

The Magnus Protocol

Episode 47 "Repetitive Strain"

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

[Intro Theme]

ANNOUNCER
Rusty Quill Presents: The Magnus
Protocol.
Episode Forty-Seven – Repetitive
Strain

[Music]

1. OIAR OFFICE INT (COMPUTER), INT. NIGHT, CLEAR

CELIA arrives at the office harried and tired. She gets to her desk, dumps her bags and hurriedly boots up her computer. She sits and logs on then takes a deep steadying breath.

GWEN knocks on her office window.

CELIA gives a deeply frustrated sigh, then starts to stand and head to the manager's office.

2. MANAGER'S OFFICE (LANDLINE), INT., NIGHT, CLEAR

CELIA enters. She heads over and sits, irritable but not going full-'Alice' yet.

Beat.

GWEN
Please remember to knock before
coming into my office Celia.

CELIA
(incredulous)
You were the one who called me in
here.

GWEN
Nevertheless...

CELIA
(snapping)
Nevertheless what Gwen?

Beat.

GWEN
Anyway, I've called you in here
because this is the second time this
week you've turned up late-

CELIA
Look, can we just not? Not tonight,
please?

Beat.

GWEN
Now I know we're all feeling the
strain at the moment, but that just
means it's even more important that
we do our jobs properly-

CELIA
(snapping)
And what exactly is your job Gwen?
Because while I am out there sorting
everyone's caseloads on my own,
you just seem to be sat in here
twiddling your thumbs watching
everything go to hell.

GWEN
I am not twiddling my thumbs!

CELIA
No, sometimes you get up and pace
aimlessly. I can see from here you
haven't even checked your
messages yet.

Beat.

GWEN
(condescending)
Is everything okay at home Celia?

CELIA
(standing)
We're done here.

GWEN
I decide when we're done.

There is a dangerous silence.

GWEN
(Cont. backing off)
Just... try not to let it happen again.

CELIA snorts and heads out closing the door hard behind her.

Beat.

GWEN pulls the blinds aside to watch **CELIA** sit back down.

Beat.

GWEN sighs frustrated then presses the voicemail on her landline.

INKSOUL
(on phone)
Hey. This is Ink5oul, I'm after Lena Kelley, got your card from your assistant girl before she legged it. I've been thinking and... Maybe I overreacted. I'm in a better place now, so I thought "Why not? Let's hear the offer." So yeah, call me back if you're still interested.

Pause. **GWEN** considers, then reluctantly pulls out a paper file. She then calls Ink5oul via the landline.

It rings a couple of times.

Ink5oul answers, it sounds like they are working again.

INK5OUL

What.

GWEN

Hi is that uh... Grace-

INK5OUL

Who's asking?

GWEN

This is Gwendolyn Bouchard -

INK5OUL

Never heard of ya.

GWEN

**You chased me out of your
warehouse? You killed man with his
own tattoos in front of me?**

INK5OUL

Doesn't ring a bell.

GWEN

(impatient)

I'm with the O.I.A.R.

INK5OUL

**Oh! The trash polka princess, how
you doing? You changed your mind
about the ink?**

GWEN

**What? No I- I'm calling about the
contract I offered you-**

INK5OUL

**You're gonna have to speak up. I'm
working-**

There is a cry/whimper from her end of the call.

INK5OUL

(cont.)

One sec-

Ink5oul silences her client with a gristly snap, waits a moment, then returns to tattooing.

INK5OUL

Sorry, where were we?

GWEN

The contract-

INK5OUL

Oh right yeah, so last time I was in a real 'I alone bear the curse' kind of era, but turns out there's loads of us out here! And a bunch of them do gigs for you guys, and they totally talked me round. So yeah, just bring the paperwork over and I'll get it signed and we can get started.

GWEN

I'm afraid I can't do that.

INK5OUL stops tattooing.

INK5OUL

You what?

GWEN

We don't have a contract for you.

INK5OUL

Is this about the whole warehouse thing? You don't need to get all bent out of shape, I told you, I was in a bad place. I'm doing much better now.

GWEN

The contract is closed.

Beat.

The dubstep abruptly stops. Ink5oul is really listening now.

INK5OUL

Say again?

GWEN

(prim)

The woman who wanted to contract you has been fired. The O.I.A.R. is under new management and that means no more work for unstable Externals. No more free victims and special favors. I'm in charge now and we're going to be doing things properly, my way.

