

THE MAGNUS PROTOCOL

Episode 3
"Putting Down Roots"

Written by Graeme Patrick

Edited by Jonathan Sims & Alexander J Newall

Show-Notes are available at the end of the Transcript.

ANNOUNCER

This Episode is dedicated to
Elias Becher. They fear you
for your fangs are sharp, your
talons are a vice, your many
eyes gleam with malice, and
your feathers glisten with the
ink that flows ever freely.

[Intro Theme]

ANNOUNCER

Rusty Quill Presents: The
Magnus Protocol.
Episode Three - Putting Down
Roots

[Music]

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

COLIN is hunched over ALICE's console, struggling to bypass a failed login on Freddie. COLIN types rapidly, then jabs at the enter key. The computer, in return, blurts out a reel of rejections. Colin lets out an agonised groan of frustration.

COLIN

Come on...

ALICE

What actually is a .jmq error?
What does it mean?

COLIN

Nothing. It's just an excuse
for the system to ruin my day,
is what it is.

ALICE

I could try another computer?

COLIN

No. It's doing this on purpose
and that will only encourage
it. Nothing's wrong it just
won't accept commands.

ALICE

I mean, same, but still...

Colin hits more keys and slaps the monitor's side hard several times.

ALICE

Do I need to call Lena before you break Freddie? This is bordering on abuse.

COLIN

(Distracted concentration)
For me or it? And what is Lena going to do exactly?

ALICE

I dunno. Could be useful to have another witness when this escalates to murder.

COLIN

Some witness. She wouldn't know a DOS prompt if it bit her on the arse. Look, did you mess with the directory or something?

ALICE

Of course not. Why would I pick a fight with Freddie? That's your job.

More rapid typing from Colin.

COLIN

(begging)

Just work, please!

COLIN presses the enter key as if defusing a bomb.

Beat

The computer rudely rejects the code and reels off more noises.

COLIN

You utter bastard! Just tell me what the error is! Do you need something? Should I get the boot disc? Do you need a goddam massage? WHAT?

He slaps it again.

ALICE

Do you want to phone a friend?
Maybe central IT?

COLIN

(climbing under the
desk)

They are not my friend, nor
yours. They'll bury you in red
tape just to replace a mouse
mat - you know that.

I know this system better than
anyone alive and I still don't
understand how it works. So, I
can guarantee you that none of
those mouthbreathers would
even know where to begin with
this steaming pile of-

ALICE

(to the computer)

It's ok, Freddie-baby; we're
figuring it out, cutie.

COLIN

Don't hit on the computer
while I'm working on it.

ALICE

Hey, I'm not the one on all
fours...

COLIN

(emerging from under
the desk)

I'm serious. Don't give it a
personality. We shouldn't even
be calling it 'Freddie'.

ALICE

Uh-huh... because FR3-D1 just
rolls so smoothly off the
tongue.

COLIN

Making friends with this
godawful program that tries to
throw itself into oblivion
every time I turn on a console
is not cute. It's hard enough

using every nanosecond of my waking life just to keep this byzantine mess from crapping the bed without you taking the piss.

ALICE

Oh come on, it's not that bad.

COLIN

Do you have any idea what will happen if this thing finally managed to extinct itself?

ALICE

We'd go home early?

Colin gives an irritated growl.

ALICE

(cont.)

Maybe he just needs some positive reinforcement.

COLIN

Or maybe it just needs a good kick in the-

Garbled low white noise sparks into audio.

NORRIS

Case: Homicide

Date: 03.04..

COLIN

Thank Christ for that!

Colin slaps at the space bar to pause it, cutting off the recording.

ALICE

Hey, you fixed him! Heeeeere's Freddie!

COLIN

Wrong movie.

ALICE

Meh, we both know Robert
Englund would have done it
better. Cheers Colin, you're a
star. I've got stacks to clear
tonight so just let it play,
and I'll go put the kettle on.
You want anything?

COLIN

Double scotch.

Beat.

ALICE

2 day old black coffee it is.

COLIN

(head in hands)

Eurgh.

