

MAG 162 — A Cosy Cabin

Content Warnings

- Isolation
- Quarantine
- Post-apocalypse

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

Rusty Quill presents... *The Magnus Archives*. Episode one hundred and sixty-two: "A Cosy Cabin."

[Theme finishes]

[Tape clicks on]

[The sound of someone searching a shelf: bottles clink, things slide]

[A cassette tape is rattled]

GERARD KEAY

Hmm.

GERTRUDE

Find anything interesting back there?

[As she speaks, Gerard startles, knocking down some items from the shelf and bumping the running tape recorder]

GERARD

Yeah, sorry, I was just, um- yeah.

GERTRUDE

Curiosity is a very dangerous trait in our line of work, Gerard.

[Gertrude moves further into the room and sits down on a creaky office chair]

GERARD

So is ignorance.

(Gertrude laughs)

GERTRUDE

Well, you're not going to find *many* dark secrets in the stationery cupboard.

[Sounds of a cupboard door sliding]

GERARD

(Amused) Just the recorded confession of your evil plans, then.

GERTRUDE

Oh, I'd be something of a fool to leave *that* one in the recorder.

GERARD

I've never really seen you use it.

GERTRUDE

Mm. It's generally *only* for those statements I think might be useful to my successor. Or, the occasional interview.

GERARD

So, do I get to hear them?

GERTRUDE

Perhaps. If you live long enough. But somehow I doubt Elias would look favourably on your application. And if I'm being quite *honest*—

GERARD

Yeah, I know, I know. And I don't want your job.

GERTRUDE

Believe me, the perks aren't worth the shackles.

GERARD

Yeah, yeah.

[Gertrude flips through some paper]

GERARD (CONT'D)

So, what's the verdict?

GERTRUDE

Hm?

GERARD

On The Travels.

GERTRUDE

Oh- Burn it, I think. You said Mr Hampton was dead?

[Page flip]

GERARD

Yep- and not peacefully.

GERTRUDE

But you hadn't seen its powers?

GERARD

Not directly.

GERTRUDE

Well, given the themes of the original, I doubt it has anything that would be worth the danger.

GERARD

And when in doubt...

GERTRUDE

Well, *quite*.

GERARD

Can I use your wastepaper bin?

[Paper noises]

GERTRUDE

Yes, it's just-

[There's a creak from Gertrude's chair as she repositions]

GERTRUDE (CONT'D)

Wait. Surely you didn't bring it *here*!

GERARD

Well, yeah, I, uh-

GERTRUDE

Gerard, we've *talked* about this. Bringing unvetted artifacts or books into the Archive is *incredibly dangerous*.

GERARD

It's locked away!

GERTRUDE

And I'm sure the lock is very sturdy, but that doesn't stop it being an unnecessary *risk*.

GERARD

(Softly) Yeah. I'm sorry.

GERTRUDE

This is exactly the sort of thing that will get you killed!

GERARD

I said I was sorry!

(Beat)

GERTRUDE

Then we'll say no more about it.

[She goes back to flipping through pages]

GERTRUDE (CONT'D)

I don't enjoy being hard on you, but I really would rather you stayed broadly intact.

GERARD

I'm touched. You're going soft in your old age.

GERTRUDE

Well, you are occasionally useful. Despite your foolishness.

GERARD

Flatterer.

GERTRUDE

Heh. You can probably burn it in the back courtyard, if you're careful.

GERARD

Yeah, will do.

GERTRUDE

And for goodness' sake, *make sure no one sees you*. The last thing we need is a letter to Elias about book burnings.

GERARD

Look, if you have somewhere *better* to burn these books, then—

GERTRUDE

(Joking) Of *course*, Gerard! I just happened not to mention the network of sinister tunnels that snake beneath the Archive where I keep all my darkest secrets.

GERARD

I mean, you joke, but there could be! It's that kinda place.

GERTRUDE

I rather hope I would have found them by now. I like to think I'm not a *complete* incompetent.

GERARD

Until dementia hits.

GERTRUDE

Given my choice to confide in you, I rather suspect it already has. Go burn your book!

[She flips more pages]

(Beat)

GERARD

Gertrude?

GERTRUDE

(Continuing her work) Mm?

GERARD

What happens if we fail?

[Page noises stop]

GERTRUDE

In... what sense?

GERARD

If we miss a ritual; you know- if one of them works.

GERTRUDE

Been losing sleep, have you?

GERARD

Yeah- something like that.

