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The Magnus Protocol

**Episode 33
"Peer Review"**

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Edited by Jonathan Sims & Alexander J Newall**

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Draft 3**

[1]

ANNOUNCER

This episode is dedicated to Addison Wagner. You may write me down in your statements with your bitter, twisted lies. The eye's seat of power may be vacant. But still, like dust and ashes, the Archivist shall rise.

[Intro Theme]

ANNOUNCER

**Rusty Quill Presents: The Magnus Protocol.
Episode Thirty-Three – Peer Review**

[Music]

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

It's quiet. Lonely. CELIA is sat at her computer, tapping away. ALICE and GWEN are having a muffled argument in the manager's office. It'd clearly been going on for a while.

Celia sighs, and double clicks, starting the next case.

2. CYBERSPACE – N/A, N/A

CHESTER

**Statement and Research lead for location CD771
Magnus Institute – Manchester.**

Private and confidential.

Viability as subject – low

Viability as agent – low

Viability as catalyst – low

No follow-up recommended due to potential acquisition risk. Interviewer comments redacted at request of Dr Welling.

**INTERVIEWER COMMENT
REDACTED**

Of course. Victoria Marcario.

**INTERVIEWER COMMENT
REDACTED**

That's M-A-R-C-A-R-I-O

**INTERVIEWER COMMENT
REDACTED**

Yes. Yes that's right. Can I get you some tea?

**INTERVIEWER COMMENT
REDACTED**

If you're sure. And it's James Dawn, as in "always darkest before"

**INTERVIEWER COMMENT
REDACTED**

It was our second date. We met online. I move around a lot for work, and they sent me to their Blackpool office for a four-month posting. James lived there all his life, he said.

Our first date was good - really good - and I was keen to meet up with him again.

Um... So we met by the beach, had dinner, everything was going great. And um... Yeah, he- He wanted to take me to the pier. Said he'd spent a lot of time there growing up and wanted to share it.

**INTERVIEWER COMMENT
REDACTED**

Yes. We went. It was a beautiful night. At first. The perfect temperature, people out- drinking, playing music. The pier was everything you'd sort of expect from a slightly run-down British seaside: Ferris wheel out at the end, games, twinkling lights, a view down the shore... We'd decided to check out the arcade at the end of it. We stopped and played a few games, which... turns out we were both terrible at, James even got a bit frustrated at one of those punching bag ones, but still, we were having a good time.

**INTERVIEWER COMMENT
REDCATED**

I don't know. Nothing obvious. It happened gradually. The first thing I remember noticing was just after he took me outside. I remember it was cool, almost cold, despite being summer with a stiff breeze coming off the Atlantic.

James walked towards the railing, and he was telling me these little stories about being there as a kid. The time he snuck onto the Ferris wheel, failing to surf in the weak swells.

As we got up to the railing, he put his arms around my waist and said, 'This spot- right here- is where I had my first kiss.'

He said, 'I was looking right out there at the coast...' But when he turned and pointed... We couldn't see the town lights. There was just a dark-kind of shadow obscuring it. We could see the rest of the shoreline, but it was like a thick bank of fog had rolled in and blocked that one spot.

James got a bit flustered, and muttered something about the weather turning. I think in his mind he'd blown it. But it was sweet. So I just told him my view was perfect. And I went for it.

**INTERVIEWER COMMENT
REDACTED**

No. Earlier that night, we'd passed an artist inside the arcade- one of those cartoon people, with the caricatures? I remember because he'd been giving James a real long look when we first saw him, like he was sizing him up. And after that kiss I was feeling... So we said 'What the hell: It's cheesy, but let's go for it.'

But as we went back inside to find them, there was a man standing at the door. He turned to us, and said: "Well don't you two make a darling pair!" And I remember that phrasing because he stressed the syllables weirdly, as if he wasn't used to speaking words like that.

**INTERVIEWER COMMENT
REDACTED**

I think so. I mean, I don't know why he'd be standing there if he wasn't.

We were making our way through the arcade, looking for the cartoonist, when James- Well, I was kind of chasing him- we were just being silly, and I was doing this, uh, Velociraptor impression- but he sort of jumped away from me and crashed into this woman. She had a

hot dog and a drink, and it went all over her.

And we were saying 'Oh my god,' you know, 'I'm so sorry,' and asking her if she was okay, and she just... smiled. She smiled and nodded her head. Like she didn't understand what we were saying.

