

MAG – 156 – Reflection

Content Warnings:

- Body horror
- Cannibalism
- Fairground accidents

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

Rusty Quill presents... The Magnus Archives. Episode one hundred and fifty-six:
"Reflection."

[Tape clicks on. Paper rustles. A clock ticks.]

MARTIN

Mm? (**beat**) Oh.

(He laughs, softly.)

MARTIN (CONT'D)

Yeah. (**Rustling paper**) I was going to read one. Hate for you to miss it!

(He laughs again)

[The paper rustles.]

MARTIN (CONT'D)

You know, I- I've been wondering about your batteries. Like, could I just take the batteries out each time one of you appears, and just- have an infinite

supply of batteries? I mean- I won't; don't worry, don't really have anything that needs them these days.

Also, I know there's every chance that you don't even have any, and it's just empty, and, well... I'm not really sure that's something I want to confirm.

Or, I open up your compartment and it's like- meat, or maggots, or something.

(Pause.) Mm. Emptiness or maggots. **(He exhales)** It's kinda the shape of things around here, isn't it? Still, kind of nice to talk to some... thing? **(He sighs.)** It's always quiet, these days. For me, at least.

I guess I technically have the power to make it not quiet, to, to talk to people, but like- you know, I, I also have the power to clean out the fridge, and it's still a mess. It's not that I don't want to clean the fridge, it's just-

Some things are just hard.

Anyway. I know he's been listening to the tapes, so I guess that'll have to do.

I think I still care that he hears my voice. It's hard to tell, sometimes. How much do I actually care, and how much is just feeling that I should care? I'm on my own so much these days, I...

Just wish I didn't like it so much.

I mean, if you've got any thoughts, I'd love to hear them.

(Pause.)

MARTIN (CONT'D)

Hmm?

[Silence, but for the clock.]

MARTIN (CONT'D)

No. Didn't think so. (**Long inhale**) That's not what you're here for, is it? (**Sigh**)

No. You want this.

MARTIN (CONT'D)

Fine. (**Heavy sigh**) Fine. Have it your way. As usual. (**pause**)

Martin Blackwood, assistant to Peter Lukas, Head of the Magnus Institute, recording statement #0090401. Statement of Adelard Dekker, taken from a letter to Gertrude Robinson, dated 4th of January, 2009.

Statement begins.

MARTIN (STATEMENT)

(**Inhale**) Gertrude. I wanted your opinion on an encounter I've had described to me, and given your recent dealing with Viscera, I would very much value your input.

Good job on that, by the way. I'm sure the gnostic temple was a great loss culturally speaking, but I can't help but admire your directness when it comes to this sort of thing. I often find myself locked in a sense of esoteric paralysis on how to proceed.

Still. God grant me clarity to act when I need it.

Anyway, I was following up on a young man who had apparently had a nasty experience whilst exploring the ruins of the Bright Lake amusement park in Colorado.

You will forgive me if I withhold his name, as I have all the verification I need to be sure he's telling the truth, and I find it hard to believe any follow up you would be interested in doing would be beneficial for him. He's earned his anonymity.

Bright Lake lies to the north of White River National Forest, just off the I-70. It was built in the sixties, around a large artificial lake that was apparently formed following a mining accident that had collapsed a significant portion of the surrounding landscape.

It was, from what I can tell from a collection of photos taken in 1983, a largely unremarkable amusement park. A medium sized wooden roller coaster, a ferris wheel, a Hall of Mirrors, and a wide avenue of games and carnival booths, as well as a fleet of paddle boats that allowed you to go out into the lake that gave the place its name.

By the nineties, it was struggling. By the turn of the millennium, it was out of business, closing its gates for the last time in October 1999.

From what I understand, there have been several plans to rebuild it or repurpose the land in the decades since, but none have amounted to more than surveyors pocketing fees and many slabs of planning documentation tucked away in filing cabinets.

It's a little too out-of-the-way to be a common destination for teenage delinquency, but has become, I'm told, quite popular with what can be described as 'rural urban exploration groups.'

Apparently, the lack of, well, actual urban areas to explore means that locations such as this become quite a draw for those in the area with an

interest in abandoned places. And of course, its rather forbidding appearance after ten years of decay has led quite a few ghost hunters out that way, as well, though I'm not aware of any specific tragedies or stories about it that would give them much to go on.

My young friend was specifically intending to use it as the site of a party they were planning to throw. Based on his description, I would have called it a rave... but when I said so, he looked at me like I didn't understand what he was talking about.

In any case, there was going to be a lot of dancing and movement, so he decided to scout ahead in order to see how structurally sound the place still was.

He was planning to mark out those buildings and areas that should be avoided, and which should be sufficiently stable to support a crowd of intoxicated party-goers.

I pressed him on how scary it had been, what fear he might have felt approaching it, but whilst he'd admit it was "creepy as hell," that was apparently the point, and he said he didn't feel any apprehension when he got there.

I suspect his machismo is stopping him admitting it, but there wasn't much I could do to get him to open up.

He was very interested in the Hall of Mirrors. According to him, if it was still in good shape, it would have been an amazing place to put on a light show, and have his guests dance their way through the maze.

