

# **Magestic**

## **Part 1**

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No 10. Downing Street, London. Summer, 1985.

The Prime Minister ran a quick eye over a letter, initialling the corner before handing it back to the waiting messenger.

Thirty minutes later a buff coloured file was being keenly opened by Jack Donohue at the Ministry of Defence. The letter, a tip-off about an upcoming IRA terror attack, now had the addition of TOP SECRET stamped onto it in blood red ink. He touched the edges of the letter reverently and squared it off to the file; neatness was next to Godliness for Jack. He curled a lip at the fingerprint dust still adhering to the paper, pursed his lips and blew delicately.

Jack read the brief letter over and over, trying hard to *read between the lines*. He attempted to judge the tone and the style of writing, trying desperately to glean some intelligence about the sender – his assigned task. Magestic with a ‘g’, whoever the individual was, had already caused him some sleepless nights. If only the letter had been signed “Majestic”.

Majestic had been the CIA campaign of misinformation about UFOs in the 1960s; a pet hobby of Jacks. But why spell the word with a ‘g’? Was our friend simply a bad speller? No, the writing style had been exhaustively analysed by various linguists and experts. Our friend was deemed to be well educated and cultured. So, it was a deliberate spelling mistake. ‘Magestic’ was a noun, a few references around the world, but none that seemed to be of significance or relevance.

This new letter, typed like the rest, had been numbered by the sender in handwriting as ‘12’ and detailed an elaborate IRA attack, so much detail that some in the government were certain that Magestic was *in the community of spies*, possibly a high ranking member of the IRA itself. Jack knew that to be nonsense, because lying next to him was a file of the first eleven letters, many detailing natural disasters. Being an intelligence researcher, Jack knew the limitations of field agents and double agents, and predicting the next winner of the Eurovision Song Contest was not amongst the attributes

of any spy he ever knew of. No, this was something quite, quite different.

The fact that the Magestic letters had been assigned to him was a great honour for Jack, his career not quite working out as anticipated in his youth. Thirty-eight years old, if he was going to do anything noteworthy, he figured, he would have done so by now. Civil Service retirement at fifty-five loomed as the only light at the end of the long dark tunnel as he sat in his basement office, longing for a window.

He smiled when considering why they had assigned him this task; a degree in psychology. Actually, it was a 2.1, not so clever. But still, here he sat, grinning smugly at his assigned task, a task that his superior resented Jack handling. His boss always read the letters first, just to make a point, but never gleaned anything of use outside of the obvious facts detailed. Like the other so-called 'experts', Jack considered, his boss was stuck in the detail, not the topics or the style. Now, he considered again the detail of this latest message as he worked alone in his office, muttering to himself. 'Playful, confident, sarcastic almost ... yet important, direct, necessary.' He made notes, comparing them to a previously prepared summary.

'Terrorists actions ... but only related to us, to the UK, not to any other country. Posted in the UK, in London, various central locations, plus Cardiff, Reading and Swindon. Our friend uses the train a lot, a commuter like myself. Hell, I may have even sat opposite him, and I'm sure by the tone that *it* is a *him*. Mid to late forties, ex-military or similar I believe, and a powerful clairvoyant.' Easing back, his chair issued a creak of complaint as he tapped his top lip with his pen.

He tipped his head back as far as it would go, stretching his neck muscles. 'So why tip us off? Why not ... bet the races.' He raised a pointed finger. 'Maybe he does. Note: look for big, consistent winners at the races - stock markets maybe.

'So far ... three IRA attacks, one faulty ship – which sank unfortunately, one spy escaping the safe house a day early, a

rail crash averted – but disputed, an aircraft with a faulty fuel line – gratefully found in time, Reagan’s win at the polls, an attempt on our Ambassador in Angola – averted, the Eurovision Song Contest winner – just to make a point, the Iran-Contra affair...’

A thought surfaced, Jack’s features hardening quickly. He typed a hurried note and sent it directly to the Cabinet Office by courier, a deliberate breach of protocol.

The Prime Minister read the note, took off her glasses and eased back in her chair, staring out of focus for several seconds. ‘I want the intelligence chiefs. Tonight. Oh, and this officer ... Donohue, fetch him as well.’

When the officers had assembled in Cabinet Office Briefing Room ‘A’, COBRA, the Prime Minister stepped purposefully in and sat quickly, placing down her handbag. Jack adjusted his tie, wondering just how annoyed his manager would be, yet not giving a damn. Deputy Director Sykes was in attendance for this meeting, and eyed Jack suspiciously.

Straight to the point, The Prime Minister said, ‘This gentleman –’ motioning toward Jack. ‘- has come up with a ... very significant point. What if our good friend Magestic is sending tip-offs to other nations?’ She waited as concerned looks swept around the assembled faces. ‘Up to now we have assumed that this was just about us.’

Jack delicately raised a finger.

‘Yes?’ the P.M. curtly prompted.

