

MAG 180 — Moving On

Content Warnings

- Second-person perspective
- Death & mortality
- Violence (including SFX)
- Undead (zombies)
- Religious abuse
- Child abuse (descriptions of)
- Mentions of: knives, gaslighting
- SFX: persistent droning

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

Rusty Quill presents... *The Magnus Archives*. Episode one hundred and eighty:
"Moving On."

[Theme finishes]

[Tape clicks on]

**[The chorus of toads normally heard in the evening, and the distant
sound of water moving in underground spaces]**

[Footsteps crunching on pebbly ground]

MARTIN

Hey, hang on!

ARCHIVIST

Oh, right you are.

MARTIN

Sorry, I just don't want to lose sight of you. You keep disappearing behind tombs and that.

ARCHIVIST

I'll try to slow down.

MARTIN

Thank you. I really rather not end up lost in a... what did you call it?

ARCHIVIST

A necropolis. It's like a cemetery but all the tombs are above ground. New Orleans has a very impressive one. Or... had.

MARTIN

Hmm.

ARCHIVIST

It's usually for places where the ground floods often or is too swampy for burial.

MARTIN

(Sarcastically) Pffft, oh yeah, yeah, I'm sure this place is just here because of all the flooding swamps.

ARCHIVIST

No, obviously. *This* place is a manifestation of—

MARTIN

No. Nope.

ARCHIVIST

I understand. Of course.

MARTIN

Sorry, I've just... I've been hearing altogether too many of your statements lately, and yeah—

ARCHIVIST

Yeah. No, no, I... I get it.

MARTIN

Just a little break.

ARCHIVIST

That's fair enough.

MARTIN

In fact, this time, when you start to... intone, I'm going to find a nice soundproof mausoleum, and just, just chill with whatever horrors they've got lurking in there, y'know. Maybe play a bit of I Spy or something.

(The Archivist chuckles)

MARTIN

I-I'll start. I spy with my little eye, something beginning with... T—

ARCHIVIST

(Immediately) Tombs.

MARTIN

Cheater.

ARCHIVIST

(Fake indignant) I did not!

MARTIN

Your turn.

ARCHIVIST

Fine. I spy with my little eye... Literally everything.

(Martin laughs)

(The Archivist laughs)

[Low laughter comes from a nearby tomb]

(Laughter stops with tense sighs)

MARTIN

Right.

Sorry.

Forgot. Levity is just... off the cards.

(Archivist noise of agreement)

ARCHIVIST

How are you doing? About...

MARTIN

Yeah, yeah... Yeah. I'm... I don't know. I'm not sure how to feel. Just... pressing on, you know?

ARCHIVIST

I do.

(Beat)

MARTIN

Do you think she'll be okay without us?

ARCHIVIST

She's made it this far.

MARTIN

Yeah.

I just worry.

ARCHIVIST

Yeah me too. But I'm, uh, keeping an eye on her, so...

[Heavy stone scrapes as a sarcophagus thuds opens]

(Slight gasps from both)

MARTIN

Is that...?

ARCHIVIST

It's not for us. Let's keep moving.

[The Archivist begins walking followed by Martin]

MARTIN

Yeah, alright, come—

[Martin races to keep up]

MARTIN (CONT'D)

Hey. Hey! I said slow down.

ARCHIVIST

S-Sorry.

MARTIN

How exactly does a leg wound make you *faster*?

ARCHIVIST

I just want to get through here quickly.

MARTIN

Really? It mean, it seems pretty calm apart from... Wait. Wait, wait. No, no, no, no, no, no. It's not more children, is it?

ARCHIVIST

No, no, no, the necropolis is fine. Uh, I mean, well, obviously it's, it's *bad*, i-i-it's horrible...

MARTIN

S-So why the hurry? Where are we going?

ARCHIVIST

Ah... well...

MARTIN

Come on, don't play coy.

ARCHIVIST

I'm not being coy, it's just, well...

MARTIN

Wait. Wait... are you excited?

ARCHIVIST

(Enthused) A bit. Maybe.

MARTIN

(Suspicious) Why? What's next?

ARCHIVIST

(Excited) I don't know.

MARTIN

In what way?

ARCHIVIST

All the ways. I don't know what's next.

MARTIN

What? But, like, you, you can see “literally everything” so—

ARCHIVIST

I-I can! But it's a blind spot! No idea why. I-I didn't realise until we got closer, and I was looking at our route, but... I can't see the area after the necropolis. None of it. It's like the inside of the Panopticon, or, or wherever Georgie and Melanie are hiding.

MARTIN

Or Annabelle.

ARCHIVIST

...Or Annabelle.

MARTIN

You think the others might be there?

ARCHIVIST

(Delighted) I have no idea. It's a mystery!

MARTIN

Just so you know, this... this is an adorable look on you.

