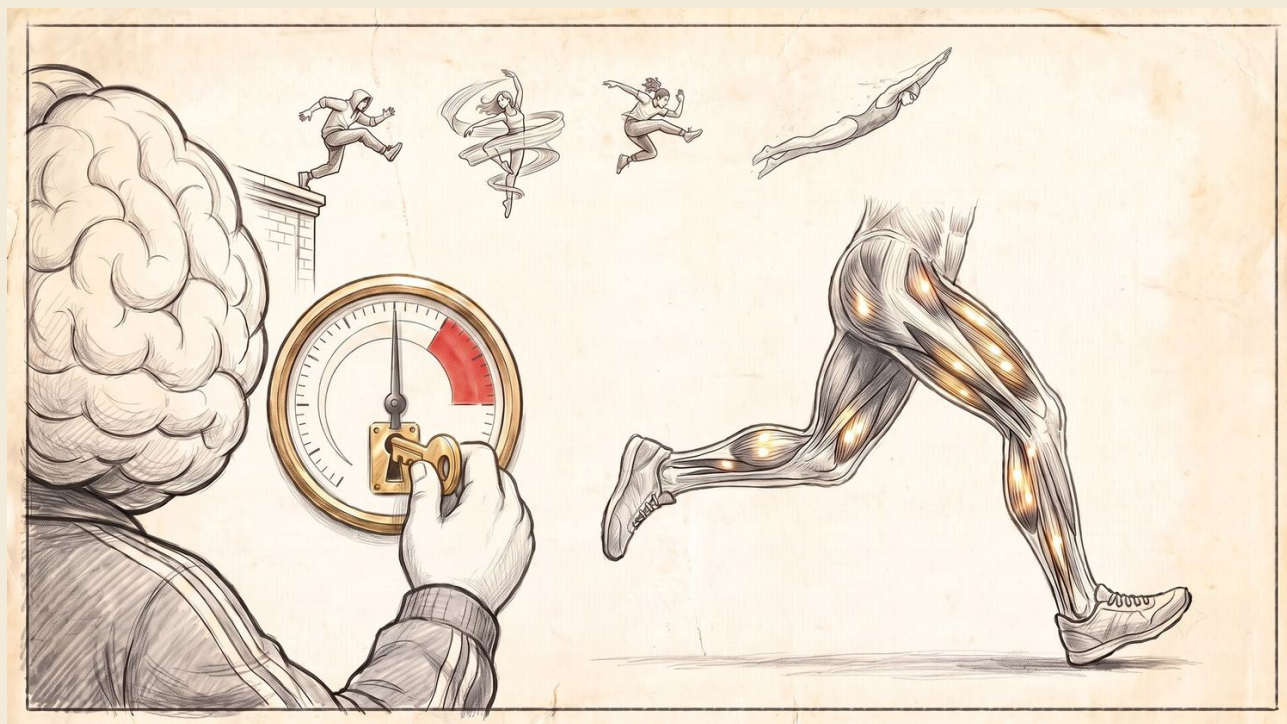
MANAN

Change what the brain believes, and the door opens.

SCENE 5 · 1:25 – 1:50

THE RELEASE

EXT. EVERYWHERE. ANIMATION. THE PEAK OF THE FILM.



Coach Brain looks at his dial, then at Manan. He smiles, and eases it open.

Inside the runner's legs, muscle fibres light one after another, more and more of them. His stride opens. He flies. Speed lines. The crowd erupts.