Colin aggressively jabs the spacebar to restart the audio and
heads off.

2. CYBERSPACE

NORRIS

...2009 (08:45)

Collection: Kent CID
Repository

Item: Journal of Dr. Samuel
Webber, age 46. Issued by
grief councillor Harriot
Manning. Found within a water-
damaged black briefcase,
partially buried, penetrated
by mouldy roots.

Additional Contents: water-
damaged smartphone, Wallet
with Dr. Webber's ID and Visa
Card, Keys on a gold chain for
13 Marigold Drive, Partial
medical files on Gerald
Andrews, age 37, of 12
Castlehill Av. And Maddie
Webber, age 39 - Deceased-

Case: 1201/19

Serial No: 72003210

Collector: Special Constable
Caroline Jennings 2911

Routing to: South-East
Evidence Storage - Lewisham

Relevant journal entries as
follows:

Date 07-12-09, 10:03 PM.

Today was bedlam. I had it all planned out, all of it! And then a panic attack just choked the nerve out of me. It was so humiliating! Felt like the ground was going to swallow me whole, with everyone staring at me only to roll their eyes at my "hysterics," as the paramedic put it. They don't understand. I was so close to getting caught... but it's done. All I need to do now is disappear.

I can't go home. Not for a few days at least. And I'll have to avoid the usual haunts until they forgot about me again. That won't be difficult. What's one more stressed doctor. Just a grey man in the crowd, unnoticed until I'm useful.

One man kept staring at me on the tube. He looked like he was connecting the dots... I'm paranoid, I know, lying low amongst wildflowers in an overgrown garden. The mud has ruined my shoes.

There's not much in my briefcase. Still, listing helps keep it all straight:

- Files on "the star-crossed couple".
- Monday Morning's rounds - I hope Mrs. Campbell's op went well.
- Nine Werther's Originals (because at some point I became an old man and didn't notice)
- Pens, prescription pads.
- Oyster card - still valid.
- £23.22 cash - thought it was 24 but one the coins was a worn-down euro. Not sure what the exchange rate is...
- This journal, obviously - Thank you, councillor - I'm more likely to use it for kindling than "expressing my feelings,".
- And my phone. 43% battery, 1 bar. They can track Sim cards can't they? I should probably destroy it. Better cut off than caught.

It's almost midnight. (Why isn't it darker?) I didn't pack a lunch. I didn't expect I'd need one. Didn't expect to get this far. I wonder how long I'll have to stay here before they stop looking. I should probably eat a Werther's. Just the one though. Christ I'm reduced to rationing sweets!

I need to find somewhere dry. Why did I choose to hide here anyway? I could try a hostel? Would I need to show ID for that? I could lie, use a false name.

I could be Gerald Andrews. I'm sure Maddie would have loved that.

I remember now. It was the jasmine. That perfume in the drizzling rain that drew me in. It reminds me so much of her. Maddie loved the scent of jasmine. Loved to garden. She would have adored this place, tucked away amongst the ugly brick back streets.

She would have quizzed me about the plants and I would have told her I didn't know. I didn't even know gardens could bloom this late in the year.

I wasn't really thinking when I pushed my way through the gates. Just following my nose to memories of happier times I suppose.

The scent is much more pungent here than it was outside, an almost overwhelming sickly-sweet rot amongst the bushes. Maddie would know what it was. But its dark and quiet, that's the main thing.

The garden seems unmanaged, which suits me fine. It's growing wild around the ruins of some bombed-out church. Nice to see nature healing old wounds.

I scratched up my hands and face fighting past the bushes beneath one of the old arches. I'm cold but it's worth it; no one will find me here.

It is so quiet. The dense foliage deadens the city noise to a whisper. I can barely make out the sirens. I doubt

they are for me, but I'm staying put anyway.

I don't have much choice; where would I go? I can't go home, that's the first place they'd look. Besides, too many memories there, and then there are the neighbours... Always snooping around with their community watch flyers. I won't miss parking scheme meetings, that's for sure.

List of alternative boltholes:

- Uncle T's allotment.

