

Activation

by

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ACTIVATION

An abandoned garage.

The room feels dirty, like someone has been squatting there for a while with no interest in cleanliness. A few random pieces of industrial junk are hanging around, like pieces of metal and pipes.

In the center of the stage there is a refrigerator sized box connected with wires to a laptop computer, which rests on a card table. Also on the table are papers, a fast food wrapper or two, and cups.

LIAM is in his late 20's, early 30's. He is scruffy, unkempt, unfashionable, and excited to the point of being on edge. He talks as he enters.

LIAM

You're here to see what I built. It's important. Totally worth the hassle, I promise.

Entering behind him is PROFESSOR STONE.

Professor Stone is in his 50's to 60's, very sure of himself, professional in appearance, and a bit gruff.

PROFESSOR STONE

Son, I understand what you're saying. I usually like a bit more information before driving out to an ancient garage in the middle of nowhere.

LIAM

Privacy, secrecy are key. This isn't complicated.

PROFESSOR STONE

Why don't you let me go? We can sit down in my office and talk this over.

LIAM

Let you go? Do you think I'm holding you hostage?

PROFESSOR STONE

You grabbed me after class, practically dragged me into your car, drove for almost half an hour...

Liam realizes how he's coming across. Calms himself down somewhat.

LIAM

What? No. This is science. It's all science. Don't worry. Relax Professor Stone. Relax. Ok, ok, ok. Let me start. Let me start at the beginning. You remember me, right?

PROFESSOR STONE

I assume you were one of my students. I've had so many over the years, it's hard to place you.

LIAM

Professor, yes. I was... Four years ago, I was in your oscillators and closed loop systems class. Do you remember? You talked about the Feinberg Oscillator. My mind was just... (he motions a "mind blowing") You said a Feinberg Oscillator could sync up with the vibrations of the spacetime itself and be used to construct a machine-

PROFESSOR STONE

Theoretically. This is all theoretically true, although completely impossible. There is no capacitor that can-

LIAM

Exactly, that's what you said. Negative four Mega-Fardads. But I said no. I said what about a crystal made of one of the heavier elements? A crystal structure that could maintain positrons in a-

PROFESSOR STONE

Look, I have one student every class who disagrees with me, says the machine is possible, that time travel could be real. Son, I've been teaching that class for twenty years. Same thing every year.

LIAM

Yes. But it can be done. I know it can, because I did it.

PROFESSOR STONE

Son-

LIAM

Liam. My name is Liam. Remember?

Professor Stone realizes this guy might be unhinged. Puts his eyeballs on the door. Shifts that way, slowly.

PROFESSOR STONE

Yes. Of course. Liam. I remember. You told me in the car. Liam, the Feinberg Oscillator violates no less than two of Maxwell's equations. These are real, verified laws of nature. And building a crystal of a heavier material... well, that's never been done. You're talking something two generations away from even being considered-

LIAM

I know. That's what I built.

The Professor keeps moving.

PROFESSOR STONE

I've already explained. It's impossible. I'm afraid you've been wasting your time.

Liam rushes over to the table, digs through his papers.

LIAM

Look, I have proof. (He pulls out a couple pieces, rushes them over to the Professor). Just read this. Read it.

Professor Stone takes the papers, looks at the charts/figures.

LIAM

After that day in class I ran home and I couldn't stop working. I sat down in front of my computer for... I have no idea. Days, probably. I couldn't stop. I gave up everything: school, my family, my girlfriend. They probably all think I'm dead, or hope. I found this place, this garage. Nobody's been here for years. I put a mattress in the corner and this is what I've been doing for the past four years. Absolute focus.

Professor Stone looks up from the papers.

PROFESSOR STONE

If this is correct...

LIAM

It is.

PROFESSOR STONE

Then you've done it. You built it? That's what this is?

The Professor looks at the machine.

LIAM

That's it. I bought what parts I could. What I couldn't pay for I stole: equipment, materials. I had to do it, I couldn't stop until I made this.

Liam goes over to the box. Puts his hand gently on it. The Professor steps towards it. In awe.

PROFESSOR STONE

The way you seem to have solved the crystal generation, is... it's nothing short of brilliant. Now that you've done the work it makes perfect sense. So this, this is the machine. A real time machine.

LIAM

I've tested all the components individually, but I needed a witness for when I turned it on, when I get inside and sent myself five minutes into the future.

PROFESSOR STONE

So you got me.

LIAM

Right. Because you'd understand it, but also so I could rub it in your face.

The Professor examines the wiring. Liam goes over to the computer, types a few numbers.

