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The Magnus Protocol

**Episode 8
"Running on Empty"**

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

**04-10-2023
Draft 3**

ANNOUNCER

This episode is dedicated to Gabriel Spencer - Thank you to the Magnus Institute for bringing me on an adventure through some of my biggest fears, with Jonathan and friends at my side.

[Intro Theme]

ANNOUNCER

**Rusty Quill Presents: The Magnus Protocol.
Episode Eight – Running on Empty**

[Music]

1. CYBERSPACE – N/A, N/A (CASE FILE – THESIS SUBMISSION)

NORRIS

**Coursework assessment report
13718B**

**Reviewing Tutor: Joseph Peterson
(#ARCSTAF-12)**

**Submitting Student: Terrance
Stevens (ID# ARCSTU-39609)**

Result: FAIL - late submission (28%)

**Assessment:
Structure & Organization – 50%**

Knowledge – 40%

Understanding – 30%

Analysis – 10%

Source Material Usage – 10%

**Extenuating circumstances:
Serious Medical Condition, Trauma,
Miscellaneous**

**Tutor Comments:
“See me.”**

ATTACHMENT:

Title: Forton’s Brutal Liminality, a case study of architecturally induced psychological stressors as a result of prolonged exposure to liminal spaces in the Brutalist mode as exhibited by Forton Service Station.

Introduction:

This paper will present a comprehensive analysis of Forton Services as a key site of study for the intersection between Brutalism and Liminal space design with a secondary focus on the psychological stresses such sites can cause.

First I will combine Theoretical Frameworks for Brutalism and Liminality. I will then examine Service Stations as psychologically stressful Liminal spaces before moving onto an architectural analysis of Forton Services and its history as a Brutalist site. This will

culminate in a case study into the effects of extended exposure to Liminal spaces with Brutalist Architecture via my employment at Forton services.

To start with, let us establish a theoretical underpinning for this paper by linking the architectural style of Brutalism to the anthropological theory of Liminality. I will do this by providing compatible interpretations of both and suggesting the new concept of Brutal Liminality.

Brutalism, originating from the French 'béton brut' - raw concrete, is an architectural movement that focuses on utilitarian purpose. This often results in exposed raw materials, stark forms, repetitive geometric shapes and monolithic structures. This can often lead end-users to feel overwhelmed or oppressed. (Zumthor, P. 2006).

'Liminal' spaces, derived from the Latin 'limen', meaning 'threshold' are transitional spaces normally inhabited for short periods. They have been shown to have marked effects upon the psychology of those exposed to them and long-term exposure has been found to illicit anxiety responses (Augé, M. 1995), (Bachelard, G. 1994) and feelings of the uncanny (Trigg, D. 2012).

My hypothesis is that that Forton services, as a site of intersection between these two psychologically significant elements can be considered a site of what I have termed “Brutal Liminalism” and this is why it has a profound effect upon those exposed to it in the long term as testified by my own experiences. Specifically, it creates an effect of absence despite presence, an “architectural hunger” of a sort.

Service stations such as Forton were originally conceived of as a location in and of themselves rather than merely a pause in a journey. However, with the widespread adoption of personal automobiles and the subsequent overdevelopment of UK road infrastructure, these spaces transitioned into liminal spaces.

This increase in travelers, far beyond older design parameters, has led to an ephemeral flux of people transitioning through service stations at all hours, leaving only trash in their wake.

Not only this, there are perceived time distortions associated with such spaces exacerbated by the deliberate absence of clocks (to encourage longer stays) and 24 hour opening times with rolling opening, closing, cleaning and restocking routines.

I propose that because these spaces are devoid of persistent humanity and consistent time perception, they have thus become dislocated from humanity's shared mindscape and there are unique health risks to people who are over-exposed to this phenomenon. In essence, I believe the "architectural hunger" of a space that resents its own transitional nature can be dangerous and I have a unique personal insight into this phenomenon

I originally took my role as a night janitor at Forton following a protracted divorce which cost me the majority of my friendships. The ensuing stress episode led me to quit my job as a deputy fiduciary services administrator. I thus applied and successfully interviewed for a low stress Janitor role despite my overqualifications. At the same time I successfully applied for the Architecture Program at Lancashire University as a mature, 51 year old student.

I soon came to realize that Forton Services is an ideal example of "Brutal Liminalism" given its status as both a popular motorway service station and a landmark of brutalist architecture. And I believe this is primarily thanks to the 20 meter Pennine Tower which was listed in

2012 despite being closed to the public.

