

MAG 193 — A Stern Look

Content Warnings

- Paranoia & anxiety
- Emotional manipulation & gaslighting
- Compulsions (supernatural)
- Spiders & arachnophobia
- Body horror & eye trauma
- Drug use (marijuana)
- Mentions of: death (including parental), apocalypse & mass suffering, instances of memory loss & identity crisis, blood, physical violence, human remains, classism, scopophobia, parental disapproval
- SFX: discordant static, buzzing, retching

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

Rusty Quill presents... *The Magnus Archives*. Episode one hundred and ninety-three: "A Stern Look."

[Theme finishes]

[Tape clicks on]

[The Panopticon's main chamber: In the background, swirling air can be heard; an unpleasant shifting tone; and a slow pulsing tone]

[The sound of Jonah's distorted voice fills the room; everything noise here reverberates similar to a vast domed church]

[Jonah's speech underscores the rest of the conversation, chanting
and channelling it to the unfathomable eye that stares down from
above]

JONAH MAGNUS (in ELIAS)

—that stinks of hate and wafts to him with promise of the fast approaching corpse that bears his face and holds within its chest the promise of his own annihilation carved in gouges deep and ragged cutting clean through bone that cracked to splintered powder cast of empty blackened earth that is his home again but something's wrong with what he see upon the door is written not his name but words that mean no more to him than jumbled symbols twisting in the edges of his sight that tries to focus on the emptiness around him but the mist that curls its bitter weeping ache around his legs that bristle up with shivered gooseflesh stained with red that's not his blood whose blood he bled but this is not from him and yet he knows he loved this blood when once it beat within a heart that joined to his through choice or circumstance but now it stains his weeping edges scarlet gloating now of all the butchered ugly fates that might already have befallen what you still might boast he loves at hands that might be moved by others or that might just now be his what have you done what have you done what have you done what have you done why do you hear upon the gloating wind the screaming of his name as now he begs him please to stop the razor slicing through that flesh but there is nothing he can do from here upon the threshold to a house she almost knows to be a home but empty hollow and devoid of all the trappings that could once have given comfort to the pale and weeping shadow of her life that has been left devoid and faded at the corners like a photograph whose sepia-tinted warmth has drained to just a crowd of faceless staring strangers among whom once she

stood to feel safe as houses no-one dares to enter anymore in case they trip upon the mouldy corpse of memories that once gave hope and now provide her nothing but a smile upon the face of something grinning at her sharply and with teeth like rows of hungry needles desperate still to stick through skin like cloth into a tapestry of suffering that billows in the wind and gusts like sails upon a wide and pitch black sea with no horizon in the distance calling one and all towards it with a pull that makes her stomach drop to know she can't resist the waves that lap and drag her over and across the surface still as cracked obsidian but deeper than the world could ever dream as something wakes and shifts below they grab the wheel and cry in panic at their howling crew to ready for a harrowed doomed escape from what begins to rise below them—

[Footstep]

MARTIN

What do you mean he's won?

ARCHIVIST

I mean, he's done it. He's... ascended, become a part of The Eye. He's... he's beyond us.

MARTIN

(Loudly to Jonah) Just shut up! Christ!

ARCHIVIST

He can't hear you.

MARTIN

So, so what? He's not aware of us? Of, of any of this?

ARCHIVIST

No. Or if he is, it's only as a minuscule speck amongst the flood of knowledge and fear that's passing through him. He is become the conduit between this new world and the thing that watches it. It's all running through him.

MARTIN

Sounds awful.

ARCHIVIST

To someone so close to it, I imagine it would be a state of... agonised bliss.

I can feel it... the... completeness of it all passing out from him. I can see everything from here, and that's still just a hint of what he must be feeling—

MARTIN

(Warning) John...

ARCHIVIST

—as he watches a man run screaming down endless dark alleys that close and crush and press—

MARTIN

(Hard warning) John...

Stay with me.

ARCHIVIST

Sorry. I-It's a, it's a lot.

MARTIN

I, I can see that but you need to keep it together.

ARCHIVIST

S-sorry, I think... I can handle it.

MARTIN

Right, so what's the play?

(Beat)

(Jonah is speaking “what have you done what have you done”)

ARCHIVIST

I-I'm not sure.

MARTIN

Well... we came here to confront Elias—Gah! Jonah— whatever! So, how do we do that?

ARCHIVIST

He's too far gone. He's barely even aware we exist.

MARTIN

And I'm guessing you can't just destroy him like the others?

ARCHIVIST

No. God knows what would happen if I called upon The Eye to try and destroy a vital piece of itself. Best case scenario, nothing happens.

MARTIN

And worst case?

ARCHIVIST

No idea. An enormous explosion that destroys the world? We get torn apart, but still suffering or, or cast off to the edges of the fearscape, maybe? I, I don't know.