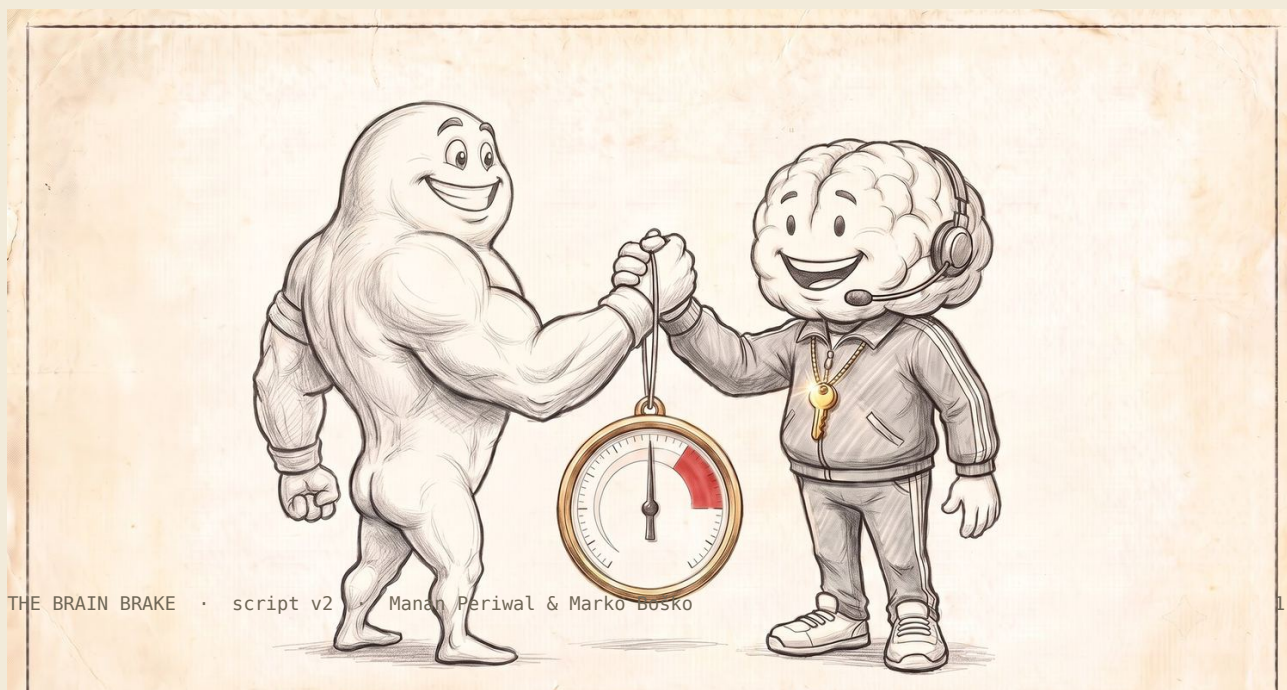
And the film breaks loose. A traceur launching rooftop to rooftop. A dancer turning in the air. A swimmer leaving the wall. Bodies doing what they could always do, permitted at last. All of it rising.

MANAN (V.O.)

The brain didn't make new energy. It gave permission.

Manan himself, mid air, coat flying, laughing.

CAPTION: More muscle fibres recruited. Notice: still not maximum.



THE INVITATION

EVERYTHING SETTLES TO WHITE. MANAN ALONE. LIVE ACTION.



The motion drains away. Manan stands still, eyes closed, breathing. Calm. The dial hangs in the air beside him, and this time his own hand is on it.

MANAN

The wall is real. But somebody set it.

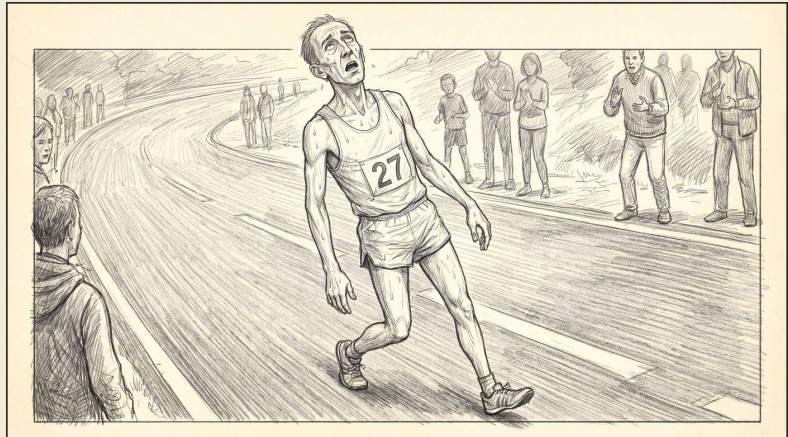
MANAN

And what your brain believes is safe can be trained.

Coach Brain steps up, takes the key from around his neck, and hands it over. A small, warm moment. Manan opens his eyes.

Cut to black.