The site is seventeen point seven acres featuring an eastern picnic site and facilities on both sides of the M6 motorway with seating for 700 people, 101 toilets and 403 parking spaces.

The top of the tower once held a fine-dining restaurant with a roof-level sun terrace both of which featured unmatched panoramic views of the surrounding rural countryside on all sides.

Unfortunately, the effects of Brutal Liminality soon took effect with a 1978 government review describing the site as “a soulless fairground” and the restaurant became a trucking lounge before being closed to the public in 1989. No-one has eaten there in decades.

There were later failed attempts to repurpose the space but in 2017, the two pentagonal lifts in the center of the Tower shaft were replaced leaving the higher floors derelict and inaccessible.

The tower still stands overlooking the surrounding countryside, the only access via the Brutally Liminal Forton Services below, but the entrance is sealed and this is perhaps for the best.

Despite being unable to enter the tower itself, I myself still came to find that over the months of my work there I was undergoing a psychological shift.

It was initially subtle enough that I failed to notice it and when I did, I assumed there was a rational explanation. Put simply, there were less and less people every night. At first, I assumed it was some seasonal change I hadn't accounted for but every day it grew more pronounced until finally, one night, I realized that I had not seen a single person.

This was obviously impossible, but it was verified by my log (see fig 1). I racked my brains, trying to remember if I had caught even a glimpse but no, no one. Intrigued, I stepped outside to check the car park. There wasn't a single car. But there was... something else.

As my eyes adjusted to the amber-lit expanse I started to notice streaks of light lingering in the air. There was a nebulous haze across the entire car park, a mélange of muted colors punctuated with more vivid reds, whites and yellows but even more curiously I realized it primarily hovered above the asphalt. The Greenery and walkways were mostly clear. The effect was curiously familiar but I couldn't quite place it. I have since been unable to determine

if this effect was psychological, physiological, or atmospheric in nature but I maintain that the phenomena was accompanied by a disquieting sense of absence. Of hunger.

I squinted again, trying to make out details in those long, waving, iridescent strips. I could trace denser routes through the chaos leading through the main doors to the facilities and as I watched a memory of my ex-wife's photography leapt unbidden to mind, my favorite shot that she'd given me on our seventh anniversary: "A study of traffic."

That's when I realized why this all felt so familiar. Timelapse. If I could have walked into that photo, this must be what it would have felt like. It would have been beautiful if it weren't so unsettling.

In retrospect I was clearly having some kind of severe hallucinatory episode brought on by long-term exposure to the space. I knew I should probably just sit quietly and wait it out but the glowing mist had already crept into the building itself, and my only instinct was to hide, to find somewhere, anywhere that I might be free of that overwhelming miasma sloshing back and forth within the foyer threatening to wash me away with it.

I retreated, away from the main

entrance, away from the densest areas of the kaleidoscope in the hopes of finding somewhere less overwhelmingly saturated. And that was when I saw the woman.

She was tall, young, and thin, almost to the point of malnourishment, dressed similarly to a stewardess with a tightly fitting blue waistcoat buttoned over a sensible looking grey skirt. She was beaming, holding open the door to the lift and inviting me inside. There was a small brass badge on her waistcoat, but instead of a name it simply read “You are here”.

I hesitated a moment but before I could consider her strangeness a particularly high tide of color swept down the corridor toward me. I panicked, and before I realized what I was doing I had darted inside the lift and slammed the close-door button.

“Thank you!” I croaked, my voice catching from disuse. She didn’t seem to notice and instead continued to smile warmly at me as she reached across and pushed the button for the penultimate floor marked “Restaurant”. A button I knew was disabled. The lift started to climb.

