

Manifestations S01 E10: Tractus

Intro Music - Breathe, by Chill Carrier <https://chillcarrier.bandcamp.com/>

Voiceover: Manifestations is a podcast of the Ostium Network

Voiceover: Time is not linear, but our story is.
Please join us ... on our journey.
We, are Manifestations.

Music becomes dramatic then fades out

*[Moody/tense music - Across This Ravaged World, by Entropy Audio]
<https://entropyaudio.bandcamp.com/>*

Alan - *[sound: elevator doors opening]* There are 6 people getting out of the elevator. All but one are dressed in what I guess is more formal attire. Not really a suit, but it still makes me feel underdressed. *[sound: elevator doors close]* I recognize one of them from the contact list in my phone, Director Lydea Greely. She thanks everyone and apologizes for the change in location.

Alan - The one person dressed differently, is wearing something reminiscent of a lab coat. They are young and seem more nervous than any of the others. I see the group moving toward the box placed on the table and taking seats, so I do the same. I choose a seat next to the scientist because -- they have an air of being “in the present” about them. Like they’re taking in everything, processing, and cataloging it. I feel a kinship to them. The group in the suits each have a somewhat distracted expression. That one that lets you know, someone can’t possibly give you their full attention because they’re busy thinking about the next, more important meeting.

Alan - The Director is still standing and begins the meeting. Her tone doesn’t ease my tension. The discussion is regarding the lack of progress on “the project.” I realize no one in the room is making eye contact with her, except me. I make a quick glance toward the windows, so of course she turns her attention to me.

Alan - She says, *[echo effect as Alan impersonates the Director]* “Dr. Redwind, we’re counting on your skill *again* to get the AI operating at 100% efficiency. It is imperative that it can control the next Outlook Window **first thing tomorrow**, as planned. And yes, I do know what I’m asking. But, I trust you understand our deadline and remember the importance of the project. I would like you and Dr. Flores to get to work immediately. You are cleared for access to the computer lab and related areas.”

Alan - At that last instruction, she motions to the young scientist in the lab coat. We look at each other and for a moment, I feel like I should recognize them. I give a small smile and nod as everyone begins to stand, and we make our way to the elevator which opens as we near. *[sound: elevator doors open]* Before we step in, Director Greely says, *[echo effect]* “**Drs. Flores & Redwind, I expect regular updates on your progress.**” The doors close and Dr. Flores presses her palm to hand shape. It’s replaced by a keypad, on which they key 37.

Alan - Again, the elevator doesn't even seem to move, but the doors open to reveal a wide hallway.. I motion for Dr. Flores to step out first. Yes, to be polite. But honestly, I'm trusting them to lead me where we're going.

Alan - With a tilt of their head and a sweeping hand gesture, and a stern, *[radio effect]* "Please, after you Thomas." I'm forced to take the first step out of the elevator. I step out and turn around to wait. But I see they are still inside. As the doors are closing, they say, *[radio effect]* "I think you have things under control." *[sound: elevator doors close]* Did they smile right before the doors closed?

[music fades and is replaced with a darker/more tense music]
Into The Depths, by Myuu <https://myuu.bandcamp.com/music>

Alan - None of this is helping my anxiety. I'm going to be expected, on my own, to fix a computer system more advanced than anything I've seen. And now, the person supposed to be helping me, has abandoned me. Maybe they're annoyed at something I did. My host has been here before, so I can only guess they don't see eye-to-eye. What if I'm in the body of a complete jerk?

Alan - *{deep breath}* Okay. I activate the HUD and look for - yes, there it is. A floor plan. Doors on the left side of the hall about every 50 feet, but I only see one door on the right. That's the main computer lab. I set off walking and hope Dr. Flores has a change of heart.

Alan - The door to the computer lab has a palm security pad. I press my hand against it and the door opens by sliding into the wall. The sci-fi nerd in me takes some small satisfaction from this. I step inside and look around. The lab itself is a little, underwhelming. The area is not much bigger than the conference room we just left. It has uh, maybe 10 foot ceilings and is 40 feet deep by 90 feet wide. On each end of that 90 feet are 3 work stations. The walls, floor and most of the furniture are made from solar adobe. There are no seams, like the room was grown with this layout. The terminal view screens and keypads are built into the workstations, similar to the screen my phone.