INK5OUL

(close)

Who the fuck are you calling unstable?

GWEN

(satisfied)

You don't need to get all "bent out of shape" about it.

Ominous beat.

INK5OUL

(threatening)

Right. And what do I tell the others?

GWEN

(holding fast)

Tell them... Tell them the buffet is closed.

INK5OUL
(too close, laughing
dangerously)
Oh, I'll tell them.

They laugh dangerously.

INK5OUL
(cont.)
You have no idea... You are so
completely fu- -

GWEN hangs up.

She takes a deep steadying breath-

-before she is startled by her PC pinging with a new case.

GWEN
Oh for christ's sake!

She opens the case.

3. CYBERSPACE (COMPUTER), N/A, N/A

NORRIS
HMP Downview (Surrey) internal
records.

**Notice to Prisoner– Restriction of
Communications**

Prisoner Details

Surname: Lively

Forename: Sarah

Date of Birth: 17-06-1985

Prison: HMP Downview

Establishment: Same

Cell Location: Wing C, Cell 17

Restricted Person Details

Surname: Jex

Forename: Eleanor Sophia

Restriction Details

Time Period: 06-05-2024

Contact: Written Letter

**Grounds for Restriction: Victim
Harassment**

Communication reads:

Sarah Lively

**You have been restricted from
contacting the above-mentioned
person on the following ground(s):**

Victim Harassment

**The decision to restrict you from
contacting this individual has not
been taken lightly as our
establishment is committed to
maintaining ties with family and
friends.**

**Restriction of communications is not
part of any form of punishment, but
we are committed to make our**

establishment a safe and secure environment for prisoners, visitors, and staff and to safeguard the public where necessary. The restriction will be reviewed on (01-09-2024).

You may appeal against this decision by using The Formal Complaints procedure available on your residential unit for the attention of the Head of Security and Operations.

A digitised copy of this message and the attached letter will be held in your permanent record.

**Regards,
Adder M. K.
HMP Downview – Security Manager**

Attachment Reads:

Hi El.

I don't know why I am writing this. There is no way they'll let it through security and even if they do there's no way you would open it. Why would you?

But I need to write this, I need something somewhere that says what actually happened even if no one ever believes it. So, if by some miracle you're reading this then I need you to know, I'm not sorry. I'm sorry for hurting you, I'm sorry that you had to go through all this awfulness, I'm sorry that I broke your

family but I'm not sorry for what I did. Your brother deserved what happened and I think you know that even if you can't believe it right now.

I'd been going to Therapy for six months when I decided to get a tattoo. I needed an anchor, something concrete I could look at, something he couldn't pretend didn't happen because it would be right there, reminding me of myself. At least, that was the idea.

I don't care what Dr. Sutcliffe said in court though, it wasn't an impulse decision. Sutcliff had discussed it with me weeks beforehand and had even made fill in a questionnaire about it. There's no way I could even have gotten a walk-in session with someone like Ink5oul, it doesn't work like that! They could have told you that themselves if they had testified. We had this whole email chain over weeks because I wanted "this too shall pass" and she kept saying she needed "creative freedom." That is, until I agreed to pay double.

I'd have copies of all of this and more if David hadn't deleted my accounts. Not that it would make a difference.

I went to their pop-up studio and got the work done and it looked good, great even, although it hurt far worse than my first tattoo. They said I shouldn't cover it but obviously I had

to hide it.

I got home all right and even managed to keep it secret at first but that evening he grabbed my forearm. It hurt like hell and I cried out. Then... well it went about as well as you would expect.

I don't know why that was the night I left him. Something about him smearing my tattoo, the one thing that was meant to be outside his power, it hurt, more than just my arm. The fine linework was already coming apart and I remember thinking I couldn't imagine a more bitter reminder of why I needed to leave.

I already had a go-bag stashed in my wardrobe and jar of cash behind the loo. It was Dr. Sutcliffe who suggested that.

I was ready to feel a pull to stay, a guilt or something but the only thing I thought as I tiptoed out the front door was thank god we never had kids.

I got in the cab and just told him to start driving. He wanted to know where but I didn't know. I could barely speak. All I could say was "away, please". Then it was quiet, blissfully, almost painfully quiet, just the hum of the engine, the rain drumming on the windows and the yellow motorway lamplights

sweeping past in time with my heartbeat. Again, and again and...

When I woke up in bed with him the next morning I honestly thought I was dead. I had died in the car and now I was in hell. It was the only possible explanation that made sense to me.