‘I hope you don’t mind, but when I ... er ... got the idea I rang a good friend in the London CIA section, the researcher I’m supposed to co-operate with on the psychology of the Russian leadership -’

‘Yes, yes,’ the P.M. urged, beckoning Jack onward with her hand.

‘I figured that, if they didn’t already know, then they wouldn’t register anything about the name. I asked if he had heard the word Magestic...’

‘And?’ Sykes firmly nudged when Jack hesitated.

‘My contact went apoplectic at the mention of the word, demanded to know what I knew.’

Numerous whispered conversations broke out, the P.M. staring hard at Jack. She cut through the chatter with, ‘You have short-cut ... what could have been a lengthy process. Now they know that we’ve been getting letters. But, more importantly, we know that this is not just about us.’

Jack forced a breath. ‘Prime Minister, we know that Magestic is probably London based, or a commuter along the M4 motorway. So ... so if the Americans have had letters, they would, most likely, be posted to the US Ambassador here ... in London.’

‘Are you suggesting ... that we *intercept* the American Ambassador’s mail?’

Jack decided to be bold. ‘They can’t possibly know when the next letter will appear, so they won’t miss it if ... it went missing.’

The P.M. stood, a nod toward Sykes before exiting quickly. A chorus of overlapping whispers began. Jack tentatively raised a finger.

‘Donohue, you don’t need to raise a finger like a schoolboy wanting the toilet,’ Sykes suggested. ‘What is it?’

‘Well ... er ... I firmly believe that our friend, well meaning that he is, may also be sending letters to others; Russians, Chinese...’

‘Jesus,’ Sykes let out.

November 21<sup>st</sup>, 2035, aboard the eco-submarine Warrior III, North East of Bermuda.

As I sat down at my cabin’s small desk I knew exactly what I wanted to write, but my hand just hovered over the data pad. I finally touched the screen.

‘Ready to begin recording and transcribing’ came a pleasant, yet detached female voice. It had obviously been thoughtfully designed by some youngster at Chinchon-Microsoft to be non-patronising, and was the same voice as that on my PCD. If she was real I hoped she was on a commission; a penny a device would have made her billions!

‘PCD’ I repeated in my mind: Personal Communications Device. When I was lad a computer was called a computer, then they became desktop computers – fair enough, then personal computers, PCs – or was it the other way around. Then everyone had a laptop to carry around. Soon mobile phones started to do what computers did and so they became Personal Communication Devices – shortened eventually to PCs, and it all got confusing. Your laptop worked like a phone and your phone worked like a computer, only smaller. And me, I often longed for the first IBM PC’s keyboard, ivory keys that ‘clunked’ heavily when you hit them, so much better than touch screens with intuitive algorithms. The number of spreadsheets I accidentally sent my mum from forty thousand feet over the Atlantic.

When I first started work in the city of London, mobile phones were called phones and were the size of a house brick, a thousand pounds to buy; only city brokers with pink shirts and briefcases lugged them around. Then they got smaller, soon everyone and their kids got one, then there were suddenly more mobile phones on the planet than people, and poor Africans tried to fix them, or melt them down or something; I remembered images of poor black kids sitting on a mountain of old phones, trying to make enough money to cover their next meal.

When was that, I considered, thinking back over the years; probably around 2013, before the troubles began. And talk about city traders, I was one for a whole six months before starting to work for Jimmy Silo. It was how we met. Actually, it was how he recruited me, and not for the first time. He came looking for me.

I took a breath, a quick glance at the wall and the photographs of my kids and ex-wife. 'Kids', I repeated in my mind, they were now parents themselves. But they would always be kids to me. 'My name ... my name is Paul Holton ... and this is my account of my life with Jimmy Silovich; time traveller, womaniser, philanthropist, reluctant politician ... and my friend.'

I caught my own image in the desk mirror; seventy years old going on twenty-five. At least I appeared twenty-five on the surface, thanks to the genetically modified stem cells floating about my system, hunting earnestly for something to repair and rejuvenate. I could pass for twenty-five, but these days so could a lot of people if they had the money. My mop of black curly hair was still there, and still a mop. As a teenager I had tried to tame it, around the time I had tried in earnest to stop my mum from buying me shirts with wide collars, and cuffs that took ages to iron. The taming hadn't worked, neither the hair nor my mum. No matter what I tried, my hair had its own ideas. It was cut every six weeks and we agreed to ignore each other and do our own thing. In its favour it never needed combing and looked exactly the same after a futile attempt at male grooming.

Sometimes, these days, my eyes looked tired and I could imagine how I might actually appear at seventy: grey hair, or no hair, wrinkles and sun spots, opaque skin and errant strands of hair trying to escape from my nostrils and eardrums. But, thanks to my mentor, I - and everyone else on the planet - had the chance of eternal youth, a subject of much debate amongst many groups, some of whom wanted me dead.

I began.

1986, London. My 'digs' in Richmond.

