

MAG – 135 – Dark Matter

Content Warnings:

- Darkness
- Kidnapping
- Imprisonment
- Cults
- Manipulation

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

Rusty Quill presents: The Magnus Archives. Episode one hundred and thirty-five. Dark Matter.

[Tape clicks on.]

ARCHIVIST

Statement of Manuela Dominguez, regarding her unconventional religious beliefs and their interaction with her project aboard the space station *Daedalus*. Original statement given July 14th 2014. Audio recording by Jonathan Sims, the Archivist.

Statement begins.

ARCHIVIST (STATEMENT)

I come to you with a warning. And an offer. When you read this, I would consider it a great favour if you could share my words with the head of your

institute. Tell him that Maxwell Raynor sends his regards and offers sanctuary. A time of holy darkness is at hand, when the eye will close forever, and in the spirit of the friendship they once shared, he offers an opportunity to surrender. Forsake the Ceaseless Watcher, abandon your position, and you shall be spared in the blind world to come. In this spirit of reconciliation, and to convince you of our sincerity, I offer my story, much as it may pain me to feed the sick voyeur that lurks in this place.

My parents were very religious, fuelled with a zealotry and zeal that only now I am beginning to truly understand. They believed in the imminence of Christ, descending and purging the earth of all the iniquities and sin that they saw in the world. I was brought up to believe in the light of God, His radiant, illuminating presence, and the promise that He was coming to banish the darkness forever. It didn't save them, of course, and when they lay there dying, I saw in their faces the fear that they had always denied, the confidence in their own salvation fading with each step closer to the end. For a long time, I hoped that they had been right about their beliefs. I remembered in my heart that deep down they were vicious, spiteful people who used their faith to hurt others, and I fondly imagined them discovering themselves in an afterlife other than the one they had assumed as their destination. But I know longer think of such things.

The core of their hatred was for anything they saw as 'unnatural'. To them, God's creation was perfect, and all things in nature were right and proper according to His will. Of course, there was little consistency in what they considered to be 'natural', and it always seemed to fall along the lines of their own petty jealousies and pride. Anything they did not understand became unnatural, and I found myself crossing that line from an early age, although

strangely, out of everything I was, it was always my desire to pursue a scientific career that they railed against with the most energy. I saw it as studying the natural world, learning how it worked, mapping it. They saw it as devil-inspired pride that tried to know and master forces that were rightfully beyond us. Regardless, I broke with them as soon as I could, and only returned when they were dying. Did I come to gloat? Maybe. Though more than that, I wanted to tell them of my own Church, to spread the Gospel that I had found, so that they might die with the fear of darkness on their lips.

You see, I do not disagree with my parents' thesis that the true virtue of the world is in its natural state. But the natural state of the universe is darkness. Those rank, pompous balls of fire and light, vomiting their radiation out into the nothing, they cannot stand against the overwhelming reality of it. We talk about light and dark being opposites, but they are no more opposites than a gaudy paint is the opposite of the wall upon which it sits. Without light, there is darkness, but without darkness, there is nothing. We sit upon our tiny spinning ball of dirt, desperately building our own tiny suns, our own illuminating shelters, from the truth of existence, clustering around them like insects, never realising that they rob us of the revelations that come in the dark, that our wretched eyes bind us to this grotesque world in which we live.

But Manuela, they would say, all life comes from light, the energy that sustains us is drawn from the sun, from its warm, beautiful radiance. And I tell them to look again at 'life', at the pain and suffering and misery that it brings with it. The nature that light gives us is corrupt and base, tearing itself to pieces, spinning to its own sick destruction. The life that is given to us by the stars, by the sun, can barely sustain itself for a century. Did you know that the oldest single thing on Earth given life by the light is the Great Basin bristlecone pine

tree? Five thousand years some of them have been alive. Five millennia. That's it. That's all. Even the longest lived of the sun's children can barely make it a few thousand years. Compare this to the uncountable eternity of darkness, stretching back far beyond when the sickness of an illuminated universe was thrown into existence. If the words of my parents hold any truth, then God is the true monster, and 'Let there be light' the most evil words ever spoken.

It may come, then, as little surprise that my studies in physics drew me towards dark matter and dark energy. My own theology was undeveloped back then, just the smallest of thoughts, tugging from the back of my mind, a thought experiment I was happy to occasionally indulge. In many ways, my work back then was a betrayal of my principals. For what is research and study if not doing the work of the light, taking what is true and hidden and rendering it revealed and imperfect, filtering it through a base and falsifying human mind as surely as the light warps the world around us. In many ways, I suppose my parents were right about it being unnatural, but it was my path to the truth, so I cannot bring myself to honestly regret it.