I stood, leaning against the doors and tried to catch my breath as she began to speak:

**“Good Evening!” She exclaimed,
“It’s my pleasure to welcome you!
You are here! Stay awhile!”**

**I gabbled some indeterminate
question and her rictus grin stayed
as wide as ever, but she said
nothing. Then the doors to the lift
opened with a ping and I tumbled
backwards onto the floor.**

**“Stay awhile!” she called again
before the lift doors closed
depositing me in the tower.**

**I’d been shown the locked tower
stairway on my first day by my
predecessor Molly, and I knew there
was nothing up there any more apart
from damp and broken furniture. At
least, there shouldn’t have been.**

**Before me though, was a restaurant,
spotless and bright with retro 60s
décor and the sweet smell of frying
pork drifting towards me from the
central kitchen. Chairs and tables
lined the outside wall, each of which
sporting a large window which would
have granted an impressive view of
the landscape below if they weren’t
all blacked out. This didn’t seem to
concern the diners however, who
were perfectly content eating whilst
chatting amiably with one another.**

**There was a moment of relief then,
for as strange as the situation was,
at least there were people. I was no
longer trapped in that bizarre,**

**solitary, aurora limbo downstairs.
The feeling faded though, when I
heard what they were saying, or
rather what they weren't saying.**

**Looking around, the restaurant was
near capacity with only one free
table but when I tried to listen to any
one conversation it was just... noise.
A muffled murmur that sounded like
speech but held no information.
Their mouths were moving but all I
could make out was a meaningless
garble, just the impression of
speech, nothing more.**

**Similarly, as I looked closer at the
diners themselves, I noticed oddly
repeating elements to them. Three
women were wearing the same
blood-red heels. Two men, the same
blue coats and worse, there were
even recurring features iterating on
different faces: the same green eyes
on two women, identical moustaches
on three men. These were as much
an impression of people as the
sound was an impression of speech.
And they were all so horribly thin.**

**A Chef turned to me, the same smile
on his face below a fourth version of
a bushy moustache and an identical
"You are here" name tag on his
chest. He gestured from his place
behind the counter to the only open
table:**

**"Good Evening!" He cried, "You are
here! We hope you stay awhile!"**

I automatically stepped towards the table before I caught myself. At the same time everybody in the room seemed to lean ever so slightly forward in anticipation.

That was when I noticed the breeze blowing in through the blacked out windows, only they weren't blacked out. They weren't even windows. They were gaping square holes and beyond them was nothing at all. Any one of the diners could reach out if they had a mind to and plunge their hand outwards into the dark, foreboding and utterly featureless void. There was nothing. Nothing above, nothing below, nothing at all. Nothing, save the tower and the restaurant.

My whole body recoiled from that awful absence, and I retreated backwards towards the lift. That was when the gentle murmur of non-speech abruptly ceased to be replaced with a complete and utter silence.

Everyone was still smiling but their repeating faces had frozen, staring straight at me.

The chef spoke again and though his tone hadn't changed it was clear this was no longer a request:

“Stay awhile.”

The diners echoed his words, a gradual chorus disseminating about the room, overlapping and entwining, wrapping me up and dragging me back towards the table.

“Stay awhile.”

Their grip on me tightened, a dozen hands pushing and pulling me as one. Then a man with that same moustache leant down towards my leg, opened his mouth, and bit into me.

Pain shot through my body, but my thrashing was in vain as one of the women buried her teeth in my shoulder, and I could feel hot blood flowing down my back as whilst at the same time the chef took off one of my fingers, the bone barely slowing his chiseled jaw.

I screamed, but the sound withered draining out the windows into nothing.

With a sudden surge of adrenaline, I shoved and kicked and fought my way free of the emaciated crowd, their thin and brittle bodies offering little resistance despite their number. But I had nowhere to go. The lift had disappeared as if it had never been. And beyond the windows was of course nothing. “You are here”, I thought bitterly.

and so when faced with the prospect of being eaten alive, or leaping out one of those windows into pure oblivion, it was no choice at all. I jumped.

Beat

NORRIS

(cont.)

The paramedics listed my missing finger and other injuries as having been received when I fell from the tower and baring further evidence to the contrary (which I shall not be returning to Forton to collect), I am forced to accept their diagnosis of falling damage and associated trauma as a result of a stress-induced psychotic episode.

In conclusion, there is no question that my time working at Forton Services has affected me profoundly. This experience is proof of the intense mental pressure that such Brutal Liminalism can have upon a person who is overexposed to such “hungry architecture”.

I can only apologise for my unintentional extended absence. I hope this may provide some context, though I am painfully aware that no missing person report was filed with the police since apparently none of my colleagues, tutors or fellow students noticed my absence.

Nonetheless, I hope that this can still be considered an extenuating

circumstance and that my findings do merit further study. Though I would request that any further work be passed to another student.

The text-to-speech completes and the computer winds down into an idle state.

2. INT. O.I.A.R. BREAKROOM– NIGHT, CLEAR (CCTV)

ALICE is sat watching something on her phone. GWEN enters clearly irritated. She attempts to flick on the kettle only to find it empty. She puts it down roughly.

