

MAG 182 — Wellbeing

Content Warnings

- Hospitals
- Surgery (including SFX)
- Extreme medical malpractice
- Involuntary commitment & treatment
- Body horror
- Torture
- Character death
- Suicide (including assisted) / Suicidal ideation
- Mentions of: Mental deterioration, chronic pain, needles, stillbirth imagery, strokes, rot
- SFX: screaming, high-pitched sounds, blades, drilling

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

Rusty Quill presents... *The Magnus Archives*. Episode one hundred and eighty-two: "Wellbeing."

[Theme finishes]

[Tape clicks on]

[Wasteland winds with distant distorted howls; closer there are
muffled tannoy announcements punctuated with high-pitched
feedback squeals]

MARTIN

Seriously?

ARCHIVIST

Yup.

MARTIN

Not an hour from an oasis, and we're already at sinister hospitals?

ARCHIVIST

It's the next stop on our journey.

MARTIN

Of course it is. And, of course, there's no chance for a warm-up?

ARCHIVIST

(Incredulous) ...A warm-up?

MARTIN

Yeah, y'know. Something a bit more... manageable. A-A chance to get our bearings a bit first.

ARCHIVIST

What exactly did you have in mind?

MARTIN

I dunno. Y'know like, like a creepy... bus stop or something?

ARCHIVIST

(Amused) I'm afraid not.

Truth be told, I'm actually feeling pretty great.

...Which isn't necessarily a good thing, I suppose.

MARTIN

Yeah, I know.

(Sigh)

We stayed in Salesa's as long as you could.

ARCHIVIST

A bit longer, actually. I was, ah... not really holding it together by the end.

MARTIN

Why didn't you say something?

ARCHIVIST

It's fine. I'm fine.

MARTIN

Yeah now.

ARCHIVIST

I just thought, what with Daisy and Basira, and... You needed a break. Some time to process.

MARTIN

We both did. But apparently I'm the only one who got to.

ARCHIVIST

It's okay. I deal with things differently these days. I just wanted to make sure that you were doing okay. Was I wrong? To hold off?

(Beat)

MARTIN

No. No you weren't. Just getting the chance to sleep again was...

...Ah well. Good while it lasted. Come on then, 'nightmare hospital' it is.

ARCHIVIST

Would it help if I told you we were actually starting to get a bit closer to London? Well, what was "London".

MARTIN

Actually yes. That does help a bit. How many more?

ARCHIVIST

Depends on, uh... A few, at least.

MARTIN

Right.

(Fortifying deep breath) Right, let's get on with it then.

[They walk through sliding doors and into the hospital; the muffled sounds of screams, bandsaws and other ‘devices’ become audible; a constant distant alarm sound plays]

[They pause walking]

MARTIN

Okay... could be worse...

[The sound of blades, like knives being sharpened or unoiled scissors working]

DR DOE

Good!

MARTIN

(Scared) HAHHH! HMMM! Worse! It got worse! Worse, ah, much worse...

ARCHIVIST

Martin, be polite.

(Martin sounds discomfited)

Hello!

[Blade sounds accompany Dr Doe’s movements and gestures; her voice sounds slightly distorted and her manner is upbeat]

DR DOE

Pleasure yes hello! I am Doctor Doe, Jane. Welcome into my hospital Inspector.

ARCHIVIST

Inspector?

DR DOE

You have come here to over-observe yes? To inspector?

ARCHIVIST

I, uh, I s-s-suppose so. Y-Yes.

DR DOE

Then follow. Let us tour our wellbeing centre. Keep your screams inside if you want to be polite.

ARCHIVIST

Right.

[They begin walking; Dr Doe's walk has a constant blade-sharpening sound]

[Sounds of screams and devices evolve as they move]

MARTIN

(Nervously) It's a... Beautiful building.

DR DOE

Do not insult me.

MARTIN

I, uh... okay.

(Beat)

W-What's it called?

DR DOE

Called?

MARTIN

The hospital.

DR DOE

Ah. St Bleedings Centre for Wellbeing.

MARTIN

(Drawled) Right.

ARCHIVIST

(Hushed) Martin, keep your eyes forward. On the doctor.

MARTIN

(Hushed) Seriously? She's all kinds of horrible—

ARCHIVIST

Better than what's in the rooms. Trust me.

MARTIN

Ah, right.

[They stop walking as Dr Doe opens a door]

[The nearest device noises change from muffled to loud and clear; a feminine voice is heard weeping]

DR DOE

You must look in here to see one of our four hundred operating theatres where we ensure any wellbeing is swiftly and awfully dispatched.

MARTIN

(Hurriedly) Right, right.

DR DOE

Sometimes is an anatomical wellness. Sometimes the wellbeing they possess is mental. In both cases we have grinding machines and anti-trained doctors on nails to deal with it. Nobody who comes into the hospital leaves right. Or at all!

