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The Magnus Protocol
“Outside The Box”
Written by Dylan Griggs & Alexander J Newall
Edited by Jonathan Sims

18-02-2025
Draft 06

ANNOUNCER

This episode is dedicated to Evan Botos from his Dad. From story time as a child, through musical theater, movies, TV shows, laughing together while listening to comedy in the car and, OF COURSE, the Magnus Archives, we've always shared a special bond when it comes to the arts.

[Intro Theme]

ANNOUNCER

**Rusty Quill Presents: The Magnus Protocol.
Episode Thirty-Six – Outside the Box**

[Music]

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

CELIA is alone in the office flicking through the manual whilst typing.

CELIA

(To herself)

Okay so that would be... Flaying... subsection... Voluntary... cross referenced with Betrayal and-

She catches herself.

Beat.

CELIA's breathing grows shorter.

CELIA

You're okay... You're okay... Jack's okay... It's okay... it's okay...

It isn't helping.

ALICE enters.

ALICE

Hey so I was looking through one of
Colin's notebooks and-

(noticing)

You all right?

CELIA

I... yeah... yeah I'm fine...

ALICE

You sure? Because you don't look
fine. In fact, you look "enif".

CELIA

(confused despite herself)

I- What?

ALICE

"Enif", opposite of fine. Maybe even
"citsatnaf".

CELIA

(irritated distracted from
her panic)

I- What?

ALICE

Good, now tell me five things you
can see.

CELIA

What?

ALICE

Just do it.

CELIA

(irritated)

Uh. You, your desk, your computer,
your mouse, Sam's... sam's...

ALICE

Never mind that, four things you can feel.

CELIA

I... Uh- My jeans, the chair, the desk, your hand

ALICE

Three you can hear.

CELIA

What other than your voice in my ear?

ALICE

That's one.

CELIA

Uh... cars outside and the computers again.

ALICE

And smell?

CELIA

Dust and that perfume you always wear. The one that smells like a magic shop.

ALICE

That'll be the patchouli. I'm a woody scent gal. And what can you taste?

CELIA

Also perfume. It's a lot close up.

ALICE

Good enough.

Beat.

ALICE CONT.

Better?

CELIA

...yeah actually. How did you-

ALICE

**I know a panic attack when I see one.
I've helped enough people through
them, and been helped for that
matter**

Beat.

CELIA

Thanks.

ALICE

(unpacking)

**All part of the service. In fact, for an
extra fiver a month you can upgrade
to the premium Alice subscription
which includes a weighted blanket
and bingeing bad TV.**

CELIA

Good to know.

Beat. Alice finishes unpacking, sits and logs on.

ALICE

**I'm assuming you don't want to talk
about it?**

CELIA

**Actually, I think maybe it's about
time I did.**

Alice sits.

ALICE

Okay.

CELIA

I- I think I know what that thing is in the Hilltop Centre.

Beat.

ALICE

Go on.

CELIA

I uh- I know I said I didn't know what it was but..., I'm certain it's a portal. And... I'm not sure how to say this...

ALICE

It's okay. I already worked it out for myself.

CELIA

(shocked)

Really?

ALICE

It felt like the obvious answer, but I guess I just couldn't face it, not until I was sure.

CELIA

And now you are?

ALICE

Yeah. Best I can figure, it goes to... well, not like "Hell" hell, but definitely some kind of evil messed-up *hellish* dimension and it's leaking. I dunno if it covers all the cases but definitely most. In fact, it's probably not the only one.

CELIA

So, you think it's been leaking out what just general...evil?

ALICE

Yeah. That's why I haven't tried following Sam. Yet. He hasn't come back, which means it's either one-way or there's something on the other side stopping him, and since I'm pretty sure we've already met things it spat out that means something is keeping Sam there, ergo, it's probably a really bad place.

CELIA

Or that he's already-

ALICE

Nope. Our train of thought is not currently stopping at that station. Besides, the evil-portal idea does make sense for the whole 'Protocol' thing. Like, we knew it would have to be bad to explain all these monsters and stuff from the cases but the O.I.A.R. literally standing in the way of hell-on-earth? That's rough.

CELIA

Alice-

ALICE

Now, obviously it's not actually Christian Hell but looking up occult stuff on what they would have thought hell was and how it connects to Alchemy might be a good place to start, and with Colin's notes we might-

CELIA

Alice!

ALICE

What?

