

MAG – 151 – Big Picture

Content Warnings:

- Existential dread
- Threats of violence
- **Discussions of:** isolation, extinction and apocalypse, death, supernatural compulsion
- **Mentions of:** thalassophobia, agoraphobia, self-sacrifice
- **SFX:** continuous low-pitched tone

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

Rusty Quill presents: The Magnus Archives. Episode one hundred and fifty-one.
Big Picture.

[Tape clicks on. Faint sounds of footsteps approaching.]

UNKNOWN

Oh! Hello.

(Several long ‘hmm’s, then a satisfied ‘hm!’ followed by chuckling.)

MARTIN

Um, excuse me sir, sorry - you can’t actually be here.

UNKNOWN

Oh, not to worry! I seem to be doing alright so far.

MARTIN

No, I mean - this area is actually off limits to the public, so -

UNKNOWN

And quite right to! Goodness, the things they could learn here turn your hair white, eh? **(chuckles)** Best to keep them out, I say.

(The unknown person continues humming to themselves.)

MARTIN

...who are you? did Peter send you?

UNKNOWN

You must be Martin. Goodness, he was not exaggerating.

MARTIN

What's that supposed to mean?

UNKNOWN

Oh come now, don't be like that. Let's start over.

Simon. Simon Fairchild. Peter asked me to look in on you and have a small chat.

Well, a big chat, really. Answer all those nagging questions.

MARTIN

Simon Fairchild? Wait, Simon Fairchild as in-

SIMON

As in, all those people who said I did horrible things to them and their loved ones?

Yes. They have been in, haven't they? I'd hate to think I'm underrepresented in here, not when Peter tells me that that bone fellow has at least half a dozen -

MARTIN

No, no, not at all. you've sent plenty of people our way.

SIMON

Brilliant! So shall we get started?

S-sorry, I'm still not entirely clear what's going on. What are you doing here?

SIMON

I see. I suppose it was a bit much to expect him to have filled you in on everything already. I mean, in many ways, that's the point.

MARTIN

Right.

SIMON

So you've been working with Peter for a while now, correct?

MARTIN

Sure.

SIMON

And he's been promising you answers to all those difficult questions?

MARTIN

I mean, sort of.

SIMON

Well, that's me.

MARTIN

What?

SIMON

Yes, well you have to understand how it is with Peter. He finds talking to people directly very difficult, especially explaining the more, um - *esoteric* side of things? Charming chap, I'm sure you agree, absolutely lovely, but even if you can convince him to actually give you a straight answer, he's just not that good at actually putting these things into words. Something to do with his upbringing, I think. **(Conspiratorial whisper)** I'm pretty sure he was home-schooled, you know.

MARTIN

So what, he sends you to answer questions because he doesn't want to?

SIMON

Precisely!

MARTIN

And you do it? Why?

SIMON

Is that your first question?

MARTIN

Is there a limit?

SIMON

Only until I get bored, and that does tend to come more quickly these days.

MARTIN

O... okay, okay then, sure, sure. First question then. Why are you helping Peter?

Don't you serve different, you know, fears?

SIMON

Well, now see... that's actually *two* questions. The answer to the first is simple. I lost a bet, and this is how the good captain chooses to use that. The second is... sort of? I mean yes, if you want to get technical, he serves the One Alone and I serve the Falling Titan, but those two are a lot closer than you might imagine.

After all, the larger the space you find yourself alone in, the more isolated you feel.

MARTIN

And being aware of how lonely you are can make anywhere feel more empty.

SIMON

Exactly. I've actually been toying with the idea of trying to do something with the scale of humanity itself, you know, emphasize all that overpopulation nonsense. But honestly it just doesn't ring true for me. We're all just so tiny and pointless, you see, it's hard to really get past it. Also, I worry it might be straying into territory that emboldens our potential new rival.

MARTIN

The Extinction.

SIMON

The very same. Peter said you'd have a lot of questions about that one.

MARTIN

I do. How are new powers born?

SIMON

Hmm... don't know.

MARTIN

How soon could it attempt this ritual?

SIMON

(Cheerily) No clue.

MARTIN

How do we stop it?

SIMON

Can't help you.

MARTIN

(Teeth gritted) Could you at least *try*?

SIMON

No, no, no, you're right, of course. The thing you have to remember is that no one actually knows how these things work, not really. There's always been plenty of theories of course, and over a century or two you do start to get an intuitive feel for it, but... there's really no hard and fast rules.

The powers, or entities, or fears, or whatever you want to call them, are bound up in emotion. In feeling. How they exist, what they can do, how they interact with the world, it all makes about as much logical sense as a nightmare; which is to say there is a certain sort of emotional logic to it all. Things feel like they flow together in a way that makes sense, but if you try to stop and do the maths then it all comes apart, at least in my experience.

