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The Magnus Protocol

**Episode 21
"Breaking Ground"**

**Written by Jonathan Sims
Edited by Alexander J Newell**

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Draft 1.3**

ANNOUNCER

This episode is dedicated to Elena.
Thank you to The Magnus Archives
for showing me an asexual character
who fell in love and keeping me sane
during lockdown.

[Intro Theme]

ANNOUNCER

Rusty Quill Presents: The Magnus
Protocol.
Episode Twenty-One – Breaking
Ground.

[Music]

1. INT. OIAR BREAKROOM – NIGHT, DRIZZLING (CCTV)

SAM sits staring quietly out the window.
Celia enters.

CELIA

Enjoying the rain?

SAM

More drizzle, really.

CELIA

Yeah. Coffee?

SAM

Got one thanks.

CELIA

How about a coffee you haven't let
get stone cold?

SAM

(smiling)

I'm good thanks.

CELIA sits.
SAM takes a sip and regrets it.

CELIA

Look I know what Alice said got to you but it's only because she cares.

SAM

I know.

CELIA

I do too, we all do. Well, maybe not Lena...

SAM

You barely know me.

CELIA

Maybe. Then again maybe digging into sinister secrets together boosts you up the old affection track a bit.

SAM

(smiling)

Yeah, maybe.

CELIA

But that's not it, is it?

SAM

Not entirely. It's more... what if she's right?

CELIA

About stopping with the Institute stuff?

SAM

About working for the OIAR. I know Alice can square it with her whole "everything's-evil-in-late-stage-

capitalism” thing, but I don’t know if I can.

CELIA

You thinking of quitting?

SAM

Maybe. Whatever weird, creepy stuff is going on I’m really starting to doubt we’re on the right side of it.

CELIA

I suppose there’s plenty of non-evil jobs out there for a smart, charming guy like you. Maybe *not* law but...

SAM

Hah. No I, uh... I couldn’t go back.

CELIA

If you get desperate there’s always the old “beep-beep”.

SAM

Beep-beep?

CELIA

Checkout.

SAM

Ah, yeah. Well that’s the real question isn’t it? Does my desire not to actively promote evil outweigh my fear of disappointing my parents?

CELIA

That’s a tough one. Maybe you could stay and try to make things better from the inside?

SAM

Of course. Because that's such a traditionally surefire way to achieve change.

CELIA

Might still be better than living in London on a retail wage.

SAM

True.

(sighing)

For now, I'm probably just going to stay and keep digging. No sense quitting until I have a better idea of what's going on and if I get fired for it, well... that works too, I guess.

CELIA

And if it turns out its as dangerous as Alice says?

SAM

Yeah, well, if like a psycho goat-monster or something tries kills me, I'll definitely quit.

CELIA

Good policy.

SAM sips his coffee again and remembers why he isn't drinking it.

SAM

And you?

CELIA

I couldn't afford to leave even if I wanted to.

SAM

Sure. But something else is bothering you. Has been ever since we met.

CELIA

Hmmmm.

SAM

You want to talk about it?

CELIA

Not really.

SAM

Fair enough.

CELIA

(hesitant)

Let's just say I have a... complicated immigration status.

SAM

Really? Surprised the Civil Service didn't pick that one up.

CELIA

I think the OIAR might be a bit less rigorous than the other branches. Anyway, if I had to go back, I couldn't take Jack with me but staying with him means I have some difficult decisions to make.

Beat.

SAM

Look, Celia, if there's anything, *anything*, I can do to help you and Jack...

CELIA

You really mean that.

SAM

I do.

CELIA

Thanks Sam. I'll keep that in mind.

Pause.

They embrace.

CELIA

Well, if neither of us is quitting we should probably get back.

SAM

Yeah, institutional evil doesn't just grow on trees right?

They chuckle halfheartedly as the joke dies painfully.

2. CYBERSPACE – N/A, N/A (CASE READING)

CHESTER

From the desk of Mr. Leonardo Kennings ACCA, co-treasurer of the Magnus Institute, Manchester to his esteemed brethren of the same.