The new guy was shaping up nicely. Six foot four, built like Darth Vader's big brother and smart with it, we were getting

on well. He did the dishes, cleaned the house, bought way too much food and drink for just his own consumption and he nearly always picked up a take-away on the way home, from the Chinese next to Richmond tube station. Me, and Dave the other lodger, were getting fat and lazy after just two weeks. With England playing in the World Cup, and tonight's match against Argentina of all countries, we were well geared up; Chinese takeaway, cans of lager, ice cream slowly defrosting and some popcorn for later. Dave and I were as snug as we could get. All we needed was a pair of lap-dancers for half time and life would have been perfect.

Jimmy had joined McKinleys Stock Brokers almost a few months ago and had noticed my advert for a lodger. Rents were high in London, especially in posh Richmond, and I had taken the lease on a whole damn house just to be near my parents. Four streets distant, it was far enough away to be independent. Just. I was twenty-three and the hormones were raging. All I needed was some money, and not to be so damn tired on the weekends that I just slept. Somewhere out there was the big wide world and the bright lights, yet to be discovered.

Getting out on a Saturday night and *going large* was proving to be more difficult a task than I had anticipated when I had moved out from my parents. Money was tight, better now with the last room occupied, and the working day was killing me; I was running on chocolate and coffee. Didn't know how Jimmy did it, he hardly slept and was always wide-awake, polite and pleasant. I suspected cocaine, since many of the lads in the office were using it, especially on a Saturday night. We were up at 6am, on the tube at 6.30am, two changes, into the office for 7.45am, pink Financial Times under arms and looking quite the part in our smart suits. We hadn't yet opted for pink shirts, and I definitely couldn't afford a mobile phone. Still, we were 1980's city traders, sons of Margaret Thatcher's revolution and yuppies in the making.

The football match had proved boring so far; a few chances, a few nudges and hard tackles, plenty of shouting at

the TV. At least the food had been good and the beers were going down nicely. Holding my aching stomach, I remembered the threat we had made to go around the corner and show the local girls how to dance. This was why I was single: getting home at 7.30pm knackered, stuffing my face and falling asleep till bedtime. I was twenty-three going on sixty!

With ten minutes of the match left to go, Jimmy said, 'You know what I reckon will happen.' He stated it in a voice that made him sound much older than myself, even though we were both the same age. 'I reckon ... that Maradona will *punch* the ball over Shilton's head, winning the match one nil.'

'What?' Dave said with a heavy frown. He shot me a look. 'If he hand-balls it, it won't be a goal, will it?' He looked embarrassed for Jimmy, who we had already figured was not a football fan.

'They'll allow it,' Jimmy suggested. 'Ten quid on it.'

'Twenty quid on it,' Dave countered, easing up from his slumber and flicking noodles off his smart work trousers.

'Make it a round hundred,' Jimmy confidently suggested.

'A hundred?' Dave repeated, another glance toward me. 'That Maradona ... will hand-ball in the winning goal? You're on, sucker.'

Jimmy opened more cans and politely offered them around as we waited. A few minutes later Dave and I were on our feet, our jaws touching the floor. And I should have known then that there was something very odd about the big guy. Dave couldn't speak for a whole minute. He rang his mates to check that the match really was live and not recorded. He even rang the BBC as Jimmy insisted that he didn't want the money. And that was the start of it. My lodger could predict the future with pinpoint accuracy, a handy trait for a budding stockbroker.

The second clue came that Friday night when I actually felt like I had the energy for a few beers in the pub around the corner. In those days they were smoke filled, no laws against

smoking in public places yet. And if there was a pretty girl present then she most definitely was a smoker. Still, in those days the birds were British at least, we weren't knee deep in East Europeans yet. With no seats free, we stood at the end of the bar, me and Dave picking Jimmy's brain on politics, which he seemed to know way too much about; he had an opinion on everything. And I mean *everything*. In our work suits we soon caught the attention of two nice girls, smokers of course, and Jimmy bought everyone several rounds. Oddly, he had deep pockets, just one more mystery about mister mystery guy.

'That's my ex-boyfriend and his mates,' the first girl whispered at some point, a nod towards the other end of the bar.

'Not to worry, and not a problem,' Jimmy quietly and confidently assured her, not even bothering to scan the would-be troublemakers.

I, on the other hand, was worried and glanced their way, a bit too obvious. Now the former Romeo knew we were discussing him, maybe even the size of his dick. Judging by the size of the rest of him it could well have been a whopper. We were in trouble. Dave was no fighter, and I preferred the *run very fast* approach to these things.

'I think your ex is still interested,' I suggested to the girl.

'He's such a wanker,' she came back with, shaking her head. 'Watch out for flying bottles.'

'Shall we ... eh ... go somewhere else?' I suggested. 'Curry maybe?' That was a bad idea, I just remembered, since I couldn't have even stuffed a packet of crisps into my bursting abdomen.

'Sounds good,' Jimmy enthused, a budding world champion at face stuffing; fella had the size to squeeze it into. Outside, in the cool night air and smoke free environment, Jimmy said, 'Start walking, I'll be a step or two behind you.'

With curious frowns, the four of us plodded slowly towards the local curry house, Jimmy trailing behind. We could not have made ten paces before a shout caused the girls

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