Alan - In the center of the room is a six sided meeting table, empty except for a tray with 6 glasses. Looking around, I also notice the wall opposite the door has 2 windows, close to the workstations on each side, but the majority of the wall in between is empty.

Alan - The middle station on the left side of the room is the only one active. I approach it and find a greeting and question waiting for me. It says, "Hello Dr. Redwind. Begin sync to PCD?" There is also a spot in the shape of a rectangle, with the letters PCD slowly flashing. I open and place my phone, or PCD apparently, in the spot and I see a progress bar begin to illuminate. It quickly shows the message "PCD sync complete. Accessing remote files." And another, slower progress bar, begins.

Alan - I sit down to relax as I wait, when I hear a voice say:

QILA - It's good to see you again Dr. Redwind.

Alan - Spinning around, I find that I'm still the only person in the room. But the large empty section of wall is now replaced with a hexagonal video screen that contains undulating patterns in various shades of blues and greens. The patterns enlarge, become bright, and flash in time with the next words I hear.

QILA - Director Greely is confident we'll be able to correct any issues with my programming in time for the next test window. I do not know why I am experiencing interference at critical times during testing, but I'm sure we'll discover the error.

Alan - *{relieved breath}* It's the AI. My host was here before to correct a similar flaw. His notes are now synced with the work station. Lets see if I can find what he did and repeat it.

Alan - His filing system is meticulous. I find a series of notes from the last visit. It details what was done step-by-step. First, was to put the Q.I.L.A. into Protected Diagnostic Mode. I sound it out loud, "QILA"

QILA - Yes Dr. Redwind?

Alan - "QILA, is your name?" -- I say it, and promptly flinch. This is something my host would know. The AI snaps back:

QILA - Yes. **Q**uantum Interpretive and **L**earning **A**lgorithms. But I hope all your tests won't be so basic, Dr. Redwind.

Alan - *{nervous laugh}* "Sorry. Bad joke. QILA, would you please engage Protected Diagnostic Mode? And then we'll begin."

QILA - Of course, Dr. Redwind.

Alan - The screens on the workstation change. There is now an area showing different aspects of system operation, with bold letters **PDM** in the upper left corner. There are notes from my host to begin running analysis programs that he designed. I see them in a separate space from the PDM area. I press on one glyph and drag it over to the PDM. As I release, the area comes alive with executing code and results. None of which makes any sense to me.

Alan - My attention is grabbed by something on a smaller screen, to the left side of the workstation. It looks like a dialog box from a chat program. There is one message, from QILA, which reads:

Alan - "Dr. Redwind, would you be more comfortable if I called you Alan?"

Alan - How does the AI know my real name?

[End]

Outro music - Sunshine, by Cobycracker <https://cobycracker.bandcamp.com/>

Voiceover:

Manifestations Season 1, The Reset, was written, acted, and produced by Dwayne Farver. With input and help from Alex C. Telander.

We're proud to introduce Penelope Dyer, as QILA. Thank you so much for agreeing to help give voice to this character that demanded to be heard. <https://www.penelopevo.com>

Our intro music is Breathe, by Chill Carrier

<https://chillcarrier.bandcamp.com/> <https://www.chillcarrier.de/>

The music heard here is Sunshine, by Cobycracker

<https://cobycracker.bandcamp.com/>

Also heard in the episode was Across This Ravaged World, by Entropy Audio

<https://entropyaudio.bandcamp.com/>

<https://www.facebook.com/EntropyAudio>

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCK-WKw8KbZYMeCp9VGEGL5g>

And, Into The Depths, by Myuu

<https://myuu.bandcamp.com/music>

<http://thedarkpiano.com/>

You can find them at bandcamp.com

Sound effects are from freesound.org

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Links to the music and transcripts can be found in the show notes

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Murphy's Law has nothing on Alan's Law. Just when you're getting comfortable, expect things to be shaken up. Alan might be feeling like he stepped through the looking glass. He's going to find, sometimes that can land you in a house of mirrors.

As long as we have access to the temporal feed, we will transmit more of our story each Wednesday and Saturday. We hope you join us.

Music fades