MARTIN

Oh. Heh. Gooooood.

ARCHIVIST

Good lord.

[Walking restarts]

DR DOE

It is a thing to look at isn't it? How much do they suffer Inspector?

ARCHIVIST

I... What?

DR DOE

I help to cure them of their wellbeing but... I cannot know if my work is appreciated. I can only guess at fear. You *know*. Does it work? Do they... (**slight laugh**) hurt?

ARCHIVIST

Yes. Yes they hurt.

DR DOE

(**Noise of contentment**)

This pleases me.

MARTIN

Is there... Uh, is-is there anything here that isn't surgeries?

DR DOE

There are all sorts of machines. Plenty of medicine.

MARTIN

Any, uh... wards? Beds, maybe?

DR DOE

Sometimes rooms. Sometimes we throw them in a pit.

MARTIN

A pit, right, yeah.

DR DOE

We have a canteen.

ARCHIVIST

(Hushed) Don't ask about the canteen.

MARTIN

(Hushed) I wasn't *going* to ask about the canteen!

ARCHIVIST

Um, Dr Doe, thank you so much for the tour.

DR DOE

There is more!

ARCHIVIST

Oh...

Good.

[Distant plastic rattling noise]

MARTIN

J-John. Hang on John, over there, is, is that um-?

DR DOE

He is a janitor. You are allowed to ignore him.

MARTIN

Right...

(Discomfited sounds from the Archivist)

John, J-John, do you— r-right, ah, ah...

Doctor!

[Walking stops]

MARTIN (CONT'D)

Is there an empty room he can use, please?

DR DOE

What is he doing?

MARTIN

He needs to... talk about all the horrible things this place does.

DR DOE

Oh, wonderful! This way.

[Tape clicks off]

[Tape clicks on]

[Hissing static]

[Previous hospital sounds are gone; now there is the bleep of a heart monitor; a neon hum; shuffling; and low, distorted, incomprehensible voices sometimes mutter]

ARCHIVIST

Patient: Jeremy W.

Date and place of birth: 4th August 1977 —

[Hissing static ends]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

— North Manchester General Hospital.

Date and place of last contentment: 8th July 2013, sunrise, on Arthur's Seat hilltop, Edinburgh.

Complaint: Generalised pain and creeping ennui.

Surgical procedures thus far: 802.

Prognosis: *Delightful*.

They always wore masks when they stood over his bed, those thin blue, or were they green, surgical masks, but they somehow covered the entire faces of the doctors and the nurses and the orderlies that swarmed in and around him. Jeremy didn't know how they could see with their eyes covered, but it was a long time since he had realistically thought there might be anything human behind the medical garb. They wore loose, baggy scrubs, head-coverings that gave no sign of hair and thick, waterproof aprons.

[Stretching rubber noise; and the heart monitor is rising in tone and speed]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Whenever they were about to touch him they would snap on another vinyl glove over the layers and layers of similar gloves that would have long since cut off all the blood to their hands. If they had any.

There was no way to tell the time here. The window in his room grew bright and dark but the light was wrong for the sun. At some point he'd broken the

glass in a desperate attempt to escape, but was confronted by a fluorescent light installed in front of a brick wall. He had tried to count how long it was on for and how long it was off, but it seemed almost random, and the pain grew worse when he tried to keep track of time.

At some point in each lighted time, they would come, unlocking the rusty iron door of his hospital room, and surrounding his bed three-deep.

[Rusty door is opened and footstep file into the room; the heart rate monitor continues to slowly rise in tone and pace; the sound of latex makes unpleasant squelching sounds]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Some were tall and narrow, others wide or crooked. None of them were quite the right proportions to be convincingly human. They mumbled among themselves, meaninglessly saying words like ‘intubation’, ‘radiology’ or ‘stat’. Occasionally one of them would touch him, the strange texture of their bodies was clear even through all the layers in which they hid. Eventually, one of them, and it was always a different one, would push to the front.

[A breathy, rattling alien sound]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

‘I am the doctor’, it would say, ‘are you well?’

This was it, the moment of truth, the point at which all Jeremy’s anxiety came to a head. They all leaned in, hidden faces focused on him, as though drinking in his desperation. He had to make an answer, a simple yes or no. He’d learned the hard way that nuanced answers or stoic silence only made it worse.

So he picked one. A roll of the dice. In many ways it didn't matter which he chose, as there was no way to determine if the doctor of the day considered his wellness an aim to be achieved or a condition that required curing.

'Yes,' he might say. 'I am well.' And if he had chosen right, the mask would widen as though the face behind it extended in a smile.

[A breathy, rattling alien sound]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

'Wonderful!' would come the response, 'keep it up!', and the crowd would file out and lock the door behind them, leaving Jeremy to wait for his next assessment.