MARTIN

Okay. So not that then. But... what about something, like, physical?

ARCHIVIST

I— What?

MARTIN

Uh, look, I know it's all about dream logic and metaphor and all that... stuff, but, y'know, what if we just... what if we just grabbed him and, y'know, pulled him down? Or, or just threw something heavy at him?

ARCHIVIST

Uh... I, I don't...

MARTIN

Or, or, or, what about, um... Th-that's Elias' body, right? I mean, yeah, they're obviously Magnus' eyes, but that's still a Bouchard body up there so... so maybe Magnus' original body is just still lying around here somewhere? That, that was a weakness before the transformation, so... maybe we could still use that?

ARCHIVIST

It's gone. Ashes swept away by the winds of ecstatic terror. What you see up there is all that remains.

MARTIN

Right.

(Sighing) (softly) Right, right, right.

...Is the original Elias still in there somewhere?

ARCHIVIST

He's, uh, I—

MARTIN

Maybe we could get through to him somehow?

ARCHIVIST

Ah, no, it isn't that— Ahh...

**[Ceaseless chanting ceases; a whirl of wind with paper noises and
two feet landing]**

[Hissing static starts]

MARTIN

(Annoyed sigh) Again? But you just did one for Ro—

(Realisation) Ro— Oh no...

[Much of the Panopticon sounds fade; however the slow pulse
remains]

[Hissing static ends]

[As when the Archivist channels a victim's experience, his voice no
longer has reverb]

[The ticking clock of Elias' office, and the occasional rustle of paper]

ARCHIVIST

He recognises those eyes. He's seen them all his life, watching him, judging him, cutting through him so no part of him was secret or safe. They peel away the armour, his carefree smile and practiced shrugs. They are the eyes of his father, and they stare at Elias over an old mahogany desk, sat in the face of a man who said his name was James Wright. His interviewer smiles with his mouth, but the eyes are the same.

[Paper turning noise]

(Each time Jonah/Elias speaks, it combines the static-distort, low voice of the current Jonah with the characteristic sound of Elias before the apocalypse; as well, the background noises of the Panopticon creep in)

JONAH/ELIAS

So tell me, Elias. What are you afraid of?

ARCHIVIST

Elias Bouchard freezes in place. The question catches him completely off-guard. Why would he ask him something like that? Elias is applying for a research job — what the hell does that matter?

[Chair creaks]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

“Why, uh... Why do you ask?” He gets the words out through a throat that doesn’t want to speak.

JONAH/ELIAS

In the Institute we are keenly interested in the anatomy of fear. Much that is stored here is disquieting. It is important to know if anything here might... upset you.

ARCHIVIST

His mind races. He can’t tell the truth, obviously. Elias can’t look this man in the face, and tell him that **he** is what scares him. That his eyes, the curiosity and judgement that pulses out of them, they terrify him in a way he can’t put into words. He feels that prickly panic building in the back of his skull, that worry that spills through: he **knows**. He knows I’m high. The thought leaps to Elias’ mind for only a second before he remembers that — he’s not. He hasn’t lit up all day, of course not, he’s got an interview. But even so, he can’t shake

the familiar paranoia. He looks again at his would-be employer, who seems like he's about to repeat the question.

"Spiders," Elias says quickly. "I'm afraid of spiders."

James Wright nods, the smile curling into one of satisfaction, though Elias is sure the man doesn't believe him. Those eyes break contact for a moment, flicking up to the corner of the office where, at the edge of a bookshelf that sags with age and weight, a small cobweb has started to form.

JONAH/ELIAS

Very wise. A very sensible fear.

ARCHIVIST

It is. Yeah, it is. But is it... true? For a moment, Elias really can't remember.

Right here and now, the thought of a spider genuinely repulses him.

[Chair squeaks start as Elias shifts uncomfortably]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

The image of a scuttling, filthy creature, eight eyes glinting out in the darkness, crawls into his mind, and he shudders, looking away for a second. But the uninvited thought keeps going.

[Fabric and itching sounds, that intensify]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

He imagines the spider moving up his leg, his body, he imagines feeling its bristling hairs against the skin of his shoulder, his throat, his cheek. It's spindly probing legs finding their way up his face.

[Crawling insect sounds join the itching]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Elias can't stop himself picturing that spider sat there, venom dripping from fangs that hang, poised over his eye. He can't shut his eye.

[Polite cough; itching, movement and insect sounds stop]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

A cough from over the desk breaks his train of thought. His interviewer is staring at him, and all at once he's back with himself, burning with embarrassment. Those eyes stare, impassive and stern as ever, but... is that a twinkle of satisfaction? As though he has been given an answer he likes. The next question comes slowly, and Elias tries to squash down the fear growing in his chest.