Dark energy, dark matter, dark radiation. The true holy trinity. Almost the entirety of reality is made of them, shaped by them, moved by them, and yet they remain entirely impervious to the light. They resist all attempts to measure and expose them, visible only in their effect upon the world, their nature guessed at, seeping through the holes in our knowledge of the cosmos. All of those things that are believed to be existence – matter, energy, radiation – all of them are utterly dwarfed by their dark counterparts. Which leads to an inevitable question: if the fundamental building blocks are so predominantly the dark parts, is it not the light-twisted versions of them that are the deviation, the pale reflection? Perhaps it should be matter and light matter.

But I did not come here to quibble over semantics. I came to tell you my story, though it has perhaps become my sermon. No matter. These thoughts, these feelings, were always in my mind, and my work in physics only served to deepen them. But it was not until I met Maxwell Raynor that I realised the deeper truth of it all. He spoke words I thought existed only in my heart, and I loved him as the soil loves the rain. At first, I thought his blindness was a gift, but he rebuked me for such thoughts. Simply because one cannot feel the heat, he told me, does not mean their flesh does not burn. The light is more than simply the source of sight; it is the source of our entire venal half-existence, and he was aware of it always.

Maxwell told me it is in our nature to fear the dark, and I could not disagree. For all my intellectual reverence of it, I could not deny that on those few occasions I had found myself in full and proper darkness, my heart had trembled. And rightly so, he said, for are we not creatures born of the light, contemptible and corrupt? Surely then, this fear of confronting the pure nature of the universe is right and good. Surely this fear of the dark is the truest communion that humanity could ever hope for. And at his words, I felt afraid, and my heart soared in terror and elation as my eyes brimmed with tears, for I knew he spoke the truth.

So, we began to work together, to worship together in his church, the only church I've ever felt I truly belonged to. It was wonderful. And when he spoke to me of prophecy, of the movement of the heavens and the killing of the sun, I knew I would do everything in my power to help him. And I could, more than anyone else on Earth, he said, because of my expertise. That knowledge I had gained in defiance of the dark could finally be put to use. I was to create a focus, a black star, a new centre point around which a universe of purest

darkness could turn. To take dark matter, dark energy, and harness it, bring it forward into a form that could be held, used ... worshipped.

Scientifically, it was nonsense, of course. Dark energy and the light don't work like that, not even remotely, but that wasn't important. What mattered was that it felt like science, and that was all I needed. To do my work, to create the black star, would need a parody, an aping mockery of science. But it would also need the deepest of darknesses. When I told Maxwell what I actually needed, he told me such a thing was impossible, but I insisted. And so, he began his own work on the *Daedalus*.

I don't know how he convinced Fairchild and the Lukases to help finance the project. A life as long as his is evidently very good for one's finances, but even so, space exploration is a whole other magnitude of expenditure. I don't entirely know if they were working on rituals of their own, or simply pushing the boundaries of their own fears, their masters. Either way, it was clear my two fellow astronauts were patsies, sent up there to suffer. I almost felt bad for them, but it was in most ways a relief, to know I wouldn't need to worry about them interfering with my own project.

Exactly how the launch was arranged, I couldn't tell you, but I assume the calculations must have been done by one of ours. Otherwise, well, weight is very important when planning a launch, and it could hardly have escaped their notice that there were four people in that rocket: three astronauts and one unlucky nyctophobe, sealed in a lightless box, silenced but not sedated, apparently indistinguishable from the rest of the supplies. I never learned his name, never needed to. He was simply a battery, a ready source of constant terror I could draw on for my experiments. However Maxwell had contrived to stop him screaming seemed most effective, and the closest I ever came to

discovery was when Kilbride expressed confusion at the rate the supplies were diminishing. It was really only the two of us anyway, with Chilcott sealed away, having his own little breakdown, and Jan was always a bit of an idiot, so ready to believe anyone's lies. But I suppose I don't need to tell you that, do I, Gertrude?

My experiments continued largely uninterrupted, pushing the boundaries of light, darkness and fear. It was dangerous work, and more than once I got too close to the light and it almost destroyed me, but it didn't. I could regale you with the technical terms or scientific disciplines I played with and rendered meaningless, but in the end all you actually need to know is that I succeeded. A tiny, terrible sun of the pitchest black, shining beautiful darkness all around it. By that time, my colleagues had long since succumbed to the torments they were assigned, and I had no difficulty storing the black star securely, before pulling them onto the shuttle for the return journey. And then the three of us returned to Earth. Just as well. The final experiment had left my battery in such a state that no amount of soundproofing could dampen the screams, and I was glad of the peace and quiet.

That's all I really came here to say, to let you know we had succeeded, and to make your boss an offer on behalf of Maxwell. I suppose there is also an element of provocation here as well. Even with the loss of Darvish, we will still be victorious. We have watched you, Gertrude. I suppose you're used to that, but we know what you're capable of. So, consider this a challenge. I would love nothing more than to see you destroyed by the radiance of the dark sun we have created. So, by all means do your worst. Or prostrate yourself, both of you, before the Forever Blind, and perhaps you might be spared. Maxwell and I await your decision with keen interest.