CELIA

**You need to slow down a moment,
you're making a lot of assumptions
and-**

ALICE

**Look, I get it. There's still a lot we
don't know: We don't know how
many portals there are, we don't
know if all the stuff we've read about
comes from this place or only some
of it, we don't know any of the rules
on how any of this actually works.
But we do know it's bad news. We
know it's *evil* and anything it spits
out is the same.**

CELIA

That's not what I-

GWEN knocks on her office window. It is weak compared to
Lena's authoritative tapping.

ALICE

(standing and leaving)

**Hold that thought and we can pick it
back up when I'm done with her
majesty.**

ALICE enters the managers office without knocking.

Beat.

CELIA

(harried)

Shit.

She takes a deep steadying breath then starts the next case.

2. Int. Cyberspace (computer)

NORRIS

Sladetechreviews.com

Blog Post: #235-1

Author: Arlo Slade (admin)

Title: “Booth MK2 review – Feeling Isolated”

Date: August 4, 2024

[Page removed pending legal action]

INTRO: The Disruption Is Coming From Inside The House

You probably haven’t heard of Booth, the enigmatic video conference startup that launched early last year, but you have almost certainly used products made by their pioneering founders: Lila Bailey and Chris Chavez. Between them, the pair hold prestigious backgrounds in advanced OLED panel displays, generative AI, aerospace engineering, and 3D projection modeling and so it was no surprise when their startup completed a record-breaking initial funding round back in 2022 with Elric Capital Ltd. taking a controlling interest.

Now, Booth stands poised to capture the video conference market. Its first

consumer outing, the Booth MK2, clearly takes inspiration from the founders' backgrounds as a first-of-its-kind "perfectly lifelike" hybrid monitor/webcam setup. According to the marketing materials "no more lonely work-from-home blues with blurry, low-res Coworkers, Booth MK2 will bring everyone back in the room!"

Realistic Conversations Over Video

True to its name, the Booth MK2 is a booth: an array of high-res webcams situated around a proprietary 8k, 3D display. Honestly, it looks like a carnival photo booth, sans curtain but this is supposedly to help the webcam array and integrated LIDAR sensor to record and track body, head, and eye movements, ensuring that you and your conversational partner are rendered in stunning 3D. The result being the uncanny sensation of the screen dissolving between the two of you

A (Purposefully?) Oblique Setup Process

The MK2 is beyond bleeding-edge, in fact it's practically still breathing. It exists past the plane of creature comforts that casual tech enthusiasts expect from their world of walled gardens and frictionless user interfaces. Instead, it harkens back to the golden age of bulky

pillars in dedicated “computer rooms.” Users can expect an arduous setup process starting with an intimidating “Safety Warning” in the lengthy install guide: “To maximize realism, remove all items from the room. Do not plug the MK2 in until all items have been removed. Position the device such that any windows and doors are not in view of the MK2’s camera array. Only once this is done should you turn on the Booth MK2. The presence of windows or doors in frame may cause the Booth MK2 to have unpredictable results.”

This is a punishing ask for users who live in a post-desktop world and I found myself working up a sweat clearing out the only room that I could afford to ransack for this review: my bedroom but looking back I am glad I did because let me tell you, describing the MK2’s behavior as “unpredictable” is charitable at best.

The MK2 Defies Possibility

Although marketed as a consumer product, the MK2 is far from that For the MK2, a safe software experience relies on industrial levels of precision operation and without it you are left with a glitchy, surreal, and isolating experience..

The MK2 has no power button. Instead it turns itself on immediately

upon being plugged in and users are greeted with a splash page displaying “THE BOOTH MK2” in an all-caps, desperately modern-looking san-serif font.

It then dropped me into my first call as soon as the logo disappeared And having had no opportunity to give it contacts, I found myself suddenly sharing my now empty bedroom with a complete stranger, an awkward experience at the best of times, but I forgot about my reservations when I realized how incredibly lifelike it felt.

It is impossible for a reviewer to adequately describe this experience and the effect doesn't translate to video review because the viewer is staring at a flat projection. Instead, imagine what it is like to be in a room with another person. That is what it feels like to use the Booth MK2. It is lifelike beyond compare. It felt like we were sharing the same air.

The man across from me told me his name (we'll call him Gregory) and that he was a member of the Booth Initiation Team (or BIT). Apparently the BIT was designed to welcome new users into the MK2 ecosystem and provide a guide to a safe and engaging user experience. It was a nice idea but instead he was leaving me disconcerted because occasionally, something would feel off about Gregory's movements. It wasn't like a video feed, it wasn't

glitching, artifacting, blurring or dropping I-frames. Instead, thanks to the hyper realism, it appeared that Gregory's body was actually morphing, shifting, changing, moving too fast. He looked incredibly real, so it was especially jarring to see him malformed in this manner, but such is the cost of reviewing bleeding-edge tech.

