

The *New York Times* Bestseller by
ADAM SILVERA



**THEY BOTH DIE
AT THE END**

"A bold, lovely, and
haunting story of loss, hope,
and the redeeming power of friendship."

—LAUREN OLIVER,
New York Times bestselling author of *Before I Fall*

THEY
BOTH
DIE
AT
THE
END

ADAM SILVERA

HARPER TEEN

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DEDICATION

For those who need a reminder to make every day count.

*Shout-out to Mom for all the love and Cecilia for all the tough love. I've
always needed both.*

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PART ONE

Death-Cast

To live is the rarest thing in the world.

Most people exist, that's all.

—Oscar Wilde

September 5, 2017

MATEO TORREZ

12:22 a.m.

Death-Cast is calling with the warning of a lifetime—I'm going to die today. Forget that, "warning" is too strong a word since warnings suggest something can be avoided, like a car honking at someone who's crossing the street when it isn't their light, giving them the chance to step back; this is more of a heads-up. The alert, a distinctive and endless gong, like a church bell one block away, is blasting from my phone on the other side of the room. I'm freaking out already, a hundred thoughts immediately drowning out everything around me. I bet this chaos is what a first-time skydiver feels as she's plummeting out of a plane, or a pianist playing his first concert. Not that I will ever know for sure.

It's crazy. One minute ago I was reading yesterday's blog entry from *CountDowners*—where Deckers chronicle their final hours through statuses and photos via live feeds, this particular one about a college junior trying to find a home for his golden retriever—and now I'm going to die.

I'm going to . . . no . . . yes. Yes.

My chest tightens. I'm dying today.

I've always been afraid of dying. I don't know why I thought this would jinx it from actually happening. Not forever, obviously, but long enough so I could grow up. Dad has even been drilling it into my head that I should pretend I'm the main character of a story that nothing bad ever happens to, most especially death, because the hero has to be around to save the day. But the noise in my head is quieting down and there's a Death-Cast herald on the other end of the phone waiting to tell me I'm going to die today at eighteen years old.

Wow, I'm actually . . .

I don't want to pick up the phone. I'd rather run into Dad's bedroom and curse into a pillow because he chose the wrong time to land himself in intensive care, or punch a wall because my mom marked me for an early death when she died giving birth to me. The phone rings for what's got to be the thirtieth time, and I can't avoid it any more than I can avoid what's going down sometime today.

I slide my laptop off my crossed legs and get up from my bed, swaying to the side, feeling really faint. I'm like a zombie moving

toward my desk, slow and walking-dead.

The caller ID reads *DEATH-CAST*, of course.

I'm shaking but manage to press *Talk*. I don't say anything. I'm not sure what to say. I just breathe because I have fewer than twenty-eight thousand breaths left in me—the average number of breaths a nondying person takes per day—and I might as well use them up while I can.

“Hello, I'm calling from Death-Cast. I'm Andrea. You there, Timothy?”

Timothy.

My name isn't Timothy.

“You've got the wrong person,” I tell Andrea. My heart settles down, even though I feel for this Timothy person. I truly do. “My name is Mateo.” I got the name from my father and he wants me to pass it down eventually. Now I can, if having a kid is a thing that happens for me.

Computer keys are tapping on her end, probably correcting the entry or something in her database. “Oh, apologies. Timothy is the gentleman I just got off the phone with; he didn't take the news very well, poor thing. You're Mateo Torrez, right?”

And just like that, my last hope is obliterated.

“Mateo, kindly confirm this is indeed you. I'm afraid I have many other calls to make tonight.”

I always imagined my herald—their official name, not mine—would sound sympathetic and ease me into this news, maybe even harp on how it's especially tragic because I'm so young. To be honest, I would've been okay with her being chipper, telling me how I should have fun and make the most of the day since I at least know what's going to happen. That way I'm not stuck at home starting one-thousand-piece puzzles I'll never finish or masturbating because sex with an actual person scares me. But this herald makes me feel like I should stop wasting her time because, unlike me, she has so much of it.

“Okay. Mateo's me. I'm Mateo.”