ARCHIVIST

(Impatient) Yes, yes, yes, yes...

MARTIN

(Humouring) Alright then. Lead on Scooby, let's go solve a mystery, ooooh...

ARCHIVIST

Ah... actually, no, hold on.

MARTIN

(Sighing) Of course.

ARCHIVIST

Sorry to be a burden.

MARTIN

Fine, fine. Just... stay in this... avenue while you do it. I don't want to lose sight of you.

ARCHIVIST

Of course.

MARTIN

Not when there's a mystery on the loose, ooh...

ARCHIVIST

Thank you.

[Footsteps as Martin walks off]

[Hissing static starts]

[Sounds of trees creaking and rustling in a breeze with far birds]

[Every so often, a clink of metal can be heard]

ARCHIVIST

Away and around and away they stretch. Row upon row of waiting granite and watching marble.

[Hissing static ends]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

The names are carved with steady-handed reverence, and the dates do not make sense, but... bite your tongue. Read the epitaphs quietly to yourself in a respectful, solemn whisper: 'loving son', 'noted philanthropist', 'honoured hero', and do not question them out loud. For these graves, they are not silent – they are listening.

[Footsteps on paving stone, then stop]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Stop a moment, and see the stone angels perched above you, staring down from the harsh corners of each mausoleum roof, looking out over the avenues of darkened, not-quite-moonlit, paving slabs, which buckle ever so slightly every step, as though the soil beneath is damp and yielding. Hungry. The angels have no expressions, their faces worn and pockmarked from the cold

and vicious rain that finds the time to fall with disinterested cruelty at times upon their post. But the swords that each one carries do not wear, nor rust, nor blunt. They keep their eager vigil, desperate for a comment, a word, a breath out of place against which they might strike. Upon each blade the words stand out in stark and silvered letters: NIHIL NISI BONUM.

[Faint hissing static under the Latin]

[Footsteps restart, hurry along]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Walk faster now, pick up the pace, for not all the tombs are silent, not all the graves are at peace. Is that a voice, calling sweetly from beyond the iron gate, telling you that it has something to show you, secrets that it wishes to share?

[Footsteps stop; something else moves nearby, followed by faint sounds of sone scraping; then footsteps resume]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Just knock and ask to enter. Or try your best not to hear, to think nothing but good and admirable thoughts of those who wait in monuments to their own virtue. There now, a face, pale and stained with age and death and sin—

[Fervent rattle of chains]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

—no, not sin, never sin. Misjudgement. Indiscretion. Misunderstanding.

[Stone scrapes and undead vocalisations]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Never sin. Never evil. It grins and smiles and nods its head, with broken yellow teeth. It is a smile that wants you closer, wants you near. A bloated, purple tongue that tries to whisper reassurance, but can only gurgle promises that smell like sour fruit.

**[Footsteps resume; the background now with more undead noises,
chain clinks, and stone scrapes]**

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

How big is this place? How many miles of eerie edifice stand between you and freedom. Some doors lie cracked, shattered outwards, their occupants kept in check by ancient chains binding their brittle, bony limbs. Don't go too close, keep to the middle of the narrowing alley. The stench that rolls from these broken crypts is unlike anything you have ever known, like lakes of fly-blown blood left to bake in the unrelenting sun. Keep it to yourself, though. Don't mention it. No point making a scene. The angels wouldn't like it. Besides, those are the tombs with the longest epitaphs, so they must have been good people.

Watch for the stones, the ones beneath your feet that sink and shift on the swampy ground. With every step their firmness seems more and more a question, and the cracks that cut across them grow deeper and deeper. Don't step on the cracks, or goodness knows what will happen. And you are surrounded by goodness, are you not?

Your steps are as quick as respect will allow, and echo dutifully down the avenues. How much further to the gates?

[Sounds caused by the undead begin to fade away]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

How much longer must you watch your every thought, lest it bring a sneer to your lips the angels might take as scorn. It must be close, simply turn at the next crypt and you should see it.

[Distant sound of a crowd murmuring; footsteps slow then halt]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Wait. No. That isn't right. There should be the gates, the threshold to leave these silent rows, but instead what rises in front of you is a house, tall and angular, with jagged peaks of dark wood, and windows from which no light escapes. It calls itself a home, but it lies. The funeral home houses only the passing congregations of sycophants and weepers, desperate to cleanse their own iniquities in the salt-tinged flood of gloating tears. You turn to walk away, to hurry back and disappear into the tombs that now seem almost welcoming, when behind you comes the inescapable, the inevitable sound of an old wooden door being opened.

[Door creaks open]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

'Come in,' the Funeral Director intones, 'the service is about to begin. You are expected.'