GWEN

Alice.

Beat.

GWEN

(cont.)

Alice.

ALICE

(pulling out an ear bud)

Hmmm?

GWEN

You did it again.

ALICE

Hmmm.

GWEN

Don't "hmmm" me. We agreed that when you empty the kettle you fill it back up after.

ALICE
(Still watching)
It's not empty.

GWEN
There's not even a third of a cup in there!

ALICE
(Finally engaging)
So it's not empty then is it?

GWEN
It's bad enough that you deliberately try to find talkers and leave them running just to mess with me-

ALICE
Allegedly.

GWEN
-but the least you could do is keep the kettle filled!

Beat. GWEN starts refilling the kettle.

ALICE
You sound stressed. Problems up the corporate ladder? Already feeling the strain of deputy president of executive synergy?

GWEN
"External Liaison".

ALICE
And of course, we both know what that means. Right?

GWEN
I assume I'm going to be managing a bunch of contractors.

ALICE
(Interested despite herself)
Contractors for what?

GWEN
I'll be receiving a more
comprehensive overview "shortly".

ALICE
Gosh. How exciting. I do hope you
decide tell us lowly grunts when
Lena finally figures out what your job
is. Assuming any of us are still here
by then.

GWEN
And what's that supposed to mean?

ALICE
Just been a lot of changes round
here recently. I don't love it. Teddy,
Sam, Celia, and did you hear Lena
put Colin on "mental health leave"?

GWEN
What?

ALICE
Oh yeah, it was a whole thing. He
flipped out and smashed up Sam's
phone.

GWEN
I always said he was unbalanced.

ALICE
You say a lot of things, mostly crap. I
dunno... Feels like something's
going on here.

GWEN

What's "going on" is a massive backlog that you aren't helping with. Speaking of, where're Sam and Celia?

ALICE

They finished their caseloads early so they headed off together.

GWEN

They can't just leave like that without even signing out-

ALICE

Maybe they were too busy gettin' hot and heavy to Norris' sexy drone and didn't notice.

GWEN

Don't be gross.

ALICE

You got it, "boss".

3. INT. A MAISONETTE – MORNING, BRIGHT (SAM'S PHONE).

GERRY

(bustling in)

Sorry for the mess, I wasn't expecting anyone.

CELIA

One empty mug hardly counts as "mess."

GERRY

Oh you're too kind!
(calling from the kitchen)

**There's some fresh sourdough rolls,
if you want a bite?**

SAM
No thank you!

GERRY
(calling)
**You sure? Homemade lemon curd to
go with it...**

SAM
(calling)
We're fine, honestly!

GERRY
(calling)
Tea? Coffee? Orange juice?

CELIA
(calling)
**You're very kind, but nothing for us,
thank you!**

GERRY
(reentering)
Well, if you're sure...

GERRY sits with a cup of herbal tea.

GERRY
(sitting)
**So where were we, I don't think I
caught your names...**

SAM
Sam.

CELIA
(walking around)
Celia.

GERRY

Pleasure to meet you both. I'm
Gerry!

SAM

(smiling)

We know.

GERRY

(laughing)

Oh right, course you do! You asked
for me, duh! So what can I do you
for?

SAM

Right, well-

CELIA

This place all yours?

GERRY

(laughing)

With London rent? Hardly! Don't get
me wrong, the landlord's lovely and
all, but I still share it with Gee Gee.

CELIA

Gee Gee?

Gertrude enters.

GERTRUDE

That would be me.

GERRY

Visitors, Gee Gee!

GERTRUDE

Yes I can see that Gerry.

(coldly)

To what do we owe this early
morning... pleasure.

SAM

Oh yeah, sorry we work nights so...

GERTRUDE

So?

Beat.

SAM

Ahem. Well... uh... we were wondering-

CELIA

Did you paint this?

GERTRUDE

Excuse me?

GERRY

Oh yes! I call it "Camden Epiphany".
Do you like it?

CELIA

It's lovely!

GERRY

You can have it if you want.

CELIA

Oh no I couldn't...

GERRY

It's fine honestly, I've got plenty more out back. You'd be doing us a favor to be honest. Gee Gee's always saying they take up too much space aren't you Gee Gee?

GERTRUDE

What exactly did you say was your business with my grandson?

CELIA

Uh... Sam?