My most distinguished colleagues, By now, I'm sure you have all read the proposal in detail and made your own personal assessments of the formulae and calculations submitted by Dr Welling and his team. I wouldn't for a moment criticise the fine work they've done, or the compelling case they've made for the potential transmutative

properties of the dome, nor do I believe they are mistaken about the potential power we might be able to harness were we to sponsor an exhibit of our own there. I cannot however, in good conscience support the project as it has been laid out, nor do believe it is a useful expenditure of the Institute's significant, but certainly not infinite, financial and political resources.

I have spoken before about my concerns over the choice of the millennium as the date for our grand experiment. I do accept, to a certain degree, Dr Welling's proposition that the turning of the millennium is an important psychological focus of transmutation, thanks to the cultural emphasis of change placed upon the shifting of an "age". That said, I still believe that determining the date should be the province of the astrological, not the cultural. The constellations have played a key role in our researches for centuries, and I fully reject the notion that they should be dismissed as irrelevant to the Great Work in such a way as the Christian god has been summarily discarded.

It should be kept in mind that the year 2000 has no relevance for cultures that do not use the Gregorian calendar, of which there are many. It means nothing to the Chinese, Indian or Hebrew calendars, and thus excludes vast

swathes of the global population from our equations. The stars, by contrast, are eternal and near unchanging thereby providing a far more stable base for a project that has always been conceived of as a universal transmutation.

I understand, of course, that this particular debate is one that myself and those who think as I do have long since lost and I do not wish to re-awaken old schisms when a unity of purpose is so profoundly vital to the success of our endeavors at this time. Nonetheless, I believe it is worth raising once again in relation specifically to the Millenium Exhibition proposal, as to go forward with this would tie our intentions even more irrevocably to this conception of Gregorian dates as having true and meaningful significance.

Even beyond this, admittedly more abstract consideration, I believe that the Dome project is almost uniquely dangerous to our work as a place of power.

The calculations provided by Dr Welling and his team presuppose that any outputs from the site will be broadly balanced; that as a symbol of the future it captures both optimism and despair – the belief in a better world and the terror that a new millennium will bring nothing except new ways to suffer. It is *my*

belief, however, that the actual balance of energies involved will be profoundly skewed towards the fearful and despairing thus invalidating the majority of the calculations provided by Dr Welling and his team.

Public support for the Dome is limited, at best, and the stated plans hardly inspire confidence in its utopian ideals. Even beyond this however, Dr Welling's calculations have failed to account for aspects of stagnation.

This modern social and political order, following the fall of the USSR, has taken root in the popular imagination as a natural and final state of society with an emergent and inherent stability. The turning of the millennium is therefore felt as an "end of history" to borrow a term, and in this context the Dome may be seen as a monument to this order. A full stop. Not to mention a desperate cry for relevance from an imperial power locked in a death-spiral of diminishing importance.

If my suspicions on these points are correct, these echoes of stagnation, almost entirely antithetical to our transformative ambitions, make the exhibition profoundly unsuitable to be utilized in the work.

And this is not to mention the location problem as I believe it may

already be in the process of developing into a locus without our intervention.

You are familiar with the peninsular on the which the edifice is to be constructed – Dr Welling et al explained it in the proposal, though not in great detail. Specifically, I would note that they rather glossed over its history as a gas works, and the incredible levels of soil toxicity that still remain in the area, currently the focus of much of the building and land reclamation efforts that will ultimately allow for the Dome’s construction.

Knowing this proposal was forthcoming, and suspecting that it would elide this particular concern, I myself made the journey down to London some weeks ago to personally inspect the site. I still have connections and clout enough to have a tour arranged on my behalf and what I saw there troubled me deeply.

The laborers were in poor shape – grey faced with blank expressions as they shifted barrows of dirt and shovelled sodden earth with such rhythmic defeat that were it not for the bright yellow of the excavators and the omnipresent fluorescent waistcoats I might have believed it an etching of some grim Victorian salt mine.

Their fingernails were cracked and dirty, their voices were hoarse and their words often gave way to ragged bouts of coughing. I had not previously considered that there might be any need of mask or respirator but shortly after my arrival I found myself surreptitiously holding my handkerchief to my mouth and nose, if only to lessen the pervasively acrid smell.