The faceless gaze of each sepulchre angel fixes itself upon you, and you feel yourself turning back towards the house, though every muscle in your body screams at you to run. Instead you nod, and apologise for your lateness. The angels look away. And you step across the threshold.

[The crowd fades, replaced by the sound of close, upset breathing]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

The air smells of decay and lavender and something else you can't quite place. The dust has settled over everything in layers so thick you dread to touch anything, to rest for even a moment, so keenly aware of the stark imprint you would leave, the marks of your presence, so deep and clear. A sign of life amongst the judgemental dead.

The Funeral Director does not comment upon your reluctance or care, though you know that nothing escapes his eyes.

[Breathing continues, footsteps on carpet]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

He leads you through the winding house towards the memorial room, the thick carpet crunching under your feet so loudly that it makes you wince, certain that it calls all attention to you. The Director's steps are silent and dignified, the heavy fabric of his dark suit still and crisp as cold iron.

[Footsteps transition to a wooden floor and stop]

[The sound of many quietly waiting people, with hushed whispers]

The mourners are all lined up so very, very neatly, four chairs either side, twenty rows deep. Each and every one in pitch-black funeral best, grey-haired heads bowed in respect, and a steady river of restrained tears flowing gracefully from under lace veils. There is no ragged breathing, no agonised wails of deep and wounding grief, only the respectful stillness of those who have lost a great figure, the best of them.

At the end of the room is the coffin, polished to a dreadful shine. There is no picture, no photograph of a smiling face casting beatitudes from beyond the

grave. But the coffin is open, and from inside you can see the faintest hint of its occupant.

No. It can't be her. That's not right. It's not fair.

[Everyone turns in their seat; footsteps on the wooden floor]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

One hundred and sixty pairs of misty eyes follow your slow procession down the room, bile rising higher and higher with each row you pass. Fifteen left, you can make out her hair, still the cold grey you remember so vividly. Ten rows left, and you can see her mouth, those lips that hide the grin that now flashes thorough your memory. Five more, and you can see her eyes. Why are her eyes open? They are lustreless and clouded, but still contain the cruelty you saw when she held the knife.

[Walking stops]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Now you stand over her. There is no mistaking who it is that lies within that softly padded box. Beneath your threadbare suit and fear-stained shirt, the scars that lattice across your body ache and burn at the sight of the one who gave them to you. You feel the cross she once carved into your back open, and begin to weep its own bloody testament.

You need to leave, to turn and flee and find the end to this necropolis of polite denials and vicious civility. Your vision swims as you turn from the face of death, and find your arm grasped by the Funeral Director. His hand moves and you move with it, unable to stand against the unyielding strength of his simplest gesture.

[Footsteps to the podium]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

He places you behind the podium, as the mourners stare at you, and you realise with a stab of agonised dread that they are waiting for your eulogy, their faces alight with hungry grief.

‘If you would like to say a few words...,’ the Director commands.

You want to scream at them, curse them all for hypocrites. How can they not smell the blood she spilled? The path of scars and pain she left behind her every minute of her life? She was a monster, brutal and unrepentant.

‘She was...,’ you begin, a heavy pause before your voice betrays you. ‘The most kind and loving person I ever had the wonderful fortune to meet. Each life she touched was left brighter and more beautiful for her presence. She was... an angel.’

The tears are flowing freely now, as your eulogy continues. You cannot turn from the podium, cannot stop the gushing flow of love and forgiveness you vomit out into the nodding crowd. Behind you, a dark shadow moves, a shape that seems to slither from the coffin.

[Wood creaks, shuffling footsteps, and undead vocalisations]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

You watch it coming closer from the corner of your eye, but you cannot stop your kind words. Not even as the needle-sharp teeth of her corpse begin to dig into your shoulder.

[The sound of flesh tearing]

[Hissing static starts]

[Sounds of the necropolis return]

[Hissing static ends]

(Archivist exhales)

ARCHIVIST

(Quietly excited) Right, then. I'm done. Let's see what we've got.

[Tape clicks off]

[Tape clicks on]

[A wasteland wind swirls with the sound of distant distorted howls]

[Footsteps that shortly come to a halt]

MARTIN

Is that...

ARCHIVIST

(Pleased) Looks like it.

MARTIN

(Crosstalk) No, no...

ARCHIVIST

(Crosstalk) Yes.

MARTIN

It... can't be real?

[In the distance, a peacock calls, and birds common to England sing]

ARCHIVIST

And yet!

MARTIN

But, but it's... it's...

ARCHIVIST

Yeah!

MARTIN

It-It's like something out of a National Trust brochure.

ARCHIVIST

I mean I'm pretty sure it is National Trust. Was, anyway.

MARTIN

But, you don't know for sure?

ARCHIVIST

No. I can't see anything about it. If I had to guess... Upton House, maybe? I mean, country houses and stately homes not exactly my specialist subjects.

