

THE REACTOR

by

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Fade in to a huge explosion. Glass flies everywhere and debris falls to the floor. When the scene calms, Professor JACK LAHEY is left sprawled out in the middle of the floor, breathing hard and staring dumbfounded at an object floating in front of him, giving off an electric blue, glowing aura. "What the hell have I done...?!"

-- 3 Months Earlier --

Tires screech to a stop and Jack rushes through a university parking lot, up a couple flights of stairs, and bursts into a classic lecture hall, interrupting a man speaking. Jack apologises as he sets his bag down, thanking his assistant, ERIK MASON, for stepping in for him. He smoothes his hair back and starts teaching astrophysics, specifically the gravitational physics of planets. Erik stands in the doorway, looking sullen as he is kicked out.

The students leave and Jack starts to get his papers together. A scholarly-looking man steps in and greets him. Professor MILES ARGENT, the science department head, congratulates Jack on his award of a grant towards private research. Jack admits that was the reason for being late, he lost track of time building his lab. Argent presses further about this lab but Jack brushes the questions off, excusing himself to get home in time for dinner. He grabs his bag and rushes out the door, nodding towards a still sulking Mason.

Jack drives through the mountain roads, finally coming to the end of the road where his house stands, a quaint, lodge-style home. His wife MELISSA is busy making homemade pizza, their son COLTON assisting her. He excitedly greets his father, and Jack kisses his wife. He admits that he may have to do some work in the lab, but he'll be up for dinner. He goes down and resumes his work, engineering something that requires a lot of calculations. Time passes and his son tries to tear Jack away, but he is brushed off. By the time he realises what time it is, the pizza is cold and Colton is being put to sleep by his wife. Jack is visibly distraught at breaking another little promise to his son. Melissa comforts him, saying that there would be plenty of time to make it up to him.

Jack sits in his office at the university, quickly scribbling down complex formulas in his leather notebook. Erik comes in hesitantly and tries to look at the work the professor is doing, but Jack stops writing to talk. He confesses that he may be onto something incredible in his lab, something that could change the world. Erik offers to assist him, referring to times when he had successfully assisted the professor before. Jack again brushes it off, saying he would work faster alone. And if Erik was in the

lab helping him, how would any of the students' assignments get marked? Besides, Jack admits he doesn't even completely understand the technology he's implementing, and it could result in something dangerous. He slides over a sealed envelope.

"If anything should happen to me, give this to Melissa..."

Erik leaves the office, the mysterious envelope in hand, when he suddenly gets thrown and pinned against a wall by a muscular young man. WEST looks menacingly at Erik, growling in his face about making sure his latest astrophysics paper would get a high grade. Erik replies he'll give him the highest grade he could without seeming suspicious. West isn't too happy with this. He reminds Erik about the power his father has at the university, along with just about every level of the crime rings in America. Erik knows all too well, and he agrees that West deserves a higher grade. West is finally content with this, and leaves Erik to lean against the wall, flustered and embarrassed, and ultimately angry.

Back in the lab, Jack works furiously. Computers run data as he works on a large screen, looking through design schematics. In the middle of the room sits a flat, octagonal device with mantis-like rods that create a dome and point inwards. It seems to be half-finished, parts of the device unattached and missing. Jack makes a face as he drinks the remnants of his cold coffee. He works through the night, barely realising the passing of time. The device has a gleam of mysterious foreboding.

Lahey's excitement is barely containable as he connects the final piece to the center of the device, the power source of the whole thing. He stands back, marvelling at it for a moment before stepping back and flipping a switch on a remote. Nothing happens. Jack is confused. It was supposed to work, everything was in the right place...

The explosion again. This time shows Jack standing up and walking cautiously towards the orb, looking at it as closely as he dares before exclaiming loudly and running upstairs to find Melissa.

"I did it! Honey, I did it, I finally did it! I don't know what it is, but I made it!!"

He rushes her downstairs, through the rubble, revealing a chunk of the wall of the lab missing, and the bright orb hovering in place above the device. She looks confused and scared, but he reassures her that it was stable, for the moment. She questions what it is, and he can't give her an answer. He says that he needs more time to observe it, to observe what the device had ultimately done. Once he

understood all that he could, he'll bring it forward to the department chairs and show them his discovery. Melissa is still uncertain, and insists that she take Colton to her parents' house until it gets figured out. They would leave at the end of the week. Jack understands. He wants his family to be safe.