After a few moments of settling in and exchanging pleasantries about cat ownership, Gregory held a peach up in front of him, his arm extended. Like Gregory, it genuinely appeared to be present in my room with me. I swear I could smell it. I was tempted to reach out and take it, then felt ridiculous having fully believed the MK2's illusion of depth. Then, in an absolutely brain-breaking display, Gregory dropped the peach into my room. It landed in front of the MK2 with an unceremonious thud. An actual peach on the actual ground.

I was stunned. I picked it up. It felt real.

I looked behind the screen, searching for an explanation and Gregory gave a laugh at my confusion, though it gave way to an angry bark as I turned the MK2 from one side to the other, looking for a hidden chute that could have been holding the peach.

He explained that I was ruining the setup, but the damage was done. My bedroom door and a small window were in frame and he was furious.

I apologized but to no avail. Gregory shared some creatively offensive words with me (apparently the BIT could use some training on acceptable customer interactions) and then the screen went dark. It didn't diminish all at once though, instead it disappeared into a pinpoint like an old CRT monitor. Then there was no way I could find to turn it back on. My first video conference call with the MK2 was over, ended by an impressively lifelike argument.

Despite this, the demo had been amazing and I was still riding high on the hyperreality of it all. That is, until I took a closer look at my surroundings. It took a moment for me to even process what I was seeing: The window and the door of my bedroom had vanished. I was in a completely bare and sealed room, shrunk to only what the MK2 cameras had been able to capture.

My first inclination was that this must be an illusion from the booth, some bizarre, unintended result due to moving its position. I reached out to where my bedroom door had been expecting to feel a handle behind whatever projection was occluding it, but there was nothing but bare wall... I knocked on it, feeling it solid

beneath my knuckles, then banged on it, then screamed for help. Nothing.

At that point I started to panic. I wrapped my hand in my shirt then pounded on the wall over and over but the walls held solid. They weren't the drywall from my house. Instead, they were solid, hard, slightly shiny like ceramic. I began to bang on everything but the MK2, which I was now terrified of damaging any further, but to no avail. Brute force wasn't going to help.

I then started to realize just how bad this could get. It might be a long time before anyone other than my cat Randal noticed I was missing. I took some solace in knowing that his automatic bowl would feed him regularly for at least another week or two.

In the meantime though, things were going to get very uncomfortable. Now, any readers of early SladeTech might remember that this used to be more of a survivalism blog. This was a harsh environment with few resources, even by my standards. I could maybe wring the sweat out of my clothes, meditate to avoid time-loss, eventually I could attempt to eat the leather from my boots. Not much.

Of course, there was the peach. It wouldn't keep, but it was real food

and I had an idea of how long it would last me. I decided to give myself three days to be found before I prepared for the worst.

For three days, I sat as still as I could, preserving energy, meditating. I soon came to see The Booth as my only hope of survival. I would swing from my forced calm to feelings of existential dread and white-hot rage. I took the smallest possible bites out of the peach, but it was still half gone within 24 hours.

My gut started burning and I dreamed fitfully that a hand would come out of the MK2 and pull me down into darkness. Time felt infinite and uncaring in all directions. I lost track. I ate the last of the peach. Then I was out of time. I prayed to the Booth MK2 that night before I closed my eyes and fell asleep.

I awoke, weakly, to light emanating from the device and looked up to see Gregory, eyeing me curiously. He then turned his head and spoke to someone off-screen: “yeah, this one’s done. Kill process.”

Hearing this, I staggered towards the screen as fast as my body would carry me. Then, before Gregory noticed me

I had reached my hands through the screen, into his room and around his neck

Then the screen snapped to black, my fingers caught inside. I felt the bones shear and the muscles sever as my fingers were neatly amputated. I could feel blood pulsing out of me, though all I could see was the perfect black of the screen..

But I swear I could still feel my fingers digging into Gregory's throat. I cried out in pain and used my ever-weakening arms to try and force myself through somehow. The screen bent, then began to yield to my effort. I pushed and screamed, trying to somehow use Gregory as a lever, until the hand holding him slipped and I felt something fleshy in my hand. I didn't stop prying and grasping though until I was able to find the edge of the MK2 on Gregory's side and heave myself into the other room. That was when I opened my eyes and looked down to see Gregory's ear in my mangled palms and my own fingers resting gentle on the carpeted floor.