MARTIN

But it's... it's fine. It's better than fine. T-There are trees. Look! Like, real trees!

ARCHIVIST

It's beautiful.

MARTIN

It's a trap.

ARCHIVIST

(Still delighted) No! It *might* be a trap. We-we just don't know!

MARTIN

John...

(Beat)

ARCHIVIST

(Resigned) Yeah, we'll go around.

[Birds and peacock continue to call]

[The Archivist goes to move off]

MARTIN

No... **(sigh)** No, no, no. Let's, let's check it out. I mean, obviously it can't be how it seems but... well...

ARCHIVIST

What if it is?

MARTIN

Huh, exactly.

ARCHIVIST

A beautiful oasis, untouched by the end of the world.

MARTIN

It's got to be worth a shot, right?

ARCHIVIST

Thank you.

MARTIN

Don't fret it. It's just nice to see you like this.

[Tape clicks off]

[Tape clicks on]

[Bird song, much closer and clearer]

[The distant sound of music]

MARTIN

So what now? I don't see a doorbell.

ARCHIVIST

I'm not even sure this door actually opens.

MARTIN

But it should, it's the front door! Besides, it's the biggest one so if it's not—

ARCHIVIST

I mean maybe they expect you to come in through the café or, I mean, they usually have a little gift shop or something.

MARTIN

Okay, so where would they be?

ARCHIVIST

No idea. **(chuckling)**

MARTIN

I thought you said you'd been here before.

ARCHIVIST

I said I might have been, and even if I have, I was twelve.

MARTIN

I'll tell you what, it is more convenient when you know everything.

[Sounds of a keys and a large door unlocking]

ARCHIVIST

(Pleased) Oh! Guess I was wrong.

MARTIN

Get ready.

ARCHIVIST

To do what?

MARTIN

What do you mean "What"? Smite them. If we need to.

Wait, hang on, can you even smite people here?

ARCHIVIST

I-I don't think so.

[Door opens, piano music can be heard playing]

MARTIN

Oh. Oh no... ah...

[Footstep]

ANNABELLE

Good morning.

MARTIN

...Uh... Yes.

ANNABELLE

Come on in. He's waiting for you.

ARCHIVIST

Oh. And who exactly—

MARTIN

J-J-John... John...

ARCHIVIST

What?

MARTIN

I think... um... Annabelle? Annabelle Cane?

ANNABELLE

Come on. He's very excited, you know.

[Keys rattle and footsteps as she moves back into the house]

MARTIN

So, do we follow or...?

ARCHIVIST

I... I suppose.

[They follow; the door creaks as they open it further, and there is a quick glitching-static sound as they pass the threshold]

(Mild discomfort noises from Martin and the Archivist)

[Annabelle closes and locks the door]

ARCHIVIST

So... Annabelle, what are you playing at? What are you doing here?

ANNABELLE

I really wouldn't worry about that. I'm just helping out around the place a little bit. Making myself at home. You know how it is.

[Their footsteps echo on wooden floors as they follow her through the house; the piano music slowly gets louder]

MARTIN

John, I don't like this.

ANNABELLE

You can relax, Mr Blackwood. You're safe here.

MARTIN

I don't feel it.

ANNABELLE

Not something I can help, I'm afraid.

MARTIN

Though... oh John, do you feel, huh, do you feel hungry?

ARCHIVIST

I, um... Actually, I was going to say I'm feeling... really tired.

ANNABELLE

Not surprising. When's the last time you slept?

(Martin yawns)

ARCHIVIST

I don't know. I mean weeks ago. Months maybe.

ANNABELLE

Well there you go, then.

Just in here.

[Annabelle opens the door; the piano music becomes clear and close; there is a ticking antique clock sometimes audible]

ANNABELLE (CONT'D)

Your guests are here, Mikaele.

[Piano playing pauses]

MIKAELE

Hoo-hoo-hoo! Excellent! Come in, come in! Ah, a pleasure to meet both of you.
Thank you Annabelle.

ANNABELLE

You're quite welcome.

[Piano playing resumes]

ANNABELLE (CONT'D)

Have fun.

ARCHIVIST

(Extremely tired) Sorry, Mikaele... Salesa?

MIKAELE

The one and only. I must say I've been, uh...

[The Archivist and Martin collapse with a small sigh, fast asleep]

[Piano playing stops]

(Disappointed umm from Mikaela)

(Beat)

ANNABELLE

I did say this might happen.

MIKAELE

You did, you did. Well. So much for my big reveal.

Shame. Ah, well, we can talk after they've slept, I suppose. Eugh. And had a bath. And some food. No rush.

[Mikaele picks up a teacup]

MIKAELE (CONT'D)

We have all the time in the world.

[Tape clicks off]

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Outro]

JONATHAN SIMS

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