ARCHIVIST

Statement ends.

Well, that's ... concerning. I mean, the sun's still there, so I assume they failed. Unless they're still waiting to attempt it. That's not the sort of statement you give four years before you try to actually ... Or is it? The timeframes on these attempts, these rituals, well ... They seem variable, to say the least. When I try to think about it ...

I, uh, it just ... darkness. Unhelpful, but not unexpected. I'll keep digging. If there is another ritual upcoming, I'll need all the information I can get on it. I can't believe Gertrude didn't have a plan for it. I hope I'm just being overcautious, that it's already long-since dealt with, but ... We'll see.

At least the coffin's gone. I gave Artefact Storage some very specific instructions and they've got it solidly sealed away. Is locking it up the right thing to do? There are other people in there and Daisy and I got out, but ... No. I can't think about that. Even if I could somehow be sure of recreating our escape, I can't save everyone that's been taken. It's not my job to try. And I can't spend another three days in there. I just ... I need to let it go.

I don't like interacting with the rest of the Institute these days. The way they look at me, I ... I don't know. I don't know what they've heard, what the rumours going around are, but they have definitely heard something. And they can't wait until they don't have to talk to me anymore. Can't honestly say I blame them. None of this is easy. Everyone's just trying to get through as best they can, living one day at a time. But I can't afford to be just living one day at a time; I need a plan. But I don't even know what I'm trying to achieve, and no-one wants to tell me.

End recording

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ELIAS

Nice to see you again, Detective.

BASIRA

Still not a detective. Never was.

ELIAS

Oh, but everyone else seems to be getting a title these days, why shouldn't—

BASIRA

Cut the shit. What are you playing at?

ELIAS

I'm sure I don't know what you mean.

BASIRA

Like hell you don't. Every lead a dead end, every contact vanished or dead.

I spent three weeks bouncing all over the globe on your bad intel, because you said there was a way to bring Daisy back.

ELIAS

There was. It required you to be absent.

BASIRA

You wanted him to go in there?

ELIAS

And you would never have allowed it had you been present.

BASIRA

Why?

ELIAS

Would you simply believe I wanted you and Daisy reunited?

BASIRA

No.

ELIAS

Fine. Consider it a test. Things are coming, things that will need John to be far stronger and more willing to use his connection to our patron. His performance during the Unknowing was ... disappointing. I needed a way to force him to harness his ability more acutely than he had before. The coffin was a useful tool, Daisy an adequate bait.

BASIRA

Then you messed up. Way he tells it, he doesn't know how he got out of there.

ELIAS

But he did. And his powers were no small part of it. Even if he required some assistance, they were what saved him, and he has still achieved what no-one, mortal, monster, or anything in between, has ever been able to. He climbed out of the Buried.

BASIRA

But what's the point? You aren't getting your ritual off from in here, so what do you need him for? What's so important you need him stronger?

ELIAS

I have been observing a recent increase in people and supplies being moved to the small town of Ny-Ålesund, in Svarlbad. An increase which I believe may be linked to a rather desperate attempt by the People's Church of the Divine Host to perform a crude ritual of their own. To bring their "Mr Pitch" into the world.

BASIRA

The People's Church? But I thought—

ELIAS

You thought the final death of Maxwell Rayner might have sufficiently derailed them? Yes, that was my hope too, but alas, it would seem not.

BASIRA

Maxwell ... You. You called in that tip, sent us out to that warehouse.

ELIAS

And now I'm sending you out again.

BASIRA

And why the hell should I trust you this time?

ELIAS

I rather feel the real shame would be letting the entire world fall into darkness because of a single person's wounded pride, Detective. The stakes are far too high for that kind of indulgence.

BASIRA

So, what are they doing?

ELIAS

I don't know the details. Ny-Ålesund is a stronghold of The Dark, meaning I can't see inside. I believe they call it the Extinguished Sun, though that's as much I know. If Gertrude had a plan for this one, I haven't found it, which is why John needs to be... closer to The Eye. If anyone can stop what's happening, he can. See through the darkness, etcetera.

BASIRA

And after all this, you want me to just take it on faith and ferry John up to Norway?

ELIAS

Have you ever seen the Aurora Borealis? It's lovely this time of year. It would be a shame to lose them. Feel free to do your own research to confirm what I'm telling you, just don't take too long.

BASIRA

If you're lying about this ...

ELIAS

You'll kill me? I can hardly wait.

Good luck, Detective.

[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: Jonathan Sims as The Archivist, Frank Voss as Basira Hussain, and Ben Meredith as Elias Bouchard.