Gregory's room still had a door thank god, and it was ajar, It looked like, he had made a quick getaway. Gingerly lifting my bloodied fingers and stumbling through I found an empty suburban house, no pictures on the walls, no real furniture, just a trail of blood leading out to the front door. I followed it and flagged down help as soon as possible.

I made it to the hospital and told the doctors my hands got slammed in a car door. I did not mention Gregory or the MK2 to anyone. Who would believe me? Besides it's not like anyone had noticed my absence. Except for Randall, of course.

VERDICT: The Booth MK2, Disruptive In The Worst Way

Yes, the Booth MK2 technically overdelivers. The tech is literally boundary-pushing but it is also exceedingly dangerous, overseen by a company that seems apparently criminally apathetic to its users and if it there was any likelihood it would see the actual market in this state, I would warn people off it as a five figure death sentence.

I did contact Booth about my experience and they claimed to have no employee named Gregory and there is no such thing as a "Booth Initiation Team." Their legal team also reminded me that I had signed an NDA to join the Alpha test but after what they put me through I don't care if they sue me.

I intend to track Gregory down. After all, I still have his ear. In the meantime though, keep an eye out for a techbro with one ear and seriously poor customer service.

1 Star (for quick delivery and solid packaging.)

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

ALICE trying to explain what she thinks she understands from Colin's notes. It isn't going well and she is constantly checking her papers..

ALICE

-so I think he used the
(checks notes)

“Salt config manager” and found an
“unmonitored orphan process”
which-

GWEN

(frustrated)

What?

ALICE

Oh right, so apparently an orphan process is one that should have a “parent process” to monitor it but like, it's gone, deleted, dead. Presumably to make the process a more compelling protagonist or something.

GWEN

Right....

ALICE

So, then you've got this orphan process just running around spamming threads and eating up massive amounts processing power via Crontask-

GWEN

Crontask?

ALICE

Uh, basically Linux but based on Anix, doesn't matter, the important

thing is that because of this, the LAN network should have already failed.

GWEN

I see.

She doesn't.

ALICE

But it hasn't.

GWEN

No it hasn't. Right?

ALICE

(trailing off)

And if I'm reading these notes this is just the tip of a very nerdy iceberg. It's no wonder it was driving Colin up the wall because he couldn't...

Beat.

ALICE CONT.

You haven't understood a word of that have you?

GWEN

Look, I don't need to know every detail of the thing to be the manager I just need to know how to balance it. So, either tell me how I can increase "W" here or get out.

Beat.

ALICE

Fine.

ALICE starts to leave.

GWEN

Alice wait!

ALICE waits.

GWEN
(gritting her teeth)
Please help me.

Beat. ALICE sighs and heads back to the desk.

ALICE
Shove over.

GWEN
I will not-

ALICE shoves GWEN over and begins typing away at her computer.

ALICE
So each of the cases is categorized on four metrics with a standard integer scale, that's your DPHW.

GWEN
Okay. Now I'm pretty sure I need to try and keep them as even as possible.

ALICE
Ok, so, it makes sense that if you're low on "W" that means we should probably prioritize processing cases with a higher rank on that metric to bring the average up, right?

GWEN
Makes sense.

ALICE
So, it's just a hunch but I bet if we have a look at old cases and then try and sort by "W" we can find out which cases got the biggest scores

in that metric and reverse engineer
what you need.

GWEN
That's very... insightful.

ALICE
(distracted)
Yeah well, it helps knowing the
whole thing is powered by demons
and spite.

GWEN
You're starting to sound like Colin...

ALICE
Good. Now, unless I'm wrong, which,
lets be honest, is pretty damn likely,
when we cross reference this
shortlist for common terms we'll find
out what Freddy thinks you need and
that... is... more...

The computer pings up a tone.

ALICE
(confused)
Bonzo?

GWEN reacts, **ALICE** doesn't notice.

ALICE
Bollocks. So much for that idea.
Okay, so maybe if I-

GWEN
Thank you Alice, you may go.

Beat.

ALICE
Hang on, weren't you going on about
Mr Bonzo when-

GWEN
(strained)
Out! Now!

ALICE
(exiting)
Whatever.

ALICE slams the door on her way out.

Beat.

GWEN takes a steadying sigh.

GWEN
(concerned)
Shit.

4. CELIA'S FLAT INT. – MORNING, CLEAR (CELIA'S LAPTOP)

CELIA enters.