Lahey is excited the next morning. He can barely contain it as he teaches, his mutterings even more nonsensical than usual. While the confused students leave, Mason confronts him and gets Jack to confess that he's made a discovery that could change the face of the science world as they know it. He calls it the Alpha Reactor. It could get him a Nobel Prize, a billion dollar grant, a space station for all he knows. It will make him a lot of money. He's too excited to see the look of jealousy in Mason's eyes. Once Erik leaves in a rush, Erik Mason sits in the professor's chair, leaning back as he schemes.

For once in a long while, Jack sits upstairs in the family room with his son, playing with a model solar system set. He smiles, genuinely happy, his wife reading in an armchair happy as well. Bags are packed and sitting by the front door, ready to be loaded into the car. Then the doorbell rings and Jack answers it. It's a man he's never seen before. He stands there a moment, silent, then he raises a mobile phone with a picture of Jack on the screen. He puts the phone next to Jack's face, who's more than a little confused. Once he's figured the picture matches the man, he punches him square in the jaw, sending him to the floor unconscious.

When Jack wakes up, he's in his lab, his hands ziptied behind him. The man who assaulted him is there, leaning against a counter and fiddling with a soldering gun. But it's a man across the room who speaks first. He looks surprisingly docile, dressed nicely and easy on the eyes. He identifies himself as DAMON RYKER. The name rings a bell, more than one bell for Jack. The man's reputation is rampant at the university. He has a grasp on many of the brightest students, coercing them to work for him to make his drug manufacturing scheme run smoothly, not to mention the ties that he has to the state government and Congress. Jack didn't understand why he was targeted, and really only cares about his family.

Ryker wants the reactor. He needs the professor to tell him everything there is to know about it, so that whomever he sells it to can use it properly. He has no interest in keeping it for himself, he really doesn't even care what it does. He simply wants to make money from it. He also has no interest in letting Jack go until he gets the information. Jack refuses to comply, insisting he doesn't know enough about it himself. That gets him a beating. Upstairs, his

family is sequestered on the couch, guarded by a pair of thugs. They can't hear what's happening in the lab below.

Ryker takes a break from watching Jack get tortured to send a text. The message thanks the receiver for the tip and there would be a reward for such a helpful idea. As he sends the text, his head henchman pokes at the device, sending an unstable ripple through the orb. Suddenly the entire house shakes. The orb wobbles dangerously and starts to shrink. It suddenly implodes, decimating the henchman and sending everyone to the ground. Jack tries to escape in the commotion and doesn't succeed. He uses this event as proof that the Alpha isn't stable enough to move, let alone sell to the highest bidder.

It's dinner time. The thugs make a bunch of stuff from the freezer, a pizza and some french fries, and Melissa and Colton upstairs are let free to eat. Colton is confused about what's happening, but he isn't about to show that he's afraid. He chats with the men, and since the boss is downstairs they let their guard down, talking back with the friendly boy. The wife is more than a little wary.

In the middle of dinner, a thug suddenly grabs Melissa and hauls her downstairs. She gets slapped around, with Jack fighting against his bonds as he watches. Ryker gives them a moment alone, to give her time to persuade her husband to cooperate. In the minute or so that they're given, he tells her to keep an eye on the bathroom. Take an extra long shower two days from then. A moment later she gets brought back upstairs. Colton is being distracted by a video game and doesn't see his mother's injuries.

Days pass by. The family fields calls from worried coworkers and family members, eventually convincing everyone they're going on a family trip. This gives Ryker room to breathe, and the torturing lightens, letting the professor recover. With the reprieve from beatings, Jack decides to give in, for the good of his family. He convinces Ryker to let him free and to continue to oversee his work until he's able to know what exactly the device can be used for.

Melissa excuses herself to take a shower. There's a guard right outside the bathroom of the master bedroom. She turns on the water but doesn't get undressed. Instead she hurries to the counter, clearing away some things to show a small flat screen monitor. It's blank. She waits.

Downstairs, Jack can hear the water running through the pipes throughout the house. He checks that he's not being too closely watched, then he moves to a smaller computer, a low-tech, outdated looking thing. On the screen is a series of old messages, like an instant messaging screen. They are almost all 'received' messages with few 'sent'. They

are from his wife, little reminders to pick Colton up from school, to wash the dishes in the sink, that she wouldn't be home until late from her office. He quickly types away a message. Back in the bathroom, Melissa sits at her vanity, waiting anxiously, watching the door. If the men knew about their little home messaging system, the whole plan would be ruined. The machine suddenly beeps and she covers it with her hands to muffle the noise. She reads the message, then reads it a second time. She clears the screen and quickly sets up everything on top of the screen to cover it again. She strips, jumping into the shower just in time for the guard to barrel his way into the room. He doesn't find anything there but an angry Melissa, screaming at him to leave her alone. He leaves and she finishes her shower grinning.