I began to scream but managed to choke it back. Instead, I slipped out of bed and checked the wardrobe to find my bag exactly where it always was, my cash jar was the same. It was only when I came back in from the bathroom that David opened his eyes. Then he rolled over, and that was that, I went downstairs and made him breakfast.

After he'd left I spent the morning cleaning and tidying as always so by the time my therapy session came around I had already had hours to rationalize what happened as a dream, a vivid, cruel and traumatic dream, but a dream nonetheless. So as normal, I checked David wasn't due back, locked myself in the bathroom and dialed in to the session.

It began the same as any other but when I told Sutcliffe that I had gone for the tattoo session he suddenly interrupted to criticize such "impulsive behavior." I laughed but he was dead serious and when I mentioned the questionnaire he had

me do he just looked at me skeptically and murmured in his quiet way: “that’s not how I remember it.”

That chilled me.

I don’t know how long I sat there in the bathroom after that session just thinking or thinking about thinking or, not thinking at all. Finally, I looked down to my arm, looking for some reassurance, something permanent.

Thankfully it was still there and still hurting with the design still smeared by David the day before. The word “shall” was ruined but it was still just about legible: “this too shall... pass.”

I resolved myself to leave that night. I didn’t know what was going on with Sutcliffe but it didn’t matter. I’d always swore I would leave if he left a mark and this had to count. The nightmare was just a- a premonition.

So I went through the rest of the day as expected. Dinner was ready for when he came in, I nodded in all the right places as he complained about his day.

I waited till he started snoring then counted to five hundred so that I knew he was really gone. Then I grabbed the go-bag and the cash and slipped out again. This time I

didn't take a taxi, I just started walking.

I didn't keep track of the time but I must have been walking hours. My legs ached and my feet had blistered but I didn't care. Every step I could feel myself getting away, feel it all fading away beneath my boots. I was thinking this as I made it to some farmland not far from the M3 and leant against a fence, watching the little parcel of horizon I could see as it crept towards dawn... It was going to be a beautiful sunrise...

Then I woke up in bed. There was no falling asleep, no transition, just one moment I was stood waiting for a new day and the next I was waking up to him again.

He opened his eyes and looked deep into mine then finally muttered "What?" before rolling over. I bit my lip so hard it bled, then gently slipped out of bed and made breakfast.

David left for work early then I carried on with the chores. Eventually I went up to change the sheets, and that was when I saw the stain. A stain from a blister that had burst on my foot. A walking blister.

Seeing that stain was like someone had poured a bucket of cold water over my head. I suddenly began panting and stared down at my

tattoo hunting for that reassurance but I could barely see the words. In fact, as I stared at it the whole thing seemed to twist: Dirty, irregular and ugly lines that now read “nothing shall pass.”

I did scream then. Long and deep and loud. I screamed and screamed with rage and anger and pain. I screamed till I was hoarse and it felt like I was ripping my own throat out. Then I stopped screaming, changed the sheets and took the dirties to the washing machine.

Dinner was ready for when he came in. I nodded in all the right places as he complained about his day then after he went upstairs and fell asleep, I slipped in after him and...

I counted to 500 again after he stopped snoring, even though there was no way he was waking up. Not after losing that much blood.

I’ll be honest El, it felt so good, so unbelievably freeing to finally cut him loose knowing that there would be no consequences, no punishment, no guilt, just another reset and then everything would be like it was. I actually laughed out loud when I realized I could feel this way every single day and no one would ever know.

I decided to go for a walk afterwards. Stretch my legs, see if I could catch

**that beautiful dawn again before the
reset...**

**The police picked me up about 20
hours after you found him and called
it in. I was still waiting for the reset
that never came.**

**I'm sure you think I'm crazy. My own
therapist said as much to a jury and
all the evidence at the trial showed
the same. But even so I just need
you to know that killing your brother
wasn't my first choice. That said, I
don't regret it, even though it stuck
and there's no going back this time.
Trust me, it's better this way, I'm just
sorry I hurt you when I freed myself.**

Look after yourself El.

**With all my love
Sarah**

4. OIAR OFFICE INT (COMPUTER), INT. NIGHT, CLEAR

CELIA is at her desk working very slowly.

She is nodding off.

Eventually, her fingers still, then her breathing begins to slow.

Then her phone rings jolting her awake.