CELIA
(quietly)
Knock knock?

GEORGIE
In here.

CELIA staggers in arms loaded with bags, the epitome of Sisyphian parenting.

CELIA
Thanks Georgie, I managed to swing by corner shop so I'm good on nappies now. I tried to get you a coffee but they hadn't restocked, and they didn't have baby toddler toothpaste so he'll have to make do with mine until-

GEORGIE

Sit.

CELIA

What? Oh no, I'm fine, if I hurry, I can get breakfast prepped and-

GEORGIE

Sit down.

CELIA

But-

GEORGIE

I did an online shop, my treat. Breakfast is prepped, you've got about 6 months of nappies hoarded along with the mildest toddler toothpaste they make and a new sippy cup because he's managed to chew through the dinosaur one.

CELIA

Oh Georgie, you didn't have to-

GEORGIE

I know but I did and it's fine. I even brought my own coffee, see?

She takes a victory sip.

CELIA collapses onto the sofa.

CELIA

Thanks Georgie.

Pause. It's peaceful, Celia resting, Georgie with her coffee and her book. Eventually:

GEORGIE

(cont.)

You know you can't keep this up forever right?

CELIA

I know. It's just been a bit of a rough time at work. We... we lost some staff recently including the manager and... it's a lot.

GEORGIE

Need to talk about it?

CELIA

No. Maybe. I don't know. The new manager-

GEORGIE

Gwen?

CELIA

Yeah that's her, she doesn't have a clue what to do and Alice is getting... tense.

GEORGIE

And Sam?

CELIA

(immediately on guard)

Hmmmm?

GEORGIE

The boy you were pretending you weren't seeing last time I asked?

CELIA

I- I don't- how did-

GEORGIE

He had a profile on your Netflix.

CELIA

(sagging slightly)

Oh right, yeah. Well, he was one of the ones that uh... moved on.

GEORGIE

Oh sweetie, maybe he's moved on to somewhere better?

CELIA

(growing upset despite herself)

I... doubt it. And- and it was my... it was kind of my fault.

GEORGIE

I see.

Beat.

GEORGIE

Does he know it was your fault?

CELIA

Yeah, I'm pretty sure he does.

GEORGIE

Damn. I was hoping we could play ignorant, blame an ex or something.

CELIA

Ha! No in fact his ex is starting to suspect as well.

GEORGIE

Hmmmm. Then could you blame it on the old manager?

CELIA

Georgie I don't think-

GEORGIE

Alright, I get it. The secret problems of your secret job are just too secret for me to help with. But you know I'm here if you actually do want to talk, right? I probably won't even put it on the podcast.

CELIA

I appreciate the chat but honestly, I just think I need sleep.

GEORGIE

That's fair. I'll take Jack to the playground once he wakes up, give you a bit of peace and quiet.

CELIA

Thanks Georgie.

GEORGIE

Don't mention it. You'll feel better after the rest. After all it's just a job, right?

CELIA sighs sadly.

[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 Dylan Griggs and Alexander J Newall and edited with additional materials by Jonathan Sims, with vocal edits by

Lowri Ann Davies, soundscaping by Tessa Vroom, and mastering by Catherine Rinella with music by Sam Jones.

It featured Billie Hindle as Alice Dyer, Lowri Ann Davies as Celia Ripley, Anusia Battersby as Gwendolyn Bouchard, Sasha Sienna as Georgie Barker, 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.**

The Magnus Protocol 36 – Out of the Box

CAT3RB2153-04082024-28052024

Entrapment (virtual) -/- Isolation (experimentation)

Incident Elements:

- **Panic Attack/PTSD**
- **Being Trapped**
- **Isolation**
- **Time Loss**
- **Starvation**
- **Manipulation**
- **Amputation**

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

This episode is dedicated to Evan Botos. You can find a complete list of our Kickstarter backers

<https://rustyquill.com/the-magnus-protocol-supporter-wall/>

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Directed by [Alexander J Newall](#)

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Featuring (in order of appearance)

Billie Hindle as Alice Dyer

Lowri Ann Davies as Celia Ripley

Anusia Battersby as Gwendolyn Bouchard

Alexander J Newall as Norris

Sasha Sienna as Georgie Barker

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Mastering Editor - Catherine Rinella

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

SFX from Soundly and Freesound: turbofol, kyles, Valenspire, nyozy, dland, toefur, ainaqueentana, KrystianPawlowski, elonen, davidnagel, Joao_Janz, bbrocer as well as previously credited artists.

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