“Mateo, I regret to inform you that sometime in the next twenty-four hours you'll be meeting an untimely death. And while there isn't anything we can do to suspend that, you still have a chance to live.” The herald goes on about how life isn't always fair, then lists some events I could participate in today. I shouldn't be mad at her, but it's obvious she's bored reciting these lines that have been burned into memory from telling hundreds, maybe thousands, about how they'll soon be dead. She has no sympathy to offer me. She's probably filing her nails or playing tic-tac-toe against herself as she talks to me.

On *CountDowners*, Deckers post entries about everything from their phone call to how they're spending their End Day. It's basically Twitter for Deckers. I've read tons of feeds where Deckers admitted to asking their heralds how they would die, but it's basic knowledge that those specifics aren't available to anyone, not even former President Reynolds, who tried to hide from Death in an underground bunker four years ago and was assassinated by one of his own secret service agents. Death-Cast can only provide a date for when someone is going to die, but not the exact minute or how it'll happen.

“. . . Do you understand all of this?”

“Yeah.”

“Log on to death-cast.com and fill out any special requests you may have for your funeral in addition to the inscription you'd like engraved on your headstone. Or perhaps you would like to be cremated, in which case . . .”

I've only ever been to one funeral. My grandmother died when I was seven, and at her funeral I threw a tantrum because she wasn't waking up. Fast-forward five years when Death-Cast came into the picture and suddenly everyone *was* awake at their own funerals. Having the chance to say goodbye before you die is an incredible opportunity, but isn't that time better spent actually living? Maybe I would feel differently if I could count on people showing up to my funeral. If I had more friends than I do fingers.

“And Timothy, on behalf of everyone here at Death-Cast, we are so sorry to lose you. Live this day to the fullest, okay?”

“I'm Mateo.”

“Sorry about that, Mateo. I'm mortified. It's been a long day and these calls can be so stressful and—”

I hang up, which is rude, I know. I know. But I can't listen to someone tell me what a stressful day she's been having when I might drop dead in the next hour, or even the next ten minutes: I could choke on a cough drop; I could leave my apartment to do something with myself and fall down the stairs and snap my neck before I even make it outside; someone could break in and murder me. The only thing I can confidently rule out is dying of old age.

I sink to the floor, on my knees. It's all ending today and there is absolutely nothing I can do about it. I can't journey across dragon-infested lands to retrieve scepters that can halt death. I can't hop onto a flying carpet in search of a genie to grant my wish for a full and simple life. I could maybe find some mad scientist to cryogenically freeze me,

but chances are I'd die in the middle of that wacky experiment. Death is inevitable for everyone and it's absolute for me today.

The list of people I will miss, if the dead can miss anyone, is so short I shouldn't even call it a list: there's Dad, for doing his best; my best friend, Lidia, not only for not ignoring me in the hallways, but for actually sitting down across from me in lunch, partnering with me in earth science, and talking to me about how she wants to become an environmentalist who will save the world and I can repay her by living in it. And that's it.

If someone were interested in my list of people I *won't* miss, I'd have nothing for them. No one has ever wronged me. And I even get why some people didn't take a shot on me. Really, I do. I'm such a paranoid mess. The few times I was invited to do something fun with classmates, like roller-skating in the park or going for a drive late at night, I bowed out because we *might* be setting ourselves up for death, *maybe*. I guess what I'll miss most are the wasted opportunities to live my life and the lost potential to make great friends with everyone I sat next to for four years. I'll miss how we never got to bond over sleepovers where everyone stayed up and played Xbox Infinity and board games all night, all because I was too scared.

The number one person I'll miss the most is Future Mateo, who maybe loosened up and lived. It's hard to picture him clearly, but I imagine Future Mateo trying out new things, like smoking pot with friends, getting a driver's license, and hopping on a plane to Puerto Rico to learn more about his roots. Maybe he's dating someone, and maybe he likes that company. He probably plays piano for his friends, sings in front of them, and he would definitely have a crowded funeral service, one that would stretch over an entire weekend after he's gone—one where the room is packed with new people who didn't get a chance to hug him one last time.

Future Mateo would have a longer list of friends he'll miss.