But he rarely seemed to choose right. The rest of the time a shudder of anticipation would pass through the medical things around him.

[A breathy, rattling alien sound]

[The heart monitor's tone and speed start rising at a faster pace]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

'Well, let's see what we can do about treating that,' the doctor would say. And they would descend upon him, and drag him away for treatment.

[Unpleasant movement noises intensify; brief scuffle sounds and a metal dish hits the floor; footsteps recede into background]

[Pause in SFX, then a curtain is drawn back on rusty rings]

[Faint sounds of air con, with the irregular sounds of hospital machinery, Velcro, shuffling and the curtain being pulled]

Patient: Renee T.

Date and place of birth: 27th November 1990, Royal Hallamshire Hospital.

Date and place of last contentment: 27th November 2015, birthday party prior to father's stroke.

Complaint: Facial paralysis.

Surgical procedures thus far: 560.

Prognosis: *Exciting.*

She always thought she hated the diagnosis the most. Those long, excruciating minutes of probing and poking, of temperature taking and needles drawing blood and mucus and tears and black bile and yellow bile all to be tested and tasted and twisted. A dozen staff flapping around her like carrion birds, stealing a little bit more of her each time for their own clumsy guesses and painful assumptions.

All the while the dread was building, focusing to a hot, tight little ball that settled just below her stomach and shot it through with agonising reminders of her fear. Her face, of course, remained impassive, unable to show her mounting dread.

Finally, one of the creatures would step forward, never one she recognised, and announce the diagnosis.

[A breathy, rattling alien sound]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

'Skin,' it might say, or 'liver', or 'bones', and once, only once, 'soul'. Then the treatment would begin.

[The curtain is drawn again]

[Straps are tightened]

Surgery was the most common treatment, and one for which the doctors often reached. Renee would be strapped down tighter to her chair, and wheeled into the lift that smelled like ammonia and rot.

[Sounds of a corridor, rattling trolley, and a melody-less whistling]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

It would descend far, far down into the belly of the hospital, before she was wheeled down the longest corridor in the building, barely wide enough to fit her trolley. The soon-to-be surgeon walked in front, whistling a tune that never resolved itself into a melody. Finally, she would be placed in the centre of the theatre, bright lights rendering the rows upon rows of silently watching doctors nothing but silhouettes.

**[The corridor, whistling and trolley are replaced by sound of straps
and faint buzzing]**

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Sometimes there was enough anaesthetic to lock her limbs in place; other times they simply let her thrash. It dulled the pain, but the pain was never the problem. Regardless, they always strapped the anaesthetic mask tight to her face before they began to cut.

[Click of a metal tray, then visceral sounds of surgery]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

The procedure varied depending on the diagnosis. An organ diagnosis was simple: open her up, dig around inside her until they could remove something

that could conceivably be a liver or a pancreas or a (**questioning**) gallbladder? Then put *something* back in its place. Sometimes what they put in was hard and sharp, digging into her when she tried to move, sometimes it was soft and putrid, and she could feel it rotting away within. Occasionally it was alive, and she could feel it clawing to get out.

[An electric drill noise now joins the surgery sounds]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

When the diagnosis had been skin, they had been peeled her piece by piece before they painted the inside of it with something dark and sticky, then sewed it back on. All through she could do nothing but watch as they cut and swapped and conjectured her body, unable to speak, to move, to do anything but watch these anonymous things play with everything she was.

But worse, perhaps, were the medicines. If they prescribed her medicine, she tried her best not to take it, but the pills would crawl down her throat when she wasn't paying attention, and the solutions would pour themselves in her ear when she lay down to rest. They might have done nothing, been naught but dust and sugar, but she could never be sure. The sickness, the seizures, the spasms, the sadness. If it wasn't the medicine, then it was inside her. And it had always been inside her. And she just didn't know.

[One last loud and wet drilling occurs, before fading away]

[Pause in SFX, then the sounds of short, pained breaths; ice-like crackling; and huffing machinery]

Patient: Kelly M.

Date and place of birth: 1st April 1982, Bournemouth Hospital.

Date and place of last contentment: Not recalled.

Complaint: Headaches.

Surgical procedures thus far: 220.

Prognosis: *unwise*.

In her locked and darkened room she waited for the doctors to come. She looked to the small strip of fluorescence that spilled beneath the door, but nothing disturbed it. When would they come? When would they give her her next treatment?

The last doctor had told her it was her heart. They had rushed her down to the theatre, and tore open her chest with something that looked like a pastry crimper and reached inside. Her bile rose at the memory of those strange boneless fingers brushing against her lungs. Then they had gripped something, and pulled it out of her slowly and... almost tenderly. Kelly remembered it had had at first looked like a child, a baby, but it had her face, and stole away her smile. She didn't see what they did with it, but in its place they put a cold and glassy thing, a frozen tube that beats and pumps out ice water that makes her shiver all through the deepest parts of herself.