JONAH/ELIAS

So tell me. Have you ever had an experience that you would consider supernatural?

[Memory brings up the buzzing of flies; Elias' ticking clock is replaced with a rapidly ticking clock]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

And immediately Elias is in that room again, fumbling for the light switch, smelling the coppery scent of old blood mixed with the crusty odour of a room that has been hot-boxed a little bit too often. The memory is as fresh and vivid as the day it happened. He knows that Allan is dead, but he needed the light to

be sure, to see it for himself. He finds it, and the switch feels slippery beneath his fingers.

[Switch is clicked, and there is the sound of disgust and retching]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

When the light comes on, Elias has no idea how much of the crimson that bathes the scene is from the blood on the walls, how much from the blood that tints the lightbulb, and how much is simply the shading of his memory. But he remembers so clearly what he was thinking as he looked at what was left of Allan Schrieber: where are his eyes? What did they do with his eyes?

**[Sounds from the memory end; replaced with Elias' office clock
ticking]**

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

“No...,” Elias tries to say, though his mouth is dry and his head is swimming.
“No, I don’t, uh, I don’t think...”

James Wright says nothing as another memory bubbles up from inside Elias, like the last scream of a drowning diver.

**[Sound of pages turning in a book and general ambience of quiet
but large area; a different clock ticks]**

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Allan is in the library, irritated at the interruption, but happy to see a friendly face. The whites of his eyes are riddled with the scarlet veins of sleeplessness, but his hand trembles with a feverish energy as he tries to explain the significance of the book he’s found. Even sober, Elias couldn’t have followed

what his friend was saying, lost in layers of theological scholarship, but he smiles anyway to see the reserved young Allan so passionate about his subject. He looks at the book itself. It's old, crumbling, with none of the usual college library markings. He asks Allan where he got it, and his friend doesn't answer, instead glancing around with a sudden self-conscious suspicion.

[Shuffling and page flicking sounds]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Elias shuffles round to get a closer look at the pages, then stops in confusion, as he realises they are all blank. Allan only laughs when he says so. Was the laughter really that cruel? Or is it just the warping of memory, the past he tries to forget, mixed with the nightmares that came after, the faces he dreamed of seeing in those pages.

**[Sounds from the memory end; replaced with Elias' office
clock ticking]**

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

"Well, er..." Elias is shaking all over. "That is to say..."

**[Elias' ticking clock is replaced with the rapidly ticking clock from
previous and muffled urban car and people noises]**

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Another one. Allan is curled up behind the sofa in the living room they share. Elias stares at his weeping friend, bleary-eyed, trying to follow his housemate's strange monologue, half-confession, half-conspiracy theory, half-urban legend.

[A cigarette lighter strikes a few times, with puffed inhales; a solitary fly buzzes about]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

"It saw me," Allan keeps saying, over and over again, "It saw me through the pages. And it's coming." He sees it, he says, in every mirror, every distant doorway, a silhouette on every skyline. Coming closer each and every time, finding its way towards him, step by step. "It has no eyes," Allan sobs, "so it has to feel its way towards me. But it knows. It knows!" Elias has no way to comfort him. He can't even understand what he's talking about.

[A few more lighter flicks]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

And so on that, the last night of Allan Schreiber's life, he just gets him high, and leaves him to sleep it off.

[Sounds from the memory end; replaced with Elias' office clock ticking]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

"I... don't know," Elias says at last. "You can never really be sure, can you?"

Beyond that stretch of polished mahogany, so well waxed that Elias' pale, sweating face is clearly visible, James Wright's smile remains unchanged.

JONAH/ELIAS

Who indeed? Now tell me: why do you want this job?

ARCHIVIST

Elias tries not to visibly sigh with relief. This, at least, is a question to which he has prepared an answer. He clears his throat slightly, shaking off the lingering image of Allan's body.

"Oh— w-well," he begins, "I've always had the greatest respect for the work put out by this institute on mythological traditions, especially some of the recent papers on Indo-European traditions which was very useful for my dissertation on—"

He stops. Those eyes. They know. They can see right through all his bullshit, right to the core of him. They know what he really thinks. A position in a small, obscure little academic organisation, the first step on a path to the position he actually deserves. This place could be anything, as far as he's concerned.

Medical research, a grant foundation... it doesn't really matter. So why choose the Magnus Institute? Barely known outside its own little sphere of influence, hardly respected among the wider academic community.

[Elias' ticking clock is replaced by a grandfather clock; sombre piano music plays in the background]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

His father's words came to him again, as they always had, through childhood, boarding school, university. "You're a smart boy, Elias, but you're lazy. You have every advantage that I and this world could possibly provide, and yet you insist on squandering them. Don't think I don't see you, looking at those other children with envy, as though their meaningless little lives could contain anything of substance, anything for a Bouchard to aspire to. You are better

than them, and they know it. And it is your job to prove worthy of that distinction.”