There's a sudden alert upstairs, and Damon goes to check on it. It's not Melissa and Jack's plan alerting the thugs though. Miles Argent is at the door, looking suspiciously at the house. Damon answers, pretending to be Jack's brother, watching the house while the family was away. Argent is more than a little suspicious. But Damon is charming and invites the man in. Once he's over the threshold and the door is closed, Damon shoots the man and leaves the body in the front corridor.

Damon goes to tell Jack the news, that now with addition of the murder, the clock was running faster and he would have even less time to get what's needed. If he isn't ready to do business in 48 hours, he'd have to take drastic steps.

Very soon after, a car arrives at the house. West, the menacing student in Professor Lahey's class, walks right inside, sees the body, and heads right downstairs, obviously unhappy. There's a dead department head at the front door and they weren't even close to being able to sell the device off. On top of that, West was under the impression that this would be his first big operation, finally stepping out of the shadow of his father. He has the brains for it. He just needs the boost that would come from his father letting him take the reins. But Damon decides that this task is much too big for West. There's no trust between them, even though Damon is more than a little aware of West's intelligence.

Damon sets his son to the task of watching over Melissa as she puts Colton to bed and gets ready for bed herself. While alone, she manages to get West to open up a bit about his feelings towards his father and the business he runs. Although West is big, he never enjoyed playing sports, although his father forced him to play football and wrestling nearly his whole life. He doesn't enjoy the bully he's become, but he admits feeling like being a thug is in his blood. Melissa implants the idea that maybe it is time to take his life into his own hands. West goes to sleep

thinking about this.

Jack spends the next couple days in the lab, working diligently. He studies the reactor. He makes calculations, using advanced looking machines that make measurements and designates what the orb was exactly. Ryker stands back and lets him work, watching him curiously. The couple questions that he asks gets answered with excited, complicated explanations. The questions stop coming after a while.

"This is your fault! All your damn fault!"

West slams Erik down onto the professor's desk, the empty lecture hall making the sound of his back hitting the wood echo loudly. Erik groans in pain, coughing and sputtering confusedly. He doesn't take responsibility, he was told that if he discovered anything while in his position at the university to report it straight to Mr. Ryker. West tells him what's happened with Professor Argent, which throws Erik into a guilty panic. West doesn't want to be in this mess, it's gone too far and is too close to home for him. He just wants to get through university and get out of his father's business once and for all. West urges Erik to do the right thing and go to the authorities, to confess what's happened, but he's a coward. He's too fearful of the consequences to do that.

Melissa gets taken aside by Ryker and told matter-of-factly that if the transaction goes smoothly and he gets the money he wants, they would be let free, unharmed. She doesn't believe a word of that.

It's a quiet night. Jack has 24 hours left before the clock runs out. The crime lord has no idea that Jack has learned all he could for the moment, with the instruments he had to use. He's merely stalling, waiting for Melissa to make the first move of their plan for escape. All she needs to do is get down the street to the closest neighbor they have. Suddenly all the pieces are in place and the plan begins. It starts with a small fire in the kitchen, where Melissa just happens to be cooking, forced to make dinner for all the men. The pan of hot oil springs up in flames, and when two men run to help put it out, she flings the oil on them, sending them screaming in pain to the floor.

Below, the ruckus is heard and Damon sends everyone upstairs to see what's going on. Suddenly a machine swings its arm around, its heavy metal drill knocking right into Ryker's head, knocking him out. Jack makes his way out of the window, dragging himself outside to wait by Colton's bedroom window, where the boy is supposed to be waiting. However, this doesn't happen. After a moment, it's apparent the plan hasn't worked. Jack goes around the house, where Ryker is standing, blood running down his face, holding Colton with

a pistol against his head. He's beyond angry. Jack gets knocked down and dragged back down to the lab, where it's made clear that an escape wouldn't happen again. Jack gives in once again, admitting he was ready to give the reactor away.