When is a new power born? Well, when does it feel like its birth would be right? When enough creatures suffer a terror of it that feels distinct, that feels truly its own? Then it would probably feel right for it to emerge into its own. Or perhaps there's a ritual. If it feels right to enact some sort of birthing ceremony, some apocalyptic -

MARTIN

(Interrupting) And how close is it, do you think?

SIMON

Hard to be sure. Peter thinks very close indeed, what with all the current hubbub, I'm inclined to agree.

MARTIN

You don't sound worried.

SIMON

That's because we disagree on exactly how bad it will be. Peter seems convinced that the Extinction is different, that its actual birth will be as bad or worse as another power fully manifesting. He believes its advent will be heralded by all sorts of disasters and catastrophes and global upheavals, and whatnot. That kind of thing.

MARTIN

Sounds like a rich feeding ground.

SIMON

Well, exactly. Peter, however, seems to think that it will upset the balance that we all have an awful lot invested in, and he's not at all certain the world as we understand will come out the other side.

MARTIN

And let me guess. You think he can't see the big picture.

SIMON

I see why he likes you. It's all a matter of perspective, you see. My patron has gifted me with, quite frankly, an absurdly long life. An appropriate gift and one that serves to provide a certain distance from things. Of course, a paltry few centuries is nothing really, but it's more than most get. And even in that brief time, I've seen all sorts of ebbs and flows to the balance of things. Do you know when the last ritual I attempted was?

MARTIN

I - I don't know, that space station?

SIMON

Oh goodness no, that's the future, my boy! No. It was 1853, the height of the aquarium mania. All over the empire, people were starting to understand the depths of the terrible unknown below the ocean, and I thought that was a rich vein to be tapped. Even bothered old Harley into helping me design a special

diving bell for the ritual. I called it the Awful Deep, and between you and me I was rather proud of myself.

MARTIN

So why didn't it work?

SIMON

Because it wasn't a very good idea. The fear wasn't out there, not like I hoped it was. All sort of fizzled. Also, a Hunter broke in and destroyed the mechanism, sent me and all my sacrifices plummeting to the bottom of the ocean.

MARTIN

I don't see your point.

SIMON

My point is...

...you know, I've quite forgotten.

(Martin sighs in frustration.)

SIMON

Hey, I've just not been doing much recently, it's not a good time for perspective you see. The world all feels too small these days. I used to do a lot for the religion but it's just not got the same conceptual scope that used to. honestly I'm pinning most of my long-term hopes on space, but that's at least a hundred years away.

MARTIN

Assuming the Extinction doesn't derail everything.

SIMON

Which is why I'm happy helping Peter. But if it does, then I'll either be dead, which will be fine, or I'll adjust.

MARTIN

It doesn't scare you?

SIMON

Martin. Taken on a cosmic scale we've never even been alive, not in any way that might register. I mean, if this dreadful little planet had a fractionally different orbit and life had never even started here, then ultimately nothing of any real importance would have changed.

MARTIN

I think our experience of the universe has value. Even if it disappears forever.

SIMON

What a lonely way to look at things. Which makes sense I suppose.

MARTIN

So what do you do then, if - if the world is pointless and your God is so weak right now?

SIMON

I have a good time, and do my best to avoid the drama. It's all been getting a bit much over the last few decades, I blame the number of people. from our own numbers point of view it's getting very busy. more Minds equals more fear after all.

MARTIN

I thought you said that the maths doesn't work.

SIMON

Oh, you are a quick one! So maybe I'm wrong. But crucially I suspect a lot of the other servants and creatures out there have a similar idea. probably while they're all in such a rush to make their own attempts.

MARTIN

You make it sound like the entities don't even know what they're doing.

SIMON

I have no idea if they're doing anything at all. if they're even capable of 'doing' things. I know that most of their servants are simply doing their best to interpret and serve something that is almost definitively inconceivable.

MARTIN

You can't be serious.

SIMON

All right. Let's try one of those analogies Peter finds so annoying. Erm... imagine you are deaf, but every night you hear the most beautiful music in your dreams, and your every waking thought is consumed by trying to reproduce that music. (Oh, you're mute as well in this analogy, or at least you can't sing.) And you need to invent the idea of a musical instrument from scratch. Everyone else is also deaf and mute, and --

MARTIN

Yes, I think I get it.

SIMON

Yes, well the point is, most of us are trying so desperately to recreate our own dream symphony that we bring an awful lot of our own baggage into the mix.