It still pumps now, as Kelly sits shivering in the corner of her room.

How long has it been? There is no way to tell, not here, but they will come back, they must come back. They always do. They must swap out this cold and hollow emptiness for some fresh pain and-and torture. She longs to feel the pain, as it is at least a feeling. But the fear has grown inside her now. What if the doctors have finished? What if she is treated, and this is all there is now? What if she is well? Kelly looks to the door and waits.

[Tape clicks off]

[Tape clicks on]

[The sounds of the hospital corridor; muffled screams, mechanical devices, and a distant distorted alarm]

[Mopping sounds and footsteps approach]

BREEKON

‘scuse me, Doctor. Just cleanin’ up.

MARTIN

Oh, I’m, uh, not a doctor.

BREEKON

Whatever. I got work to do.

MARTIN

Hang on... Hang on. Are you— Wait, which one are you? Hope, or, um—

BREEKON

Breekon. Hope’s dead. Do I know you?

MARTIN

Hmm. Hope’s dead. Bit on the nose, isn’t it?

BREEKON

Glad losing half my existence has given you a funny little metaphor.

MARTIN

Oh, well, I mean, that’s not *actually* a metaphor per se, so...

BREEKON

(Weary) Piss off.

MARTIN

Oh, I'm sorry, am I, am I supposed to be sympathising? After everything you two did to people?

BREEKON

Guess not.

(Beat)

Who you waiting for? Maybe I can rip them away from you. See how you like it.

MARTIN

You're welcome to try.

BREEKON

Wait... No, I do know you. We gave you a delivery, didn't we? Years back. You're one of Magnus' lot, right?

MARTIN

...I was, yes.

BREEKON

Wait, so does that mean, in there... The Archivist?

MARTIN

That's right.

(Beat)

BREEKON

I'll wait with you.

MARTIN

I... thought you had work to do.

BREEKON

Just spreading the smell around. Doesn't matter. None of it matters.

MARTIN

...Right.

(Long beat)

[Door opens and footsteps as the Archivist enters]

ARCHIVIST

Hello again, Breekon.

BREEKON

Yeah.

ARCHIVIST

He hasn't been bothering you, has he Martin?

MARTIN

Well...

BREEKON

Nah. Just been chattin'.

ARCHIVIST

Naturally.

So you've come to me.

BREEKON

Didn't mean to.

ARCHIVIST

No, but you have. Because there's something you want. Isn't there?

BREEKON

...Yeah.

ARCHIVIST

Say it.

BREEKON

...Kill me.

MARTIN

Wait, what?

BREEKON

The way I figure, you're the one that made all this. So if anyone can end it, you can.

Can you do it?

ARCHIVIST

Yes. I can.

MARTIN

But, but like, why would you want him to? Isn't this whole thing like a dream come true for all of you... monsters?

BREEKON

You think I dream of mopping floors? No. We're a— *I'm* a delivery man. We arrive somewhere, deliver terror and death, then leave, never to be seen again. Not much call for that now everyone's in their little kingdoms. Maybe if we were complete, we coulda done something, but as is... No. Can't say I want this to be my forever.

ARCHIVIST

I see.

BREEKON

Besides, it hurts all the time. The Eye won't ever stop watching, and (sigh) it isn't great for an anonymous thing like us... (**pained noise**) like me.

ARCHIVIST

Very well. I warn you, though, it **will** hurt.

BREEKON

Only until it doesn't though, right?

ARCHIVIST

Right.

MARTIN

Good luck.

BREEKON

Whatever.

[A few footsteps]

[Hissing static starts]

ARCHIVIST

(Intoning) Ceaseless Watcher, gaze upon this thing, this lost and broken splinter of fear.

[The static is joined with other unpleasant electronic high tones and glitching — the ‘smite static’ from the Not-Sasha encounter]

(Breekon makes noises of discomfort)

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Take what is left of it as your own and leave no trace of it behind.

It. Is. Yours.

[Statics crescendo to the smite glitch sound; as Breekon grunts in pain and then discorporates with a last echoing yell of agony]

[Statics end]

(Beat)

MARTIN

Right.

ARCHIVIST

I suppose we should find Doctor Doe. Finish our tour.

MARTIN

Do we have to?

ARCHIVIST

Probably not.

MARTIN

...I don't really know how to feel about that.

ARCHIVIST

About Breekon?

MARTIN

Yeah.

ARCHIVIST

...Me neither. I didn't enjoy it, but... I dunno, almost felt like doing a favour for an old friend.

MARTIN

An old friend who hated us.

ARCHIVIST

I guess.

Maybe we don't have to feel any way at all.

(Martin makes a noncommittal sound)

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Come on, this place is starting to get to me.

[Footsteps]

[Tape clicks off]

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Outro]

JONATHAN SIMS

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