Safe, but about 9 miles away. Too far. Daily chicken eggs are a plus but not exactly private. Besides the rooster would be a problem.

- The hospital basement.

This would have been the best solution but getting there unseen is a problem and no easy way to get food. It definitely would have been warmer and drier though with the boiler on all day.

I'm safer here in my little sanctuary. Sodden and sore, but safe.

I suppose there is one other possibility.

- The lock-up.

I still have a key. My name isn't on the lease anymore and it's secure and dry but... Maddie stored her stuff there after she moved out. I'm not sure I could face being surrounded by all that history even if it would be more comfy.

I can't sleep. This itch is killing me! Even the numbing cold from lying on the ground doesn't dull it. It must be an anaphylactic response to something. The rash runs up my entire left side. I'll try and find a better spot when the sun's up.

Thought I heard someone calling my name. No flashlight though, no movement, just the voice. Sounds like Maddie. My hands won't stop shaking.

It's well after midnight. It should be pitch black, but I can still make out grey shapes in the gloom. The voice is still calling for me. I've got to stay still even though my heart is racing. I think there were some branches cracking but I can't tell from where.

Morning soon but I can still hear her out there, moving around in the garden. I almost called back as I dozed.

My phone died. Just my luck. I can see enough to write so it must be just before dawn. God knows I need the warmth.

The rash is getting worse and my scratches will get infected if I don't clean them. I examined one on my forearm and it seems to be secreting something full of coiled translucent strands. Hair thin, their roots broke away easily when I pulled with a dull tear I could feel as much as hear. I've never seen anything like this before, but I was never great at dermatology.

If I had the proper tools,
this would be far simpler.
Must get a scalpel and a
mirror. I've cleaned the
scratches as best I can but
there's now a stabbing pain in
my abdomen if I move.

Current Condition:

- I taste aniseed.
- My nose is running.
Normal mucus thank god.
- The rash has spread
across the whole of my
back now and if I move I
can feel the toughened
area split and weep like
a scab.
- Feeling very lethargic.
Probably hypothermia. Not
good.
- My fingernails are black
with dirt. I don't
remember digging..
- The scratches are all
weeping now.
- Struggling not to fall
back into vivid dreams.

I need to get up, get out of
here for treatment. I'll have
to chance the pharmacist, at
least. I saw one a few streets
away. I'm not local, so I
doubt they'd recognise me. I
do still have my prescription
pad with me but using my own
paperwork would be incredibly
foolish.

This place is far bigger than
I thought. Followed the birch
trees and the canopies over
that cobbled path near the
close. Lined with moss.
There's a dense wall of
thickets overwhelming the
boundary fence. I know it. I
remember that. I can't hear

the traffic at all now. It's hard to keep moving.

I can't find an entrance. I resorted to shouldering my way out through the tangled bushes like before. It hurt so much but I made it. Only to find more garden on the other side. It looks the same. I think Maddie's still here too.

Jasmine everywhere. The smell stings where it touches me but that doesn't make sense. I wonder if its psychosomatic? A guilty conscience with comorbid pneumonia...

I'm back in the undergrowth. I'm not sure if I ever got up at all. I don't remember coming back. My feet have swollen.

Something is very wrong. If I don't get to the pharmacy now I doubt I ever will. I've managed to push my feet back into my shoes with some pruning but I'm struggling to stand.

Maddie makes a good point, though. Doctors do make the worst patients. We are always self-diagnosing, and it's always doom and gloom. She's offered to go and get my supplies herself. She always was kind.

I'll just try to keep warm and sleep until the sun comes out. I so much want to see it again. This night seems endless. I want to be warm again.

I am terribly afraid. Thank god for Maddie. I need to treat her better. She'll be back soon with medicine.

Condition update:

- Dry mouth and swollen tongue. Tasting burnt aniseed now.
- The fingers of my left hand are nearly immobile. Right is not much better. I don't know how much longer I'll be able to write.
- The pain in my abdomen has passed and the seeping has mostly stopped. But my back aches.
- I definitely have an infection. The scratches are budding some kind of polyps and the slightest touch feels like jabbing an exposed nerve.
- I stink of Jasmine. At least, I think I do.