But I will never grow up to be Future Mateo. No one will ever get high with me, no one will be my audience as I play piano, and no one will sit shotgun in my dad's car after I get my license. I'll never fight with friends over who gets the better bowling shoes or who gets to be Wolverine when we play video games.

I collapse back onto the floor, thinking about how it's do or die now. Not even that.

Do, and then die.

12:42 a.m.

Dad takes hot showers to cool down whenever he's upset or disappointed in himself. I copied him around the time I turned thirteen because confusing Mateo Thoughts surfaced and I needed tons of Mateo Time to sort through them. I'm showering now because I feel guilty for hoping the world, or some part of it beyond Lidia and my dad, will be sad to see me go. Because I refused to live invincibly on all the days I didn't get an alert, I wasted all those yesterdays and am completely out of tomorrows.

I'm not going to tell anyone. Except Dad, but he's not even awake so it doesn't really count. I don't want to spend my last day wondering if people are being genuine when they throw sad words at me. No one should spend their last hours second-guessing people.

I've got to get out into the world, though, trick myself into thinking it is any other day. I've got to see Dad at the hospital and hold his hand for the first time since I was a kid and for what will be the last . . . wow, the last time ever.

I'll be gone before I can adjust to my mortality.

I also have to see Lidia and her one-year-old, Penny. Lidia named me Penny's godfather when the baby was born, and it sucks how I'm the person expected to take care of her in case Lidia passes away since Lidia's boyfriend, Christian, died a little over a year ago. Sure, how is an eighteen-year-old with no income going to take care of a baby? Short answer: He isn't. But I was supposed to get older and tell Penny stories of her world-saving mother and chill father and welcome her into my home when I was financially secure and emotionally prepared to do so. Now I'm being whisked out of her life before I can become more than some guy in a photo album who Lidia may tell stories about, during which Penny will nod her head, maybe make fun of my glasses, and then flip the page to family she actually knows and cares about. I won't even be a ghost to her. But that's no reason to not go tickle her one more time or wipe squash and green peas off her face, or give Lidia a little break so she can focus on studying for her GED or brush her teeth or comb her hair or take a nap.

After that, I will somehow pull myself away from my best friend and her daughter, and I will have to go and live.

I turn off the faucet and the water stops raining down on me; today isn't the day for an hour shower. I grab my glasses off the sink and put them on. I step out of the tub, slipping on a puddle of water, and while falling backward I'm expecting to see if that theory of your life flashing before your eyes carries any truth to it when I grab hold of the towel rack

and catch myself. I breathe in and out, in and out, because dying this way would just be an extremely unfortunate way to go; someone would add me to the “Shower KO” feed on the *DumbDeaths* blog, a high-traffic site that grosses me out on so many levels.

I need to get out of here and live—but first I have to make it out of this apartment alive.

12:56 a.m.

I write thank-you notes for my neighbors in 4F and 4A, telling them it’s my End Day. With Dad in the hospital, Elliot in 4F has been checking in on me, bringing me dinner, especially since our stove has been busted for the past week after I tried making Dad’s empanadas. Sean in 4A was planning on stopping by on Saturday to fix the stove’s burner, but it’s not necessary anymore. Dad will know how to fix it and might need a distraction when I’m gone.

I go into my closet and pull out the blue-and-gray flannel shirt Lidia got me for my eighteenth birthday, then put it on over my white T-shirt. I haven’t worn it outside yet. The shirt is how I get to keep Lidia close today.

I check my watch—an old one of Dad’s he gave me after buying a digital one that could glow, for his bad eyes—and it’s close to 1:00 a.m. On a regular day, I would be playing video games until late at night, even if it meant going to school exhausted. At least I could fall asleep during my free periods. I shouldn’t have taken those frees for granted. I should’ve taken up another class, like art, even though I can’t draw to save my life. (Or do anything to save my life, obviously, and I want to say that’s neither here nor there, but it pretty much is everything, isn’t it?) Maybe I should’ve joined band and played piano, gotten some recognition before working my way up to singing in the chorus, then maybe a duet with someone cool, and then maybe braving a solo. Heck, even theater could’ve been fun if I’d gotten to play a role that forced me to break out. But no, I elected for another free period where I could shut down and nap.