Sounds like a good way to get injured to me, but apparently I used the word 'rave' wrong, so what do I know?

Anyway, that was his first stop after checking that the wooden floor of the main avenue was still solid, which it was, and that the central square would be able to take the weight of the heavy speakers, which it could. Then, he headed to the Hall of Mirrors.

A lot of the actual mirrors themselves were cracked or broken, making the maze part of the funhouse easy to navigate, but he reckoned if he took the time to sweep up the broken glass, it would still be serviceable.

Then he came to a long, straight room that contained the warped mirrors. Now, to you and I, the undamaged pristine state of these would have a warning sign. The fact that there was no dust on them at all, even after ten years of neglect, would have rang all sorts of alarm bells.

But I'm trying to remind myself that not everyone is as attuned to these signs as we are, and to my young trespasser friend, apparently there was nothing in that to worry him at all. In fact, he was excited to see them in such a good shape.

I feel a little guilty. I actually laughed when he said that.

It was the third mirror that did it. The one that expanded him into a short, squat reflection caused no problems. Neither did the one that bent him out of shape. But the third mirror, the one that squeezed him, made him thin and gaunt, that was the one which took him.

He outright refused to tell me how exactly he was pulled through it, but from the look in his eyes I have no doubt it was a powerfully unpleasant experience, so much so, that he claims to have lost consciousness.

He awoke to bright lights, and the sound of machines whirring, cut through with ringing bells and the sound of people shouting. The lights in the Hall of Mirrors were on, and it was clear that he was no longer in the old amusement park, seeing the place was changed from how he recalled it in the dark. Everything seemed more or less maintained, with paint that was old and starting to peel, but a long way from the bare, rotten wood it had been before. The only thing in worse condition were the mirrors themselves, the frames of which were now pocked with tiny, irregular indentations all the way round. It would be some time before the idea would come to him that they were teeth marks.

Our witness staggered to his feet and quietly made his way towards the door of the funhouse, hanging off the side, so as to look out without being seen. The park was completely changed, now seemingly full of life. There were people striding down the main avenue, past the well-lit booths trying to entice them with coconut throws and hoop games. The rollercoaster rattled along in the background, the faint screams of its riders drifting over the crowds below. For a few seconds it seemed almost legitimately joyful.

But as he watched, a certain wrongness began to become clear.

Meaningless details, if they were confined to a single punter, but all the park-goers seemed the same.

The first was how baggy their clothes were. It almost seemed as though everyone was wearing some sort of oversized novelty t-shirt. But it was the

same with the shirts, jackets, dresses- until it became apparent that it was not the clothes that were too big, but the wearers who were too small.

Their limbs were painfully thin to look at, their flesh stretched tightly over jutting bones, and the fabric hung off them like great flaps of skin. The hair on each head was thin, almost wispy, often missing in great chunks, and their eyes were sunken so hollow that from a distance they seemed empty.

This is when our unfortunate interloper began to feel the first stirrings of fear. He began to move, slowly and quietly, outside, his utter bafflement at what was happening briefly overpowering his mounting dread. It wasn't just a few of them. Everyone in the park was so emaciated that they barely seemed human- but they seemed to be acting normally, at least for the moment.

He moved slowly through the shadows of the rickety wooden structures, watching them pass, until his eyes fell upon the coconut shy.

'WIN BREAD,' the sign announced in bold colours, but a huge black cross had been struck through it, and from this distance the prize bucket seemed empty. Even so, a woman stood there, hurling a well-worn leather ball at the hairy targets in the back. As she knocked one from its perch, her face contorted into a grimace of joy, and the wizened carnie hobbled over to one of the buckets and handed her a tiny bone.

Without hesitation, she snapped it cleanly in half and started desperately gnawing at the broken end, trying to reach whatever scant marrow might have remained inside.

Our lost young friend felt his stomach turn. He told me he was a good fifteen feet away, but could still hear the sounds of her desperate hunger over the rides all around.

The woman began to examine the bone in her hand closely, then turned and began railing at the carnie, accusing him of cheating her, of lying about the prizes.

This was all too much for our witness, who had decided that whatever was going on in this place, he wanted no part of it. But as he turned to look for a way out, there was a sound that cut through the background din of the park: It was a scream from the rollercoaster, but not the joyful cry of adrenaline and mock terror, but a dreadful, piercing wail, flying through the air.

It seemed one of the riders, unable to properly benefit from the safety bar, had been thrown from the height of a loop, and was sailing through the air, landing on the unforgiving ground of the main avenue with a horrendous crunch.

A sudden silence fell over the place. The rides still whirred and rang and jangled, but every person there had gone completely still, their eyes locked on the mangled mess of broken limbs and shattered bone.

It was the carnie that went first, vaulting over the side of the coconut shy with an unexpected agility. Then it was as if a dam had broken, and every half-wasted figure descended on the twisted corpse. Our interloper had to look away, or risk being sick at the sight of so many spindly bodies swarming, biting, rotten teeth and swollen gums tearing at the still-twitching body of the unfortunate soul from the roller coaster.