I just need to rest and it's safe enough here. Maddie still hasn't returned though. I hope she's ok. I miss her laughter. And that smile.

I worry when she is out alone. She'll talk to anyone, like Gerald. I never liked him. I should make more time for her; I'm too busy and work far too much. I get home and just go to sleep. I need to be careful or we'll drift apart. I don't know what I would do if I thought I had lost her.

But I'm not alone here though. I'm covered in insects. They seem to enjoy feasting on my wounds so I let them. Besides they scratch the itches.

My left arm is now completely numb and the skin is splitting down to the bone. I removed the phalanges—tugging them out like stones from a peach. I planted them deep. Flies swarm the wound, and soon there will be maggots eating only the dead flesh and leaving the living. Nature is so wonderful, so efficient—nothing is wasted in the garden.

I can see my bones are tangled with the same fine strands as my wounds. It's fascinating to see. I should write a paper. Of course if the infection reaches the marrow there could be complications. I could take more drastic measures but I would need something to cut with. Something strong and heavy. A rock perhaps? Could I? Should I?

I can't tell how long I slept. Still no sun. Maddie, is that you? You're right. I should stay.

She has come back to me! Just a whisper but it is her! I knew she would never leave me. She says there is a spot where I can sit out in the sun and feel the wind on my face. What would I do without her?

We have decided not to remove any more of me as my condition develops. Maddie feels it isn't prudent now that the vomiting has passed. It was touch and go there for a while. I think I've gotten most of the rot out and made enough room to grow.

We'll monitor the progression, of course, with a strict regimen of fresh air, sunshine, and rest. The polyps should be blooming soon.

Condition Update:

- I've gained some good weight and my skin is pulling away nicely like blanched tomatoes.
- My legs will be non-responsive soon. I need to finalise my position before then, but there are many variables to consider. Maddie is advising.
- The roots have freed themselves from the weight of my meat as it sags from my bones and drops to the dirt.
- No greenfly or other parasites. I remain quite healthy.

The clouds have finally broken and the azure skies are so bright, almost blinding! We are blessed with such a radiant joy of warmth and love sitting within our garden together. The thought of all those years behind me, toiling in the dark, ignoring nourishment for myself and others, so withdrawn... but no longer. I have so much time now, out in the light. But strangely, deep inside me, beneath the roots, there is something that still shakes with terror.

I don't see why. The sun is bright, my roots run deep and the breeze is fresh and clear. I think I shall stay here for a good long while.

3. OIAR BREAKROOM INT. - NIGHT, CLEAR (CCTV)

SAM enters the breakroom finding ALICE already there. He starts to make the coffee.

ALICE
Pour us one, would you?

SAM
Sure.

SAM continues to make coffee. He sighs and is clearly bothered by what he has heard.

ALICE
Yeah. I didn't catch all of it but that one sounded fun.

SAM
What do I even file that as? I doubt there's a code for "parasitic-garden-that-whispers-with-the-voice-of-the-woman-he-clearly-murderd-and-sort-of-turns-you-into-a-tree"

ALICE
"Infection" comma "arboreal". Cross link it with "guilt" if you're feeling fancy.

SAM
Of course.

Beat. SAM pours the coffee and brings it over to sit with Alice.

ALICE
Cheers.

They sip.

SAM
What?

ALICE
I'm just thinking. Would you fancy doing me a favour?

SAM

Depends.

ALICE

Nothing sordid-

SAM

Oh good.

ALICE

-it's just would you call
Central IT for me?

SAM

I thought Colin fixed your
computer?

ALICE

He did, with a lecture on top
and quite frankly I'm sick of
getting it in the neck every
time Freddie throws a wobbly.
We all know the system's a
mess, Colin's told us like a
billion times but he's the one
always fiddling with the
system, and well...

SAM

You think he's causing the
issues?

ALICE

I'm just beginning to wonder
if he knows what he's doing
with all that spaghetti code.
I'd check with central myself
but if Colin catches me he'll
pitch a fit.