It’s 12:58 a.m. When it hits 1:00 I am forcing myself out of this apartment. It has been both my sanctuary and my prison and for once I need to go breathe in the outside air instead of tearing through it to get from Point A to Point B. I have to count trees, maybe sing a favorite song while dipping my feet in the Hudson, and just do my best to be remembered as the young man who died too early.

It's 1:00 a.m.

I can't believe I'm never returning to my bedroom.

I unlock the front door, turn the knob, and pull the door open.

I shake my head and slam the door shut.

I'm not walking out into a world that will kill me before my time.

RUFUS EMETERIO

1:05 a.m.

Death-Cast is hitting me up as I'm beating my ex-girlfriend's new boyfriend to death. I'm still on top of this dude, pinning his shoulders down with my knees, and the only reason I'm not clocking him in the eye again is because of the ringing coming from my pocket, that loud Death-Cast ringtone everyone knows too damn well either from personal experience, the news, or every shitty show using the alert for that *dun-dun-dun* effect. My boys, Tagoe and Malcolm, are no longer cheering on the beat-down. They're dead quiet and I'm waiting for this punk Peck's phone to go off too. But nothing, just my phone. Maybe the call telling me I'm about to lose my life just saved his.

"You gotta pick it up, Roof," Tagoe says. He was recording the beat-down because watching fights online is his thing, but now he's staring at his phone like he's scared a call is coming for him too.

"The hell I do," I say. My heart is pounding mad fast, even faster than when I first moved up on Peck, even faster than when I first decked him and laid him out. Peck's left eye is swollen already, and there's still nothing but pure terror in his right eye. These Death-Cast calls go strong until three. He don't know for sure if I'm about to take him down with me.

I don't know either.

My phone stops ringing.

"Maybe it was a mistake," Malcolm says.

My phone rings again.

Malcolm stays shut.

I wasn't hopeful. I don't know stats or nothing like that, but Death-Cast fucking up alerts isn't exactly common news. And we Emeterios haven't exactly been lucky with staying alive. But meeting our maker way ahead of time? We're your guys.

I'm shaking and that buzzing panic is in my head, like someone is punching me nonstop, because I have no idea how I'm gonna go, just that I am. And my life isn't exactly flashing before my eyes, not that I expect it to later on when I'm actually at death's edge.

Peck squirms from underneath me and I raise my fist so he calms the hell down.

“Maybe he got a weapon on him,” Malcolm says. He’s the giant of our group, the kind of guy who would’ve been helpful to have around when my sister couldn’t get her seat belt off as our car flipped into the Hudson River.

Before the call, I would’ve bet anything Peck doesn’t have any weapon on him, since we’re the ones who jumped him when he was coming out of work. But I’m not betting my life, not like this. I drop my phone. I pat him down and flip him over, checking his waistband for a pocketknife. I stand and he stays down.

Malcolm drags Peck’s backpack out from under the blue car where Tagoe threw it. He unzips the backpack and flips it over, letting some Black Panther and Hawkeye comics hit the ground. “Nothing.”

Tagoe rushes toward Peck and I swear he’s about to kick him like his head’s a soccer ball, but he grabs my phone off the ground and answers the call. “Who you calling for?” His neck twitch surprises no one. “Hold up, hold up. I ain’t him. *Hold up*. Wait a sec.” He holds out the phone. “You want me to hang up, Roof?”

I don’t know. I still have Peck, bloodied and beat, in the parking lot of this elementary school, and it’s not like I need to take this call to make sure Death-Cast isn’t actually calling to tell me I won the lottery. I snatch the phone from Tagoe, pissed and confused, and I might throw up but my parents and sister didn’t so maybe I won’t either.

“Watch him,” I tell Tagoe and Malcolm. They nod. I don’t know how I became the alpha dog. I ended up in the foster home years after them.

I give myself some distance, as if privacy actually matters, and make sure I stay out of the light coming from the exit sign. Not trying to get caught in the middle of the night with blood on my knuckles. “Yeah?”