MARTIN

What about the monsters?

SIMON

What monsters?

MARTIN

Things like M-- erm, uh, the Distortion. I thought they were part of the entities themselves, extensions. Surely they know what's going on.

SIMON

Honestly, I think they have it a lot worse than we do. Imagine being a hand that can conceive of itself, having impulses shot through you, being moved and clinched by some unseen mind, but never knowing the reasoning behind your own actions, or even if you're just some thoughtless reflex. (**Noise of disgust**) Sounds horrid.

MARTIN

(**Agitated**) So if no one's ever actually communicated with their patron, how do you know they even want rituals? How - how does anyone know if they could ever even work?

SIMON

We don't!

(Martin scoffs.)

SIMON

And honestly? The idea that this is all some grand cosmic joke, thousands of us running around spreading horror and sabotaging each other pointlessly while these impossible unknowable things just lurk out there, feeding off the misery we caused? I find that interpretation quite appealing. But, I still hear the music in my dreams.

(Martin makes a sound of acknowledgement. There's a pause.)

MARTIN

Who are you? No, no - who *were* you?

SIMON

Originally? No one you would have heard of. No great historical figure or atrocity monger. I've been Simon Fairchild about, erm, 80 or 90 years maybe. For business purposes mainly, by which I mean I was bored at not being wealthy, so I made some arrangements and sent Mr. Fairchild on a very long fall. I could go into details but without a certain amount of knowledge of 1930s tax practices it wouldn't mean very much to you.

MARTIN

And how did you get started with it all? Did you -- did - did you just look up at the sky one day and fall head-over-heels in love?

SIMON

Sort of, actually. Except it wasn't the actual sky, it was a painting. I was apprenticed, you see, under Tintoretto. Dreadful man, but a decent artist. He was fascinated, you see, with the human figure. He found most of the rest of the work dreadfully dull so he'd always delegated the lot of it to us.

He had a particular distaste for painting the sky, and I was always the one he called on to do them. Days, weeks I would spend, focusing so intently on these patches of clear sky or swirling cloud at the top of his latest self-proclaimed

masterpiece, and gradually it sort of, erm, drew me in until it seemed to dwarf the rest of the work. Every stroke of the brush felt larger than my entire existence. And when I finally lost my footing, well.... I should have of course fallen to the floor of the church, broken my neck, but that blue painted sky welcomed me with open arms and I never looked back.

I tried to share it with others, not just as sacrifices, but they often find it difficult to keep up with the, um, velocity I tend to live at. They tend to get left behind, and I suppose it doesn't help that I can't bring myself to see any of them as anything other than trivial.

MARTIN

Mm.

SIMON

No wonder I'm so sympathetic to the Lonely! You know, this really is a place for self-discovery, isn't it? (**Chuckles**) Statement ends I suppose.

MARTIN

Er, I'm sorry?

SIMON

Oh nothing, just my own hubris. I should have known. When I came here, I said to myself, "Simon," I said, "you're going to answer this young man's questions, but you're not going to give the Watcher a statement. You're better than that." But

it's a hard one to resist, isn't it? You get in the flow of talking about yourself and it all just... tumbles out.

MARTIN

Does seem like it.

SIMON

(Laughs) Well, this has been fun. Now, if we're about done--

MARTIN

We're *not*. Sit back down.

SIMON

Bold! (chuckles) I like it.

MARTIN

You said you were here to answer my questions for Peter, but so far you've told me basically nothing of any use.

SIMON

The big answers are rarely helpful.

MARTIN

Then let's try some smaller ones. Is Peter attempting a ritual?

SIMON

Not in the sense that you're used to. Him and his family made their play a few years ago and they failed. I'm sure he'd like me to explain it but I think he can do that one himself.

MARTIN

How honest has he been with me?

SIMON

About which part?

MARTIN

Protecting the others.

SIMON

I think he tried. I suspect he may have slightly exaggerated his abilities when you first made the deal, but he certainly expended a reasonable amount of influence and resources to follow through.

MARTIN

But that was never the endgame was it? He just wanted me on side long enough to rope me into his - his plans for the Extinction.

SIMON

Do you really need me to answer that one?

MARTIN

Fine. So why me? What's his plan? Why not get the others involved?

SIMON

He is what he is, Martin. For a creature of the Lonely, the urge is always to isolate, never to communicate or connect. I suspect that's why he's so keen on wagers, it allows him a framework for cooperation that doesn't risk any sort of intimacy.

As for his plan... I don't know the details. But I believe there's something in the Institute that he thinks can help his cause.

MARTIN

And he needs me to use it?