SAM

Oh right but he and I are just
so close right now after your
stunt on my first night?

ALICE

Ah but you're new. You can
just claim ignorance. God
knows that's believable.
You're basically an ickle baby
foal wobbling around the

paddock with your little stick legs.

SAM

Thanks for that.

ALICE

You're welcome.

SAM

Look, Alice, I really don't want to rock the boat right now, everyone seems pretty tense as it is.

ALICE

All I'm saying is that Colin tinkers with this system all the time and I don't see any oversight.

If you queried upstairs asking about it, all bambi-eyed and innocent, some alarms might go off. They might even come down and do a refresh or reboot or whatever.

SAM

Hmmmmmm. You give a convincing argument-

ALICE

Thank you.

SAM

-but it's a no from me I'm afraid.

Beat.

ALICE

(joking)

You've made a powerful enemy tonight.

SAM

(sipping)

Better than being force fed my own keyboard by Colin.

Beat. GWEN enters.

ALICE

Fair point.

GWEN

Are you working on the 27th
Alice? I've got a thing and
you know what Lena's like.

ALICE

Good evening Gwendolyn.

GWEN

Must we do this every time?

ALICE

Fine. What's the 'Thing?'

GWEN

It's really not your concern.
Just are you working or not?

ALICE

See, now I really need to
know, what do you recon Sam?

SAM

I'm not getting dragged into
this.

GWEN

Alice, I don't have time for
this. It's simple: yes or no.

ALICE

It would be such a shame for
you to miss out just because
you wouldn't tell me. Sounds
rather petty doesn't it Sam?

SAM

Stop.

GWEN

(Restrained)

It is dinner with friends if
you must know. That's all.

ALICE

Let me guess, fancy gowns,
champagne, bathing in the
blood of the poor that sort of
thing?

GWEN

You know we make the same
Alice. An old friend just made
partner at her law firm. She
wants to celebrate.

ALICE

You sound thrilled.

GWEN

Oh I can't wait to catch up
and tell them I'm still
working in the same cesspit I
was last time they asked.

ALICE

Come on, its not that bad.

GWEN

Are you working or not? The
27th, yes or no?

ALICE

Fine. Yes, I'm working that
night. I'm working every
night. I was born down here
and I'll die down here. Happy?

GWEN

(sighing)

Are any of us?

Beat.

SAM

Yikes.

[Music]

ANNOUNCER

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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 Graeme Patrick and edited with additional material by Jonathan Sims Alexander J Newall, with vocal edits by Nico Vettese, sound scaping by Meg McKellar, and masting 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, Ryan Hopevere-Anderson as Colin Becher 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.

The Magnus Protocol 3 – Putting Down Roots

CAT2C8175-03042009-22012024

Infection (full body) -/- arboreal [journal entry]

Incident Elements:

- Temporal Distortion
- Compulsion/OCD
- Auditory Hallucinations
- Disorientation
- Hypochondria
- Paranoia
- Self-Injury

Transcripts: <https://shorturl.at/gzF15>

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

Created by Jonathan Sims and Alexander J Newall

Directed by Alexander J Newall

Written by Graeme Patrick (for more of his work visit <https://www.aintslayednobody.com/>)

Script Editing with Additional Materials by Jonathan Sims and Alexander J Newall

Executive Producers April Sumner, Alexander J Newall, Jonathan Sims, Dani McDonough, Linn Ci, and Samantha F.G. Hamilton

Associate Producers Jordan L. Hawk, Taylor Michaels, Nicole Perlman, Cetius d’Raven, and Megan Nice

Produced by April Sumner

Featuring (in order of appearance)

Ryan Hopevere-Anderson as Colin Becher

Billie Hindle as Alice Dyer

Alexander J Newall as Norris

Shahan Hamza as Samama Khalid

Anusia Battersby as Gwendolyn Bouchard

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Mastering Editor - Catherine Rinella

Music by Sam Jones (orchestral mix by Jake Jackson)

Art by April Sumner

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