It's the dead of night in Colorado, and five screens are being set up to transmit live feeds all over the earth to black market buyers whose identities remain secure and secret until the device is bought. Slowly but surely the screens power up and show the men and women on the other ends, diplomats from untrusted countries and crime lords looking to barter with their native government using the reactor as a bargaining chip. Ryker introduces the professor, who is made to wheel out the device and start it, getting very interested reactions from everyone.

Jack looks at the screens, hesitating for a long moment, playing with the ring on his finger before starting to speak. The Alpha Reactor generates power from the environment around it, sucking in matter from organic organisms as well as certain elements and reorganises it to create a fully self-sustaining life force. This is where he pauses, looking at the device warily. He then reveals that the orb that is created consumes carbon dioxide and emits oxygen. This has its desired effect on Damon and the rest of the group. The weight of such an object is understood without words.

There was a catch though. The energy it takes to sustain something like this for a long period of time, longer than 24 hours, is massive. It is more than the professor has at his disposal and he warns that the amount needed to create an even larger reactor and orb may reach dangerous, unstable levels. He looks back towards where Ryker's man was killed, no trace of him left around. Ryker dismisses it as a technicality, and pushes for the bidding to start, base price of a billion dollars.

The bidding goes on, and after a while only two people are bidding. The price goes higher and higher, until finally one person gives in, letting the other win the auction at 200 billion dollars. The large amount makes Jack weary and he asks Ryker to reveal who is it whom won. The man behind the screen wasn't anyone recognizable, but he speaks with an American accent which puts Jack on edge. He had sold this to his own country, that 200 billion had to come from somewhere and he knew that this whole situation was risky. He is told to pack up the device once it is agreed on how the exchange would go. This would be the last time Jack saw his invention.

Damon is too busy celebrating the money he would be getting when suddenly the power goes out and the house starts to

shake. The Alpha has been powered up, with Jack standing next to it, the controls in his hands. Weapons are drawn and aimed at him, but as the men step closer, the power surges higher, making them retreat in fear. Jack threatens to blow the entire place up if everyone doesn't leave right away. Damon reminds him about his family upstairs, which makes Jack pause, torn between his options. The power keeps building and the men step back, fearing the worst. Then as soon as it started, the energy recedes back into the reactor and the room is left in relative darkness. When the lights come back on, the center of the device is in Jack's hands, raised over his head.

"I can't let this happen... I can't..."

As he brings the thin, octagonal metal disc down to smash over his knee, he's shot. Three bullets pierce him before he falls to the ground. Damon rushes forward, searching for the core, the vital part of Lahey's invention. He can't find it, until he turns the professor over. The disc is clasped over his chest, where a bullet has gone straight through the metal and into him. He grins, knowing exactly what kind of sacrifice he's made. Damon is furious. He's just about to shoot the man in the head and put him out of his misery when suddenly there is a SWAT team bursting into the lab, taking down a couple thugs before the rest surrender. Ryker gets handcuffed and is being led away as he swears he'll be back, that this isn't over.

"I very much doubt that, Mr. Ryker. Seeing as the Alpha Reactor belongs to the United States Government now."

The man standing next to the reactor, watching as medics take care of Jack, who is bleeding badly and barely conscious, is the same man from the screen, the man who won the auction. He picks up the ruined, bloody reactor core, turning it over in his hands. He remarks out loud that they'll need to make a replacement for it ASAP.

"Over my dead body..."

Jack gasps out the words as his body trembles and he closes his eyes. He stills, his chest no longer rising and falling. This clearly pisses the government man off, and he sends agents around the lab to search for the blueprints and calculations for the reactor. He doesn't know that Lahey had wiped all the memory from the computer system and had destroyed any kind of paper trail.

The body is covered and wheeled out the front door, where Melissa covers Colton's eyes so he doesn't have to see. She's already crying, and she kneels to hug her son, crying out of confusion and fear.

There's a tap on her shoulder, and she looks up to see Erik Mason standing there. He apologises and hands her the envelope. Once it's handed over, he gets led away to a cop car, his hands being handcuffed. She looks at the large envelope and doesn't open it right away. She brings Colton to his room to put him to sleep. Only there does she open it. Inside is a handwritten letter from Jack, along with his leather notebook. She cries again as she reads the letter. He writes that he hopes Colton can continue his work when he's older, to make the world a better place like he had tried to. He begs Melissa to keep the notebook secret, especially from whomever had killed him. Just then, the government agent comes in, asking if he could ask her a couple questions. She agrees, slipping the notebook under Colton's pillow as she kisses his forehead and leaves the room. The boy sleeps peacefully, exhausted.