The foreman, a spritely young man whose weak moustache gave him the air of an overambitious school prefect, was talking excitedly about the engineering of the building, about struts and sheets and material loads but when I asked him how long he expected the dome to stay up. He went quiet for a moment, then told me he wasn't sure. "Could be there forever!" he said, with an odd manic edge to his voice. "Or it could be gone in a year. You just... never know. Do you? You never know what's coming."

Something about the way he articulated this thought, this clearly disordered conception of the future, sat rather ill with me. I began to develop another suspicion, that the contaminants of the place were not simply chemical in nature, but may have contained a more psychical poison.

To be clear, had that been the extent of what I observed I would not be so

vociferous in my opposition to Dr Welling's proposal. Unfortunately, it very much was not.

Following my guide's strange comments, I began to hang back somewhat from the rest of the group, attempting to make my own determinations without the consideration of being watched. I espied a worker operating one of the concrete mixers that arrested my attention. He was of East-Asian descent, Pakistani I believe, and his face was locked on the aperture of the mixer, spinning round and round as though hypnotized by the motion. There was no-one else in sight, and it seemed to me as though the din of industry and construction had faded somewhat, like it were muted as he stood in his senseless reverie.

Abruptly, he turned and walked over to a nearby ditch that was in the process of being dug out for the foundations. I could see the tell-tale indications of heavy metals in the earthen edges of it, but he took no precautions as he hopped down into it and began to stare at the wall of the trench as transfixed as he had been at the mixer.

Were I writing for a less learned and experienced audience I might take some time here to caveat my reliability and sanity, but given none of us are strangers to the strangeness of our work I will speak

plainly of what I saw for the sake of brevity.

From the dirt of the wall emerged the same man as was standing before it. He clawed his way out slowly, painfully, as though it were a grave but this second version of the worker was not identical. His hair was white, his skin wrinkled and pitted with age and illness and his every movement slowed with the agony of infirmity.

Were I to guess, I would say he was some forty or fifty years older than the man with whom he was twinned. The younger version, for his part, seemed to break out of whatever reverie had overtaken him, with an expression of purest terror crossed his face.

He moved to scream, but before he could utter more than the most perfunctory of cries, the older, or perhaps newer version of him depending upon one's perspective, covered the original's mouth with gnarled and twisted fingers. Despite his, or perhaps its, apparent age, this elderly copy was clearly possessed of enormous strength, and was easily able to pull the young construction worker towards the dirt wall from which it had emerged. The struggle was grim and desperate, but not particularly lengthy, and in less than a minute both had vanished into the polluted ground. The last thing I

**saw of them both being the poor
young man's horrified eyes
disappearing into the darkness and
mud.**

**I rejoined my guide without comment
and had no other encounters worth
noting here during my visit beyond
the general malaise induced by the
site of which I have previously
spoken.**

**It should be clear enough, then, why
I felt compelled to write in opposition
to Dr Welling and his team's
proposal to become involved with
the Millenium Exhibition and the
Dome that is to house it. It is my firm
belief that not only is this site
already on its own journey to
become a decidedly hostile locus,
but that the future it represents, and
that we are being pushed to
incorporate into our grand ritual, is
unfit being so profoundly and
irrevocably poisoned.**

**I thank my brethren for their time
considering these letters and wish
them insight in their works.**

3. INT. OIAR OFFICES – NIGHT, DRIZZLING (COMPUTER)

ALICE sits in front of SAM's computer.

ALICE

**You bastard. You wanted him to read
this, didn't you? Just slipped it into
his caseload, all subtle like and**

**waited for him to hear it. Well not
this time.**

ALICE deletes the case despite the computer's objections.

ALICE

(leaning close)

**I see what you're doing. Trying to
lead him on, feeding his obsessions.
Colin was right about you. What do
you want? Hmmm? Who's in there?**

The computer is silent.

LENA

Alice?

ALICE

Ah!

LENA

**May I ask why you are investigating
Sam's terminal?**

ALICE

**Oh er, Sam was having an issue with
it earlier, same errors as mine and
since Colin's still not around I
thought I would give it a quick go,
see if I couldn't copy Gwen's
solution for him.**

LENA

**I see. And I presume that Sam
consented to your intervention?**

ALICE

Oh er, yeah. Yes.