**INTERVIEWER COMMENT
REDACTED**

No. It was more like She didn't understand anything that was happening. She just kept looking at us with a big, toothy, friendly smile. She didn't look at her shirt, she didn't look at her food on the ground. She just kept staring. Then she turned and walked away.

So then James looked at me, and I looked at him, and I didn't really know what to say. I was freaked out, but I didn't want to bring down the vibe, and I don't think he did either. So he... made a joke. And I went along with it.

We decided to skip the caricatures, reset the mood a bit on the Ferris wheel, and then hop in a cab back to my place.

It was much colder now. It'd only been a few minutes but the wind had

really picked up and a mist was rolling in, giving the lights of the arcade this sort of eerie, multicolored glow.

We headed toward the Ferris wheel, but as it came into view... It was dark, completely shut off. Lights were off, no one was around And the whole area was roped off. It didn't make any sense, it wasn't that late and we'd seen it Full of people not five minutes before. But now there was no one and the fog was...

**INTERVIEWER COMMENT
REDACTED**

Yeah. It was huge.

**INTERVIEWER COMMENT
REDACTED**

I don't know. I couldn't... I thought I was being paranoid.

So we went back toward the arcade. They had a little cafe and James thought a hot chocolate might chase away... whatever we were feeling. When he suggested it, I was so relieved, relieved to finally... be in it together with someone. I... hadn't had that in a long time.

We started back inside. But as we went in, the same man- looked at us

as though he'd never seen us, and said, Well don't you two make a darling pair tonight!'

**INTERVIEWER COMMENT
REDACTED**

No. Different door, same man.

**INTERVIEWER COMMENT
REDACTED**

What? No. Why would we? I thought it was just- Besides, I was embarrassed of how scared I was getting.

Of course the concession stand was closed. The whole arcade was... wrong. Like, some of the lights were out and it made all the posters and games look... sharper and meaner somehow. Then we saw the same woman from before, with stains all down her shirt, still grinning away.

**INTERVIEWER COMMENT
REDACTED**

Well I certainly was. We walked back out onto the pier and it was even darker than before. At least half the illuminations were out. One was flickering. We were the only ones on the pier. I could hear the waves roaring beneath the pier shaking it with force, spray floating up through

the wooden slats tasting of salt.

I looked out. And- I swear to you- I couldn't see land. At all. The pier just... extended out, into darkness. And that shadow, the one I thought was fog...

It wasn't fog.

**INTERVIEWER COMMENT
REDACTED**

I don't know. But it was huge and it was moving in the darkness. That was when I started to panic.

I pointed it out to James, and he saw it, I know he saw it. I saw a brief wash of fear over his face but then his expression changed, became casual, like he was still trying not to ruin the mood. He made some joke about sea monsters and suggested we have another look for the artist.

I couldn't believe it. I just kept telling him that we had to go, we had to go, but instead he started saying we should go and see if the gift shop still had any of those ugly sweatshirts we saw earlier. I looked where he was pointing and the gift shop was dark and empty, chained shut with one of the windows broken.

I told him I was leaving. Then I turned towards where the land should be and started to walk, deliberately not looking at the shape looming in the darkness. I'd only gotten a few steps when I felt James grab my arm.

'Please don't go,' he said, 'we're having such a lovely time. There's nothing wrong, there's nothing wrong!'

He was obviously terrified when he spoke, and I still don't understand what was happening in his mind, whether it was some sort of denial or...

**INTERVIEWER COMMENT
REDACTED**

I don't know what that means. Maybe? It doesn't matter. The thing was getting closer, towering above us now, So I took his hand and begged him to run with me. But instead he just pulled me in, and whispered" Please say it's okay! Please say it's okay! Tell me it's okay!" I tried to pull him and he tried to hold me.

So I broke free, and I ran.

It was so dark. Impossibly dark. Every light was out and the pier was

shaking. I was at a full sprint even though I could hardly see where I was going. I pulled out my phone for the torch, but it was dead. The only way I could make out the edge was by the sound of churning water below. I half expected the boards to finally give way to under my feet and then I'd plunge into the cold water, or...

It wasn't long before I heard him screaming behind me.

**INTERVIEWER COMMENT
REDACTED**

If you say so. I don't know how long I'd been running when it hit. I couldn't tell the difference between what I heard and what I felt, it was so loud. It threw me to the ground and it felt like the whole pier went but when I looked back... Nothing but that paralyzing, impossible darkness. And I was still there. I turned to start running again, and that was when I saw the lights on the shore.

**INTERVIEWER COMMENT
REDACTED**

You tell me. I'm sure you've done your research. Find any news articles about the destruction of Blackpool Pier?