SIMON

Presumably, from what he said it must be powerfully aligned to the Watcher. If he wishes to use it, it would need someone already touched by the Eye. And if he wants to control that someone...

MARTIN

They need to serve the Lonely.

SIMON

Quite right. Anything else?

MARTIN

How do you feel about this?

SIMON

You might need to be a tad more specific.

MARTIN

All of it. Peter's plan, the extinction, me.

SIMON

I think... (**inhale**) I think Peter is taking a rather large but calculated gamble. Not just on you, but on a lot of things. If it works, he'll be in a very strong position. And if he fails it won't be all that bad.

MARTIN

You don't think it'll be the end of the world?

SIMON

Oh, it very well might be, but life has continued through dozens of apocalypse is already. Ice ages, pandemics, calamities, extinctions. The only reason this one feels special is because, well, it's happening to you. And that's the sort of solipsism that tends to come with loneliness, in my experience. So my feeling is that I'll help out where I can, but ultimately if this Armageddon comes off, then so be it. Either billions suffer and life goes on, or billions suffer and life doesn't. In the grand scheme of things it's all much of a muchness.

MARTIN

Right.

SIMON

Sorry. Too big picture? I get that a lot.

MARTIN

No, it's... thank you. This has actually been quite helpful.

SIMON

I'd say any time, but honestly, if you see me again I may just throw you off something for a joke. How do you feel about roller coasters?

MARTIN

Um... neutral.

SIMON

(Disappointed) Oh. You're no fun.

[Footsteps walk away]

BASIRA

Who was that?

MARTIN

Basira, please, I don't have time.

BASIRA

(Interrupting) I know you don't.

MARTIN

(Warning) Basira, let go.

BASIRA

I don't think so. Three weeks I've been waiting to catch sight of you, and now I find you chatting with Simon Fairchild. No, you're not pulling your little vanishing act on me.

MARTIN

How did you know about-

BASIRA

Yeah, Jon's not the only one who listens to statements.

MARTIN

It's none of your business.

BASIRA

No? because it seems to me like you're panning around are two very dangerous people right around the time you're cutting all of us out. That makes me worried. It makes me suspicious. Tell me I'm wrong.

MARTIN

You're wrong.

BASIRA

So what's going on then? Talk to me.

MARTIN

It's. Complicated.

BASIRA

What, they're just here out of the goodness of their hearts helping you save the world from Extinction?

MARTIN

You know about that?

BASIRA

Yeah, Jon found the tapes you made for him -

MARTIN

(Frantically) Shh, shh!

BASIRA

Found a stash of them a while ago. I made sure he shared with the club.

MARTIN

(Frustrated) Well, there you go then.

BASIRA

John may be going through the whole “we have to trust Martin” thing, but I’m not. As far as I can see you’re either compromised or you’re being played, and I want to know which.

MARTIN

I didn’t know Jon had listened to them already.

BASIRA

Well, he has. He seems to think you’ll come to him when you need him. I think you’re feeding him what he needs to hear so he doesn’t bother you.

MARTIN

Look, I don’t have time for this. I don’t like that I have to work with Peter any more than you do, and I didn’t know that Simon was involved until today. But I would hope that you and Jon understood the importance of preventing an apocalypse.

BASIRA

I guess I’m just a bit burned out on the end of the world.

MARTIN

Yeah, well, that’s your problem.

BASIRA

And if you really think this whole Extinction thing is it, why not come to us for help?

MARTIN

I can't. Peter's the one with the plan, and... it needs me to be alone.

BASIRA

And you don't see anything suspicious about that?

MARTIN

'course I do, but it might be the only way and... so far at least he's been honest with me. Awful, but honest.

I need to do this. For everyone.

(Long pause.)

BASIRA

You're not expecting to come out of this, are you?

MARTIN

I'll do what I have to. If I'm right, no one else needs to get hurt.

BASIRA

(Sigh) Okay. You want to do whatever grand sacrifice you think is going to save everyone, go ahead. But you'd best be sure you're not just playing their game.

MARTIN

I know what I'm doing.

BASIRA

We'll see. Don't make me regret this.

MARTIN

Yeah.

Don't tell Jon. Please.

BASIRA

Fine. I can't promise you he won't just Know it, though.

MARTIN

How is he?

BASIRA

Hungry. But he's keeping it together.

MARTIN

(Exhales) that's good. Can I go now?

BASIRA

Sure.

(A sigh.)

[Tape clicks off.]

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Outro]

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Today's episode was written by Jonathan Sims and directed by Alexander J Newall.

It featured: Karim Kronfli as Simon Fairchild, Alexander J Newall as Martin Blackwood, and Frank Voss as Basira Hussein.