LENA

Well regardless he really shouldn't be sharing terminal access like this. It's a security risk.

ALICE

I'll er- let him know when he gets back.

LENA

Please do. In the meantime I would suggest you return to your own terminal. We wouldn't want these technical issues to put you behind your own caseload now would we?

ALICE

(moving seats)

Er yeah, sure. Can I er- Can I speak freely for a moment?

LENA

Do you ever not?

ALICE

Fair but look, serious talk a moment, we're going to struggle to keep on top of everything without Colin. Everything keeps breaking and we don't know the first thing about fixing it.

LENA

Interesting. If anything my data seems to indicate the system is actually functioning slightly better without his interferences.

ALICE

Oh well I don't know about that.

LENA

No. You wouldn't.

Beat.

ALICE

Well, I should probably-

LENA

Have you heard from Gwen tonight?

ALICE

What? No. Why, should I have?

LENA

It's nothing. I simply wondered if you had heard from her tonight. She is late returning from her assignment.

ALICE

Some things up. You look worried. You never look worried.

LENA

Only about your caseload after all these interruptions.

ALICE

(unconvinced)

Of course.

ALICE gets back to work.

LENA

(departing)

Do let me know if Gwen contacts you.

ALICE

Will do.

LENA departs.

ALICE CONT.

(to computer)

What did you do?

Freddy pings obnoxiously in response.

**4. EXT. ALLEY BEHIND ABANDONED WAREHOUSE – NIGHT,
DRIZZLING (GWEN’S PHONE)**

Gwen is running hard, her breathing is ragged as she hits the exit door of the warehouse and plunges out into the alley behind. She stops, looking around frantically.

INK5OUL

(pursuing)

Come back little canvas...

GWEN

Get away from me!

INK5OUL

What to give you? I’m thinking trash polka, but I’d never want to impose my own taste on a client...

Gwen starts running again. She starts to dial into her phone, but fumbles it, and we (listening through the phone) tumble to the floor. Gwen picks it up again and starts trying to dial again.

GWEN

Shit. Shit!

INK5OUL

You sound like someone who might have a family crest. Maybe we could riff on that? Or perhaps a silver spoon done across the face?

Gwen is running again. Ink5oul is having a great time.

INK5OUL

Choices, choices...

Gwen rounds a corner to see a man in the distance, lighting a cigarette.

GWEN

Hey! HEY!!

BYSTANDER

Hm?

GWEN

Help! You've got to help me!

The bystander immediately focuses on Gwen.

BYSTANDER

Woah, woah what's up love? Calm down, are you alright?

GWEN

(panting)

Trying... to Kill me... Call...

Ink5oul rounds the corner.

BYSTANDER

(to Ink5oul)

Oi you! Back off.

Ink5oul laughs quietly.

BYSTANDER

(cont'd)

I'm warning you!

INK5OUL

Nice ink. Barbed wire is that?

BYSTANDER

What?

INK5OUL

Boring but not badly done. Looks so sharp you could cut yourself...

BYSTANDER
Wha-AAAAAHHHHH!

The tattoo begins to saw through the bystander's arm. His arm drops to the ground. Then so does he, still screaming.

GWEN
Oh god!

GWEN drops her phone.

INK5OUL
**Don't worry. We'll get you something
much more... unique.**

Gwen takes off running, disappearing into the rain. **Ink5oul** follows, chuckling.
The phone finally gives up the ghost.

5. EXT. A BACK ALLEY – NIGHT, DRIZZLE (TAPE RECORDER)

A tape recorder clicks on in an empty back alley on a miserable night.
Eventually running feet approach before **GWEN** slams into a chainlink fence.

GWEN
(panting)
No! Nonononono!

She looks around desperately for an escape but finds nothing.

INK5OUL
**End of the road, Princess Civil
Service.**

GWEN
Please... Please don't...

INK5OUL

You know, when you first walked in, I was just going to give you a bit of ink. Something small to keep you up at night. But now? Now we're going to have to get creative. Tell me, how do you feel about scorpions?