**INTERVIEWER COMMENT
REDACTED**

Yeah, didn't think so James's gone, though. Filed a missing person report, but no luck so far. I gave the Police an... edited version of the story, told them the last place I saw him was on the pier and I'd gotten some 'weird vibes' before leaving.

**INTERVIEWER COMMENT
REDACTED**

I don't know. I guess I just wanted to tell someone the real story. Someone who'd believe me.

**INTERVIEWER COMMENT
REDACTED**

Of course, I...

**INTERVIEWER COMMENT
REDACTED**

Please don't go.

**INTERVIEWER COMMENT
REDACTED**

3. INT. OIAR OFFICE - NIGHT, CLEAR (COMPUTER)

Celia taps a few keys, checks her binder and begins to log the case.

ALICE approaches from behind her then tosses a notebook onto the desk.

ALICE
What do you make of that?

Beat.

CELIA
It's a notebook.

ALICE
Thank you, chief inspector. Another case solved!

CELIA
Colin's?

ALICE
Only one I could find in that bomb-site of an office. The man was... what's a less tactful way to say omega-level hoarder?

CELIA
Alice...

ALICE
(snapping)
Oh Don't you start. As his only friend and the one who found him, I'll 'respect his memory' however I damn well want. Ok?

CELIA
Ok.

Beat. ALICE sighs with irritation but doesn't apologise.

CELIA

(cont.)

So what does it say?

ALICE

I... don't know. I was actually hoping you might be able to help with that. Do you know anything about computer codes?

CELIA

No.

ALICE

Do you speak German?

CELIA

I did GSCE French.

ALICE

How about the kind of cyphers a paranoid, tech-recluse might use to keep his dentist appointments top secret?

CELIA

Not unless it's crossword.

ALICE

Well, that's a real shame because this here seems to be written in a combination of all three.

CELIA

Ah. Well, you tried-

ALICE

Oh I'll figure this out, one way or another.

CELIA
You're starting to sound like him....

ALICE
Good. Maybe it'll help.

4. MANAGER'S OFFICE – NIGHT, CLEAR (LANDLINE)

GWEN is on hold.

GWEN
(impatiently)
Christ, you'd think they'd have a fast
track for official-

Beat. Someone is there.

GWEN
(cont.)
Yes, hello, this is Gwendolyn
Bouchard with the O.I.A.R.

Beat.

GWEN (CONT.)
Oh, uh- of course.

She begins checking the piles of papers on her desk.

GWEN
(cont., calling)
One second!

**SHE KEEPS RUMMAGING IN FRUSTRATION BEFORE
FINALLY FINDING WHAT SHE WAS AFTER.**

GWEN

(cont.)

**Sorry about that! Still there? Yes it's
Five three nine nine seven five two.**

Beat.

GWEN CONT'D

**Thank you. I'm checking on a
recently dismissed employee by the
name of Lena Kelley. I've taken over
her role and I... have a bit of mail that
needs forwarded to her. I'm hoping
you can give me a forwarding
address or...**

Beat.

GWEN

(cont.)

**Right, yes, I understand. I'm not
asking you to break GDPR, I just-**

Beat.

GWEN

(cont.)

**No, I'm her- She used to be my
manager and I've been promoted
into her role and I need to-**

Beat.

GWEN CONT'D

**She did, but she must have changed
phones, and the only email I have is
her old civil service one so-**

Beat.

GWEN
(cont. Wearily)
No, of course, I understand

Beat.

GWEN
(cont. insincere)
Yes, fine. Thank you so much for
your help.

She puts the phone down hard and lets out an irritated long
sigh.

The door opens abruptly and **BRETT** saunters in.

GWEN
(angry)
Alice, I told you, I'm not- Oh.

She stops, thrown. He is unexpected, and rather handsome. She
covers with her best impression of what she thinks authority
looks like.

BRETT
Sorry, don't mean to interrupt. The
young lady at the desk said you were
in charge?

GWEN
Did she? I mean, Yes, I am. I don't
believe we've met, Mr...

BRETT
Larz, call me Brett. And I'm guessing
you're Ms. Bouchard, I believe we
have an appointment?

GWEN

We do?

BRETT

Set up a few weeks ago. You emailed us?

GWEN

(still covering)

Oh. Of course, my... assistant must have neglected to update my calendar, My apologies.

BRETT

It's all good, God knows I'd struggle to be on the ball working these hours. Latest meeting I've had in years. Since your predecessor, actually.