“Hello. This is Victor from Death-Cast calling to speak with Rufus Emmy-terio.”

He butchers my last name, but there’s no point correcting him. No one else is around to carry on the Emeterio name. “Yeah, it’s me.”

“Rufus, I regret to inform you that sometime in the next twenty-four hours—”

“Twenty-three hours,” I interrupt, pacing back and forth from one end of this car to the other. “You’re calling after one.” It’s bullshit. Other Deckers got their alert an hour ago. Maybe if Death-Cast called an hour ago I wouldn’t have been waiting outside the restaurant where freshman-year college-dropout Peck works so I could chase him into this parking lot.

“Yes, you’re right. I’m sorry,” Victor says.

I'm trying to stay shut 'cause I don't wanna take my problems out on some guy doing his job, even though I have no idea why the hell anyone applies for this position in the first place. Let's pretend I got a future for a second, entertain me—in no universe am I ever waking up and saying, “I think I'll get a twelve-to-three shift where I do nothing but tell people their lives are over.” But Victor and others did. I don't wanna hear none of that don't-kill-the-messenger business either, especially when the messenger is calling to tell me I'll be straight wrecked by day's end.

“Rufus, I regret to inform you that sometime in the next twenty-three hours you'll be meeting an untimely death. While there isn't anything I can do to suspend that, I'm calling to inform you of your options for the day. First of all, how are you doing? It took a while for you to answer. Is everything okay?”

He wants to know how I'm doing, yeah right. I can hear it in the stunted way he asked me, he doesn't actually care about me any more than he does the other Deckers he gotta call tonight. These calls are probably monitored and he's not trying to lose his job by speeding through this.

“I don't know how I'm doing.” I squeeze my phone so I don't throw it against the wall painted with little white and brown kids holding hands underneath a rainbow. I look over my shoulder and Peck is still face-first on the ground as Malcolm and Tagoë stare at me; they better make sure he doesn't run away before we can figure out what we're doing with him. “Just tell me my options.” This should be good.

Victor tells me the forecast for the day (supposed to rain before noon and later on as well if I make it that long), special festivals I have zero interest in attending (especially not a yoga class on the High Line, rain or no rain), formal funeral arrangements, and restaurants with the best Decker discounts if I use today's code. I zone out on everything else 'cause I'm anxious on how the rest of my End Day is gonna play out.

“How do you guys know?” I interrupt. Maybe this dude will take pity on me and I can clue in Tagoë and Malcolm on this huge mystery. “The End Days. How do you know? Some list? Crystal ball? Calendar from the future?” Everyone stays speculating on how Death-Cast receives this life-changing information. Tagoë told me about all these crazy theories he read online, like Death-Cast consulting a band of legit psychics and a really ridiculous one with an alien shackled to a bathtub and forced by the government to report End Days. There are mad things wrong with that theory, but I don't have time to comment on them right now.

“I’m afraid that information isn’t available to heralds either,” Victor claims. “We’re equally curious, but it’s not knowledge we need to perform our job.” Another flat answer. I bet you anything he knows and can’t say if he wants to keep his job.

Screw this guy. “Yo, Victor, be a person for one minute. I don’t know if you know, but I’m seventeen. Three weeks from my eighteenth birthday. Doesn’t it piss you off that I’ll never go to college? Get married? Have kids? Travel? Doubt it. You’re just chilling on your little throne in your little office because you know you got another few decades ahead of you, right?”

Victor clears his throat. “You want me to be a person, Rufus? You want me to get off my throne and get real with you? Okay. An hour ago I got off the phone with a woman who cried over how she won’t be a mother anymore after her four-year-old daughter dies today. She begged me to tell her how she can save her daughter’s life, but no one has that power. And then I had to put in a request to the Youth Department to dispatch a cop just in case the mother is responsible, which, believe it or not, is not the most disgusting thing I’ve done for this job. Rufus, I feel for you, I do. But I’m not at fault for your death, and I unfortunately have many more of these calls to make tonight. Can you do me a solid and cooperate?”

Damn.