Elias’ stomach tightened at the memory, the fierce judgement in his father’s eyes. Even laid out in a casket, it was as if he had looked at Elias with disdain. What should he say?

**[Sounds from the memory fade out, replaced with Elias’ office
clock ticking]**

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

That he had no idea why he wanted this job? That he was all alone in the world, no friends, no family, nothing but the deep certainty that he deserved better. That he was destined to be important. That it was in his blood.

Where had he heard about this job opening? Had it been in a newspaper? He knew no-one who worked here, but received a letter anyway inviting him to interview.

[Chair creaks with uncomfortable movement]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Now that he thought about it, he hadn’t even sent out a CV. Yet somehow he found himself sat across from this man whose smile hadn’t moved the whole time, and whose eyes seemed to know why he was here far better than he did.

“I, uh,” Elias’ voice wavered, paused. “I’ve always had the greatest respect for the work put out by this institute on mythological traditions, especially some of the recent papers on Indo-European traditions which was very—”

[Hissing static starts; joining the Panopticon sounds that rise each time Jonah/Elias talks]

JONAH/ELIAS

Enough. Tell me, why are you here?

[The Panopticon background noises & static continues]

ARCHIVIST

I... I don't know.

JONAH/ELIAS

Were you drawn here?

ARCHIVIST

Yes. I was.

JONAH/ELIAS

Against your will?

ARCHIVIST

No.

JONAH/ELIAS

Then why did you heed the call?

ARCHIVIST

(With Panopticon room reverb) Because... this is the place I know I should be.

JONAH/ELIAS

Good.

The job is yours.

[The background echoes of the Panopticon fades out; the background constant pulse now starts rising in loudness; with the unpleasant shifting tone joining it]

[Hissing static ends]

[Strange high-pitched static sound for a few seconds]

ARCHIVIST

Elias has the briefest of flashes, a sudden burst of terror, an image of himself, strapped down, helpless. The vanishing of well-known faces, and the harsh sneers that replace them as they stare at him. He cannot move. He cannot scream. What is happening? What is it that he feels deep down in his skull?

[Faint squelchy gore sounds]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

What are they doing to his eyes? This presence, old and rotten, in his mind?

He can do nothing but watch.

[Gore sounds and shifting tone stop, while pulse returns to the background; Elias' ticking clock resumes]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

The moment passes, and Elias returns to himself.

[Hissing static starts]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

He tries to smile, and thanks his new employer for the opportunity.

[Elias' office clock fades out; sound transitions to the Panopticon ambience]

[Hissing static fades]

[Jonah resumes his position skyward, recommencing his chanting narrative]

JONAH/ELIAS (BACKGROUND)

...as they look down to see the pitch black void of ocean getting darker still as something rises up that dwarfs the sky and yet they know it is the smallest tip of only one appendage reaching up splitting timber splitting steel splitting friends all into shapes and forms and spatters that don't register as human even as the inky frozen sea pulls air out of their lungs because it is so cold it is so cold it is so coldly sneering as sticky strands pull taut against the flailing struggles as they try to pull away from what approaches in the distant edge of this colossal latticework of bone and sickly paste that twists and curls with each vibration of those fools like them now caught and wrapped and flailing in their heaving desperation not to see it looming over them with glassy eyes and fangs that drip with poison and the promise of the slow and steady agony of feeling all that was herself dissolved and broken down into the bitter pleading—

MARTIN

You alright? That was... intense.

ARCHIVIST

Yeah... uhh... I just... uhh...

MARTIN

Was that the real Elias? Is he still in there then?

ARCHIVIST

No... No. It-it was... an echo. The last spasm of a corpse. I-It's far too late for either of them.

MARTIN

Damn.

ARCHIVIST

There was never anything we could have done. But I-I saw...

MARTIN

What?

ARCHIVIST

You were right.

MARTIN

A-about what?

ARCHIVIST

His body **is** vulnerable. At least to me.

(Beat)

MARTIN

What's the catch?

ARCHIVIST

I could kill his body, sever the link, break The Eye's power, and Jonah Magnus would die.

MARTIN

Okay, that sounds good, but...?

ARCHIVIST

But, that wouldn't actually harm The Eye itself. And with him gone it would...

It would choose a suitable replacement.

MARTIN

Oh.

ARCHIVIST

If we kill Jonah Magnus, I take his place.

MARTIN

Oh god.

ARCHIVIST

And I think...

...that's exactly what it wants.

[Tape clicks off]

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Outro]

JONATHAN SIMS

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