GWEN

Right.

BRETT

Must be a lot of pressure, filling her shoes.

Beat.

GWEN

(colder)

A lot of clean up, certainly. Speaking of which, I'm afraid we've been having some issues with our email systems. Do you remember what exactly I wanted to discuss?

BRETT

Oh well, I believe you said something about budget adjustments and reconsidering whether Starkwall had anything to offer the OIAR in terms of security services.

The penny drops for Gwen.

GWEN

Ah, of course.

She settles herself back and into her role. It isn't really any more convincing.

GWEN

Well firstly, I'm so glad you could make it.

BRETT

Pleasure's all mine Ms. Bouchard. You're a breath of fresh air compared to my other clients

GWEN

(flattered and hiding it)

Yes, well, I'm afraid this meeting is purely exploratory you understand.

BRETT

Explore away.

Beat.

GWEN

As the new manager it behooves me to check these things and although our current security arrangements are satisfactory, I'm interested in

hearing your pitch as to why we need the services of a Private Military Company.

BRETT

Well, let's start with tonight. I just walked right in and you know how many people challenged me? Zero. There was one locked door with a basic RFID reader, and when I knocked on it, a tired young woman let me in as soon as I said your name. I'm not sure I'd describe that as a "satisfactory security arrangement".

GWEN

I see your point, but we can solve that with some basic training and some new locks.

BRETT

Of course but that isn't going to help with off-site security is it?

GWEN

True but we do have... other assets at our disposal should we need them.

BRETT

Ah yes, you know I warned Lena against the wholesale shift to her uh, how shall we put it? 'Unpredictable External agents'?

GWEN is surprised but covers it.

BRETT

Well it was a bad idea then and it's a bad idea now. In the past, Starkwall has been a major factor in keeping those agents in check, and I think we can both admit that Lena's decision to part ways with us has left your situation... precarious.

GWEN

It's not ideal I'll admit but I have a few reports here that seem to show Starkwall actually increasing the precarity of a few situations over the years. What would you say to that?

BRETT

(good natured)

Hey, I'll be the first to admit our record isn't spotless but when you're working in dangerous situations with incomplete intel and unreliable allies, things can get hairy. But let's be honest, as far as I'm aware that's pretty much the standard M.O. at the O.I.A.R. and we never left a job unfinished I still believe there's a bright future for us if we work together.

GWEN

A lucrative future for you perhaps.

BRETT

And a secure one for you and your team. We can protect you from whatever comes your way. I guarantee it.

Beat.

GWEN

Thank you for your time, Mr. Larz,
but I think we'll have to decline your
offer for now.

Beat.

BRETT

I understand. How about we leave
you to think it over and if the
situation changes, we'll be ready to
help. Here's my card - drop me a line
when you reconsider and we can set
up some sort of trial or
demonstration, maybe?

GWEN

We'll see.

BRETT

(standing)

Sounds good. Well, take care of
yourself Ms. Bouchard, I can't deny
I'm a little disappointed but it's still
nice to be invited back.

Beat.

BRETT

Speaking of, you know, I never
realized how big this office is when I
was talking to Lena...

GWEN

Good night, Mr. Larz. I'm sure you
can find your own way out.

[Music]

ANNOUNCER

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The series is created by Jonathan Sims and Alexander J Newall, and directed by Alexander J Newall.

This episode was written by Aaron Blanton and edited with additional materials by Jonathan Sims and Alexander J Newall, with vocal edits by Nico Vettese, soundscaping by Meg McKellar, and mastering by Catherine Rinella with music by Sam Jones.

It featured Billie Hindle as Alice Dyer, Anusia Battersby as Gwen Bouchard Lowri Ann Davies as Celia Ripley, with additional voices from Jonathan Sims. 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.

The Magnus Protocol 33 – Peer Review

CAT2RB2365-14081996-20052024
Transformation (pier) -/- Fear (void)

Incident Elements:

- Nyctophobia
- Thalassophobia
- Abandonment
- Unreality

Transcripts available at <https://rustyquill.com/transcripts/the-magnus-protocol/>

This episode is dedicated to Addison Wagner. You can find a complete list of our Kickstarter backers <https://rustyquill.com/the-magnus-protocol-supporter-wall/>

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Produced by April Sumner

Featuring (in order of appearance)

Lowri Ann Davies as Celia Ripley

Jonathan Sims as Chester

Billie Hindle as Alice Dyer

Anusia Battersby as Gwendolyn Bouchard

Mike Thoms as Brett Larz

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