When he told me of the hunger he saw in their eyes, his legs were shaking so badly, he had to turn away. His eyes fell instead on the coconut shy, and he finally got a good look at what were propped up as targets.

What stared back at him certainly had hair, but they most definitely were not coconuts.

He staggered backwards as a shock passed through him, colliding with a nearby trash can and sending it clattering to the floor. He tried to regain his footing, but something underneath him rolled away, and he slipped, falling on top of the heap of bones from the overturned garbage.

They were too large to be animal bones, he was sure of it, and every one of them had been picked clean and cracked open, the marrow sucked from them to leave nothing but dry, white fragments.

Pulling himself painfully to his feet, he glanced back at the crowd, and saw that several of them on the edge, those that had no hopes of reaching the corpse, had clearly heard the commotion, and were starting to walk warily towards him.

He tells me he was suddenly very aware of just how much flesh was on his body.

He turned and ran back into the funhouse.

I do envy you your gifts sometimes, Gertrude. His account of their pursuit through the mirror-maze was honestly so disjoint that I was unable to follow it. Even after he tried to take me through it two, or even three times.

Without the Eye's clarifying influence, panic can make details... difficult to remember.

They shouted at him, certainly, but his stark terror appears to have robbed him of the memory of their words.

Judging by the bite marks on his wrist, I think it's safe to assume that one of them caught him, at least for a moment, but he claims he can remember nothing of the sort.

I can at least say for certain that he managed to lose his pursuers long enough to return to the warped mirrors. He then took what I consider to be his only sensible action in the entire affair: Rather than running straight to the mirror which distorted him into a thin, angular figure, he took a moment to look into each one, and one of them showed no reflection at all.

His next action of running full pelt into it was perhaps less inspired, but it does seem to have been effective, since when he regained consciousness, covered in blood and broken glass, he was once again in the silent darkness of the abandoned Bright Lake amusement park he had made the unwise decision to break into.

I don't believe the party ever happened, which is almost certainly for the best. So? What are your thoughts. I'm keen to hear your own interpretation of this one. My first assumption would have been the Flesh, based on the cannibalism and strangeness of the bodies involved, but- something about this idea of some sort of famine world, its location within a man-made ruin, the whole... societal aspect of it- I'd be inclined to chalk this up as a genuine Extinction manifestation.

But I don't know. Am I drawing wild conclusions, trying to fit the account into my own preconceptions? Keen to know your feelings on the matter.

Oh. One more thing: If you do try to follow up with my source- and I know you have your own ways of finding him, should you wish- please be careful.

He told me, near the end, that he had recently been worried he's being followed. He keeps catching glimpses of a thin figure in the distance, or disappearing around a corner, and I can't quite get past the detail that there was no reflection at all in the mirror he used to return.

If my suspicions are correct, there's little either of us can do for him- but do take care, if you make contact.

MARTIN

Statement ends.

[He flips the paper over.]

MARTIN (CONT'D)

(Sighs) Another day, another Extinction scare. The more things change, I guess.

(He sighs again.)

[Static begins to fade in, quickly.]

MARTIN (CONT'D)

I just wish Peter would finally get round to telling me what we're going to do about it.

PETER

Then I have good news for you!

(Martin sucks in a hard breath, and we hear what sounds like his chair scraping backwards in alarm.)

MARTIN

(Annoyed) Peter, we have talked about this!

PETER

In my defence, it is still quite funny.

(Martin takes an annoyed breath.)

MARTIN

So. What's the news?

PETER

I think we're finally ready!

MARTIN

(Through gritted teeth) Great. Does that mean I finally get to know what we're ready for?

PETER

Yes! Well- for the most part. To a certain degree, you really need to see it for yourself.

MARTIN

Peter.

PETER

You know the tunnels under the Institute?

MARTIN

Y- Yes, I remember.

PETER

Well, there's something at the centre, a- let's call it a device. Now, our biggest problem with the Extinction is a lack of information. We know it's emerging, but we don't know how, or where.

MARTIN

And this... device will help?

PETER

Yes.

MARTIN

And I'm going to be the one to use it for you.

PETER

I very much hope so.

(Pause) If you need more time...

MARTIN

I don't.

PETER

Good, because I was going to say there probably isn't any.

MARTIN

If it's been down there all this time, how come we haven't found it? John explored the tunnels pretty thoroughly, and Leitner was down there a lot.

PETER

It's very difficult to reach if you don't know exactly where you're going.

MARTIN

And you do?

PETER

I will. By tomorrow, I should have my hands on a map, and then- we go.

(Pause.)

MARTIN

(Subdued) Right.

(Beat.) Will I be coming back?

PETER

You're not going to die, if that's what you're asking, but- no. If all goes well, you won't be.

(Martin takes a long inhale, then exhales.)

PETER

How does that make you feel?

[The static in the background adopts a bit more bass than usual, and the high-pitched scream-like tones increase in volume as well.]

MARTIN

Nothing. **(Short laugh)** Nothing at all.

PETER

Excellent. I'm so proud of you, Martin.

MARTIN

I really don't care.

PETER

Perfect.

[Tape clicks off.]

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Outro]

JONATHAN SIMS

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