SAM

Right. Of course. I was wondering if you knew anything about The Magnus Institute?

Beat. No-one moves.

SAM

(cont.)

I was on one of their gifted kids programs and -um- I got hold of a list of a few of the other kids and thought it might be nice if we could get in contact, swap stories and that.

GERTRUDE

I see. Well I'm sorry, but I don't think Gerry can help you-

GERRY

Yeah I barely remember any of it.

Beat. GERTRUDE disapproves.

SAM

Oh, so you were a candidate?

GERRY

Oh yeah but I was pretty young. I remember filling in a bunch of forms and questionnaires then some old men asking me questions about what books I liked to read, who did I look up to, that kind of thing. Then I left.

SAM

(Disappointed)

That's all?

GERRY

Yea, afraid so. Other than just sitting around with a bunch of other kids in a room that smelled like old books.

Beat. SAM is clearly dejected.

GERTRUDE

(standing)

Well if that's all, we really have to get on with our day...

SAM

(standing)

Of course, we'll just be going then. Ah, well.

GERRY

Don't take it too much to heart. It's such a lovely morning.

SAM

(smiling)

You're not wrong.

GERTRUDE

(opening the door)

Off you go then. Nice to meet you both.

GERRY

(bustling)

Don't forget Camden Epiphany!

CELIA

Wouldn't dream of it.

GERRY

(still bustling)

And come back soon! Always a pleasure to chat with old friends!

GERTRUDE

I don't know they'll have much
reason to, Gerry.

(to Sam)

Good luck hunting elsewhere.

SAM

Thanks again for your time.

CELIA

Bye Gerry!

GERRY

Bye Celia!

The door closes with us outside alongside Sam and Celia.

GERRY

(muffled)

I liked them.

GERTRUDE

(muffled)

Of course you do.

**4. EXT. GERRY'S FLAT - MORNING, BRIGHT (SAM'S
PHONE).**

SAM and Celia are stepping outside onto the pavement.

SAM

Well that was-

CELIA

Nice?

SAM

- a dead end.

CELIA

Yeah. Free painting though!

SAM

(starting to walk)

How do you intend to get that on the tube?

CELIA

I'll figure it out.

Beat.

SAM

Thanks for coming with me Celia. I know we've only been working together a few weeks.

CELIA

Hey, it was my idea, remember?

SAM

I know Alice just wants me to drop this whole Magnus thing but, well, I had to try. Not that it matters, dead ends all the way down.

Beat.

CELIA

Well, maybe you can help me with my mystery.

SAM

And what mystery is that?

CELIA

I'm trying to look into... Weird physics stuff: time travel, other dimensions, teleportation, all that good stuff. Freddy doesn't really do searches, so could you keep an eye out and let me know if any come up in your cases?

SAM

Uh, sounds a bit sci-fi compared to our usuals. What's this for? You're not doing research for that podcast you were on, are you?

CELIA

You know about that?

SAM

I might have given you a quick google.

CELIA

Then yeah. I'm doing a favor for Georgie.

SAM

Fair enough.

Beat.

CELIA

So do we have deal? Help with each other's mysteries?

SAM

Yeah all right. Deal.

CELIA

Great. Also as part of the deal, you have to carry this painting on the tube.

SAM

Now hang on-

[Music]

ANNOUNCER

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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 Lowri Ann Davies, soundscaping by Tessa Vroom, 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, 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 8 – Hostile Workplace

CAT2RBC3366-12072023-28022024

Architecture (liminal) -/-hunger [coursework]

Incident Elements:

- **Temporal Distortion**
- **Spatial Distortion**
- **Altered Reality**
- **Isolation**
- **Graphic Violence**
- **Canibalism**
- **Mentions of – stress, trauma, psychological breakdown, starvation**

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

This Episode is dedicated to Gabriel Spencer, 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 Alexander J Newall

Script Editing with Additional Materials by Jonathan Sims

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)

Alexander J Newall as Norris

Anusia Battersby as Gwendolyn Bouchard

Billie Hindle as Alice Dyer

Jon Gracey as Gerry Keay

Lowri Ann Davies as Celia Ripley

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**Shahan Hamza as Samama Khalid
Sue Sims as Gertrude Robinson**

**Dialogue Editor – Lowri Ann Davies
Sound Designer – Tessa Vroom
Mastering Editor - Catherine Rinella**

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

**SFX from soundly, Freesound (CCO): vckhaze,
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