**CELIA
No! Jack!**

**She realizes where she is and shakes it off before checking her
phone then answering.**

CELIA

(cont.)

Alice?

ALICE

Hey Celia-

ALICE is at the airport. Her signal is poor.

ALICE

(cont.)

**Can you hear me? I'm in the airport
and the signals crap.**

CELIA

**No yeah, I hear you! Did you get a
flight in the end?**

ALICE

**Yeah, it was a massive ballache, but-
ah, long story, don't worry about it.**

CELIA

**I'm just glad to hear you're all good.
Sorry it didn't pan out.**

ALICE

**It wasn't a complete bust and, hey, at
least I made a terrifying new friend.
Listen, while I finally have you, have
you made any progress with Sam at
your end? I haven't been getting any
updates.**

CELIA

(evading)

**Oh, well I mean, Gwen's been
pushing me pretty hard while you've
been gone...**

ALICE

So? Push her back. Off a cliff preferably.

CELIA

I just mean I've not had much time, I'm doing four people's caseload and-

ALICE

(colder)

So what? You haven't got anything?

CELIA

I didn't say that...

ALICE

(short)

Fine, whatever. I'll be there tomorrow, bring whatever you've got and you can catch me up then.

CELIA

...Sure.

ALICE

Right. I've got to go. Talk later.

ALICE hangs up transitioning us to:

5. BERLIN AIRPORT (ALICE'S PHONE), INT. NIGHT, CLEAR

Alice angrily hangs up the phone.

HEINRICH

Alles gut¹?

ALICE

Yeah, it's fine. I'm fine. Alice good.

¹ Is everything ok?

HEINRICH
You are certain?

ALICE sighs and rubs her face, tiredly.

ALICE
It's nothing.

HEINRICH
She is not sleeping. The child is perhaps keeping her up? Little ones are always the loudest.

Beat. **ALICE** is on guard.

ALICE
What?

HEINRICH
(cont.)
Oh do not worry, Liebchen², you did not “let it slip”. You were very careful. But I can smell these things, weißt du³?

Beat.

ALICE
(small)
I won't let you hurt them.

HEINRICH
You could not stop me, but this does not matter, I do not want to harm them. You know this. I have a gift for the boy. You will take it to him.

² Dear

³ Don't you know?

ALICE

Listen, I appreciate all your help, I do, but I'm not going to give my friends kid a gift from... well...

As HEINRICH speaks he begins to loom. The airport begins to fall away revealing childhood laughter hidden in the background.

HEINRICH

You forget yourself. And worse, you forget me.

We can no longer tell if the children are screaming in joy or terror. Perhaps both.

HEINRICH

You can take this gift or I can take your life, it is your choice.

ALICE

Why?

HEINRICH

Because I am the toymaker, I am Heinrich Unheimlich. I am polite yes but I am not kind. Now choose.

Beat.

ALICE

(terrified but resolved)

Ah fuck. Do it then.

HEINRICH

Ja⁴?

ALICE

Do it.

Pause. HEINRICH bursts out into cruel laughter.

⁴ Yes?

HEINRICH

I do like you very much Alice.

ALICE

...What?

HEINRICH

There is no choice for you. The toy is already in your bag. I look forward to your efforts to be rid of it.

ALICE

(still shaken)

I... No. No, I chose to- To..

HEINRICH starts to walk off, still laughing.

HEINRICH

Gute Reise Alice. Bis bald⁵...

Alice is alone. She takes a deep shuddering, breath.

[Music]

ANNOUNCER

The Magnus Protocol is a podcast distributed by Rusty Quill and licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial Share-alike 4.0 International License. The series is created by Jonathan Sims and Alexander J Newall, and directed by Alexander J Newall. This episode was written by Alexander J Newall and edited with additional materials by Jonathan Sims, with vocal edits by Nico Vettese, soundscaping by Meg

⁵ Have a good journey Alice, see you soon.

McKellar, and mastering by Catherine Rinella with music by Sam Jones.

It featured Billie Hindle as Alice Dyer, Anusia Battersby as Gwendolyn Bouchard, Lowri Ann Davies as Celia Ripley, with additional voices from Alexander J Newall. The Magnus Protocol is produced by April Sumner, with executive producers Alexander J Newall, Dani McDonough, Linn Ci, and Samantha F.G. Hamilton, and Associate Producers Jordan L. Hawk, Taylor Michaels, Nicole Perlman, Cetius d'Raven, and Megan Nice.

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Thanks for listening.