Scene 1, shot breakdown



1.1 EXT. MARATHON COURSE — DAY

ANIMATION ONLY

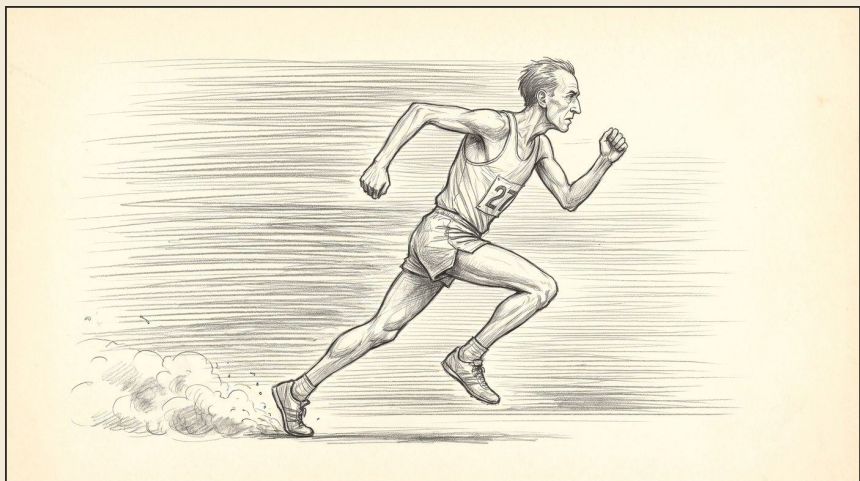
0:00 — 0:05
5 sec

The runner is failing. Low wide angle near road level. Head rolled back, arms hanging useless, stride collapsed into a shuffle. Barriers line both sides, the crowd behind them deliberately unfocused so the eye stays on his body. This man is beaten and everyone watching knows it.

COMMENTATOR (V.O.)

He's got nothing left.

- | | |
|------|--|
| CAM | Nothing required. Manan does not appear. |
| ANIM | Full frame animation. Bib 27 legible. Crowd loose and simplified. |
| SND | Broadcast crowd wash, compressed. Ragged breath close and dry on top. Footfall dragging on tarmac. |
| MUS | No score. Only the race. |



1.2 EXT. MARATHON COURSE — CONTINUOUS

ANIMATION ONLY

0:05 — 0:08
3 sec

The impossible sprint. Same man, transformed. Knees driving, arms pumping, jaw set. Camera tracks alongside at chest height. Dense speed lines streak the frame, dust kicks from the trailing foot, background reduced to horizontal smears. It should feel like it should not be possible.

- | | |
|------|---|
| CAM | Nothing required. |
| ANIM | The turn of the whole film. Hold on it just long enough for the audience to register the contradiction. |
| SND | Crowd surges. Footfall sharpens from drag to strike. Breath drives. |
| MUS | Nothing yet. Let the sound carry it. |



1.3 EXT. FROZEN WORLD — CONTINUOUS

LIVE ACTION IN ANIMATION

0:08 — 0:13
5 sec

Everything stops. Speed lines, dust and crowd hang suspended mid air. Manan walks into the frozen tableau from frame right, coat swinging, magnifying glass raised toward the runner. He is the only living thing in the picture.

- CAM SETUP A. Manan enters frame right, four steps, stops in profile, raises the glass toward an eyeline mark at camera left. Nothing is really there. Give him the mark.
- ANIM The freeze is the effect. Absolutely nothing else moves, including dust and speed lines.
- SND World drops to a single low tone. Only his footsteps and coat remain. Best sound moment in the film.
- MUS Three note motif enters alone, unaccompanied.



1.4 INSERT — THE EVIDENCE

LIVE ACTION IN ANIMATION

0:13 — 0:15
2 sec

Close on the brass magnifying glass held steady in his hand. Inside the lens, magnified and sharpened, a single running shoe print pressed into the tarmac and a stopwatch lying beside it. His face soft and out of focus at the edge of frame, tilted down, concentrating.

- CAM SETUP A. Tight insert of his hand gripping the glass. Shoot it locked off, let his hand tremble slightly, do not stabilise it.
- ANIM The magnified contents of the lens are drawn. Everything outside the glass stays soft.
- SND Near silence. A faint watch tick inside the lens, if anything at all.
- MUS Motif holds, suspended.



1.5 EXT. FROZEN WORLD — CONTINUOUS
LIVE ACTION IN ANIMATION

0:15 — 0:18
3 sec

He lowers the glass and turns to the lens. One eyebrow raised, the expression of somebody who has just realised the story they were told does not hold together. Question marks bloom in the air around him. The title lands.

MANAN

Hold on.

MANAN

He had nothing left.

MANAN

So where did THAT come from?

TITLE

THE BRAIN BRAKE

- | | |
|------|---|
| CAR | SETUP A. Medium, direct to lens. ONE SENTENCE PER TAKE, full reset between each. Minimum three clean takes of every line. |
| ANIM | Question marks and title card drawn over the live plate. They arrive on the last word, not before. |
| SND | Absolute quiet under the lines. A single soft impact on the title. |
| MUS | Motif left unresolved. Do not answer it here. It resolves at 1:48. |

END CARD

THE LIMIT IS A SETTING, NOT A WALL.