They grab Gwen's arm, and she starts to gasp in pain as ink begins to seep onto it to the distinct sound of scorpions.

Ink5oul laughs but then Gwen begins monologuing, the words pouring out of her unstopably like a river. She is alarmed but cannot stop.

**GWEN
(Compelled)**

When I was a little girl there was a shed at the bottom of the garden that I was always told never to go inside. There were tools and sharp and deadly things-

-that were not right, too dangerous for a little girl. But then one year we lost the gardener to another house and the new one brought everything they needed in the van so the shed was locked up tight-

-and sealed against any nosy children who would think that something in there might be rusty toys for

Ink5oul

What- What are you talking about?

What are you doing?

Alright stop! Stop it!

Enough I said.

Shut up!

Shut!

Stop Talking!

**playing without the fear
they needed-**

A Figure emerges, shrouded in a cloak of whispers.

**GWEN
(Compelled)
-at what damage such
sharp metal can inflict
on uncaredful flesh-**

**INK5OUL
You did this.
Well stop it, she's mine.**

**The Figure continues to emerge, a nightmarish specter of an
older world, slowly enveloping Ink5oul's brash bravado.**

**GWEN
(Compelled)
-it took no more
than the smallest
push to break it
open and inside
spilled out
teeming swarms
of writhing bone-
white maggots**

**INK5OUL
No I found this
one.**

**[ERROR]
MINE.**

**GWEN
(Compelled)
flesh poured
forth from the
rotted fox that
must have come
in through the
window seeking
warmth not
death**

**INK5OUL
Dammit fine!**

**[ERROR]
ALL OF THEM, MINE.**

Ink5oul reluctantly releases GWEN. She sprints away still gabbling as she flees.

GWEN (Compelled) -instead finding only putrescence seeping squirming reaching for me as I-	INK5oul Go get her then.
---	---

The Figure does not move.

INK5OUL CONT.
Didn't you hear me freak? She's all
yours.

Beat. The Figure turns to Ink5oul.

[ERROR]
THERE IS MORE.

INK5OUL
Not here there isn't.

The Figure breathes deeply, a strange and disconcerting sound, enveloped in pained whispers.

[ERROR]
NO. NOT HERE. ELSWHERE...

The Figure recedes.

INK5OUL
Yeah, whatever. Manky old git.

Beat.

INK5OUL

**(reaching to the tape
recorder)**

Oi, you left your- Argh! Mother Fu-

The tape recorder bites Ink5oul before clicking off.

[Music]

ANNOUNCER

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**The series is created by Jonathan
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**This episode was written by
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Vettese, soundscaping by Meg
McKellar, and mastering by
Catherine Rinella with music by Sam
Jones.**

**It featured Billie Hindle as Alice Dyer,
Shahan Hamza as Samama Khalid,
Anusia Battersby as Gwen Bouchard
Lowri Ann Davies as Celia Ripley,
Sarah Lambie as Lena Kelley, with
additional voices from Jonathan
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**The Magnus Protocol is produced by
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Thanks for listening.**

The Magnus Protocol 21 – Breaking Ground

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Architecture (landmark) -/- corruption (entropy)

Incident Elements:

- Live Burial
- Rapid Aging
- Doppelgangers
- Compulsions (supernatural)
- Mentions of: strangulation
- SFX: tattoo buzzing, screaming

Transcripts: <https://shorturl.at/qzF15>

This episode is dedicated to Elena, thank you for your generous support! You can a complete list of our Kickstarter backers <https://rustyquill.com/the-magnus-protocol-supporter-wall/>

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Featuring (in order of appearance)

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Shahan Hamza as Samama Khalid

Billie Hindle as Alice Dyer

Sarah Lambie as Lena Kelley

Anusia Battersby as Gwendolyn Bouchard

Vera Chok as Ink5oul

Callum Dougherty as Bystander

Beth Eyre as [ERROR]

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Jonathan Sims as Chester

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Sound Designer – Tessa Vroom
Mastering Editor - Catherine Rinella**

**Music by Sam Jones (orchestral mix by Jake Jackson)
Art by April Sumner**

**SFX from ecfike, khenshom, NuclearTape and previously
credited artists**

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