LIAM

I'm setting the machine for five minutes. You just have to wait for me to come out.

The Professor becomes worried.

PROFESSOR STONE

No, stop, stop. Do you understand the nature of this machine?

LIAM

Yeah, I built it.

PROFESSOR STONE

But do you understand what it means? Turning on the oscillator will create a path between moments in time. So long as the machine remains on you can visit any point in time along that line. What's your power source?

LIAM

It's an old radioisotope thermoelectric generator I swiped from your lab. Sorry.

PROFESSOR STONE

You stole from my lab?

LIAM

Yeah, but only in the name of science.

PROFESSOR STONE

How long does it have left?

LIAM

Twenty five years, give or take.

PROFESSOR STONE

You will be opening a twenty five year long gap in time, through which any one with this machine can travel.

LIAM

Pretty awesome, right?

PROFESSOR STONE

Incredibly dangerous. We don't know what will happen if you activate the machine.

LIAM

What are you even talking about? This is one of the... No, this is the biggest invention in the history of anything.

PROFESSOR STONE

Right and you've proven yourself brilliant. I can vouch for you. Why don't we take this machine apart and forget about the oscillator. I can make a few phone calls, find you a research job. Something top shelf.

LIAM

I don't want a research job. I didn't spend four years of my life trying to get a research job. I invented a time machine. I am going to use it.

Liam is starting to get worked up. The Professor senses that.

PROFESSOR STONE

Let's calm down and discuss. I don't think you've thought through all the possible ramifications of turning on your machine. You're opening a window to twenty five years from now. Whoever has access to this machine can step through it and come out at any moment.

LIAM

That's the point. Time machine. I get it. What is your problem?

PROFESSOR STONE

Son, Liam. We have no way of knowing what society will look like twenty five years from now. Who will be in charge, what kind of people they will be. We don't know who will find your machine.

LIAM

Which is why I built it here, miles from anything. I've been here four years, never even seen a car drive down the road. Nobody is finding this place.

PROFESSOR STONE

You don't know what the future will hold.

LIAM

I'm going to find out.

PROFESSOR STONE

What about weapons? What if some crazy person from the future wants to blow up the world. All they have to do is send a bomb back to the moment you turn on the machine. What about a virus? An army? A future version of you?

This makes Liam antsy.

LIAM

Alright, tell me, what are the odds? What are the odds something crazy happens?

PROFESSOR STONE

They're not zero. That's why you need to take this machine apart.

Liam laughs.

PROFESSOR STONE

Ethics. Think of the ethics.

LIAM

The ethics of time travel? You can't know until I turn this thing on. I took Scientific Ethics 205. Nobody knew the ethics of the internet until it was in every home. Read an article about the internet from the early 90's. Oh boy, someone in Nevada can learn the temperature in Reykjavik. Nobody could predict Ebay, Craigslist, Tentacle Porn. The only way to figure it out is to turn it on.

PROFESSOR STONE

Fine. What about your ethics? Your personal ethics?

LIAM

My ethics are fine. I'm a scientist.

PROFESSOR STONE

You step into this machine, come out five minutes from now. What next? You tell the world? Do you travel back and forth making yourself a billionaire? The President? The supreme leader of the entire planet, shaping the world in your image? Build a model that will last ten thousand years? Because the power of this machine... it's infinite.

LIAM

This is America. I deserve the fruits of my labor. These are my bootstraps, man. This machine is for me to do with as I please. I get to be a billionaire, I get to be President if I want. This is my machine.

PROFESSOR STONE

And you intend to keep it a secret.

LIAM

Exactly.

PROFESSOR STONE

And you trust yourself?

Liam thinks about this for a second. He calms down. Has completely sobered up.

LIAM

Yeah, I do. You don't know me, but I'm doing this for all the good reason. I don't want to be rich, I don't want to blow up the Earth. I'm just curious. I want to see what the future holds, how we turn out. The crazy stuff? That's not me. That's why I have to keep it secret.

PROFESSOR STONE

Well then you've already failed. You told me.

This just dawned on Liam. He chuckles.

LIAM

You're right. That's funny. Good call. (He pauses, thinks) Alright. Unplug it.

The Professor feels proud of himself. He bends over to pull a plug out.

Liam grabs a pipe and clocks the professor on the head. The Professor falls to the floor. Liam plugs the machine back in.

Liam stands in front of the computer. He hits a few buttons.

He pauses, he looks at the Professor.

LIAM

Well, let's see.

He hits one last button.

The lights cut to black.