I cooperate for the rest of the call, even though this dude has no business telling me anyone else’s, but all I can think about is the mother whose daughter will never attend the school right behind me. At the end of the call Victor gives me that company line I’ve grown used to hearing from all the new TV shows and movies incorporating Death-Cast into the characters’ day-to-days: “On behalf of Death-Cast, we are sorry to lose you. Live this day to the fullest.”

I can’t tell you who hangs up first, but it doesn’t matter. The damage is done—will be done. Today is my End Day, a straight-up Rufus Armageddon. I don’t know how this is gonna go down. I’m praying I don’t drown like my parents and sis. The only person I’ve done dirty is Peck, for real, so I’m counting on not getting shot, but who knows, misfires happen too. The how doesn’t matter as much as what I do before it goes down, but not knowing is still freaking shaking me; you only die once, after all.

Maybe Peck *is* gonna be responsible for this.

I walk back over to the three of them, fast. I pick Peck up by the back of his collar and then slam him against the brick wall. Blood slides from

an open wound on his forehead, and I can't believe this dude threw me over the edge like this. He should've never run his mouth about all the reasons Aimee didn't want me anymore. If that'd never gotten back to me, my hand wouldn't be around his throat right now, getting him even more scared than I am.

"You didn't 'beat' me, okay? Aimee didn't split with me because of you, so get that out of your head right now. She loved me and we got complicated, and she would've taken me back eventually." I know this is legit—Malcolm and Tagoe think so too. I lean in on Peck, looking him dead-on in his only good eye. "I better never see you again for the rest of my life." Yeah, yeah. Not much life left. But this dude is a fucking clown and might get funny. "You feel me?"

Peck nods.

I let go of his throat and grab his phone out of his pocket. I hurl it against the wall and the screen is totaled. Malcolm stomps it out.

"Get the hell out of here."

Malcolm grabs my shoulder. "Don't let him go. He's got those connections."

Peck slides along the wall, nervous, like he's scaling across some windows high up in the city.

I shake Malcolm off my shoulder. "I said *get the hell out of here*."

Peck takes off, running in a dizzying zigzag. He never looks back once to see if we're coming for him or stops for his comics and backpack.

"I thought you said he's got friends in some gang," Malcolm says. "What if they come for you?"

"They're not a real gang, and he was the gang reject. I got no reason to get scared of a gang that let Peck in. He can't even call them or Aimee, we took care of that." I wouldn't want him reaching out to Aimee before I can. I gotta explain myself, and, I don't know, she may not wanna see me if she figures out what I did, End Day or not.

"Death-Cast can't call him either," Tagoe says, his neck twitching twice.

"I wasn't gonna kill him."

Malcolm and Tagoe are quiet. They saw the way I was laying into him, like I had no off button.

I can't stop shaking.

I could've killed him, even if I didn't mean to. I don't know if I would've been able to live with myself or not if I did end up snuffing him gone. Nah, that's a lie and I know it, I'm just trying to be hard. But

I'm not hard. I've barely been able to live with myself for surviving something my family didn't—something that wasn't even my fault. There's no way in hell I would've been chill with myself for beating someone to death.

I storm toward our bikes. My handles are tangled in Tagoe's wheel from after we chased Peck here, jumping off our bikes to tackle him. "You guys can't follow me," I say, picking my bike up. "You get that, right?"

"Nah, we're with you, just—"

"Not happening," I interrupt. "I'm a ticking time bomb, and even if you're not blowing up when I do, you might get burned—maybe literally."

"You're not ditching us," Malcolm says. "Where you go, we go."

Tagoe nods, his head jerking to the right, like his body is betraying his instinct to follow me. He nods again, no twitch this time.

"You two are straight-up shadows," I say.

"That because we're black?" Malcolm asks.

"Because you're always following me," I say. "Loyal to the end."

The end.

That shuts us up. We get on our bikes and ride off the curb, the wheels bumping and bumping. This is the wrong day to have left my helmet behind.

Tagoe and Malcolm can't stay with me the entire day, I know that. But we're Plutos, bros from the same foster home, and we don't turn our backs on each other.

"Let's go home," I say.

And we out.