GERTRUDE

(Measured) If we are lucky, then that failure will also mean our deaths.

GERARD

You don't think they can reach us after death?

GERTRUDE

I suppose that depends on your religious beliefs.

[Chair creak]

GERTRUDE (CONT'D)

Personally, I suspect death puts us beyond their power, either because we find ourselves in... some kind of afterlife, or because we simply— cease to be.

GERARD

Yeah, I guess.

GERTRUDE

And I am *certain* that either scenario is preferable to lingering in a world *they* control. They're already able to circumvent physics, and suspend natural laws. If one were to genuinely press through, I suspect they would rewrite them wholesale, most likely making them utterly incomprehensible to any survivors. They-They *might* still need us human enough to be afraid, but beyond that... Let's just surmise that petty rules like space or time would be unlikely to factor into the proceedings. They might even stop death entirely, deny us the one last escape, keeping us alive and afraid— forever.

(Beat)

(Gerard exhales)

GERARD

And taxes?

GERTRUDE

Heh, taxes, I imagine, will continue. Beyond that, I honestly don't know. I suppose it depends on which one comes through. The world of the Stranger would be very different to that of the Corruption.

GERARD

Eugh.

(Beat)

And if it *does* happen—

GERTRUDE

It's my fondest ambition to make sure it does not.

GERARD

Yeah, sure, but— suppose it does.

GERTRUDE

(Sigh) Very well.

GERARD

Could it be undone?

(Beat)

(Gertrude takes a breath)

[Chair creaks]

GERTRUDE

No. / don't think so. Once an Entity fully manifested, I doubt it would be keen to fully relinquish its grip on reality—

[Tape click]

[In the background is the sound of strange and distant howls from unknown creatures, and the sound of muffled wind. Closer, wood creaks regularly, as of a building settling and moving, and the sounds of a small log fire]

[The sound of tape rewinding]

[Tape click]

GERTRUDE

No. / don't think so. Once an—

[Tape click]

[The strange howls, wind and creaks resume]

[The sound of tape rewinding]

[Tape click]

GERTRUDE

No. / don't think so.

[Tape click]

[The strange howls, wind and creaks resume]

[The sound of tape rewinding]

[Tape click]

GERTRUDE

I don't think so.

[Tape click]

[The strange howls, wind and creaks resume]

(Beat)

[Tape click]

GERTRUDE

Once an Entity fully manifested, I doubt it would be keen to relinquish its grip on reality. And as for those unlucky enough to survive its rule... I don't think they'd be in a state to do anything about it.

(Gerard exhales a *ppfft*)

GERARD

Well. Then I guess we'd better not let it happen.

GERTRUDE

Well. Quite. Now. I believe you have an evil book to burn?

GERARD

Yeah. Of course.

[He starts to leave]

GERARD (CONT'D)

You, uh- need anything else burning?

GERTRUDE

(Wryly) No, no. Not right now. I think I'm alright, thank you for the offer.

GERARD

Right.

GERTRUDE

Oh, and, Gerard—

GERARD

Hm?

GERTRUDE

Don't go rifling through my things in future. It could end... badly for you.

[Tape click]

[The strange howls, wind and creaks resume]

**[The cassette tape is removed from the recorder and another tape
is put in]**

[Tape click]

[Rummaging noises that appear close to the tape recorder]

SASHA

This it?

[Sasha hands Tim the recorder]

TIM

Oh, thank *god*. I thought I was seeing things.

SASHA

Glad I could help.

TIM

I didn't know he was actually gonna ask me to *get it* for him; I just mentioned it 'cause he was talking about *recording*.

SASHA

Well, I'm sure he's waiting!

TIM

Mm, he can wait a bit longer.

[Tim puts the recorder down]

SASHA

Fantastic! Good of you to volunteer to help me.

[Page rustles]

TIM

Uh- /, I didn't actually-

SASHA

Grab a stapler.

TIM

(Sighs) *Fine.*

[Picks up stapler]

TIM (CONT'D)

What are we doing?

[Page flipping]

SASHA

John's been getting frustrated with all the loose statement sheets around. (stapler) I'm going box by box, collating and stapling them. And now, so are you.

TIM

(Exaggerated sigh) If you say so.

SASHA

(Mock sympathy) I do.

[A few moments pass in silence with them flipping through statements and stapling. As they resume talking, the noises of paper and stapling continue]

TIM

(Sigh) So. How are you finding our new leader?

SASHA

Mm, alright, I suppose. Early days yet.

TIM

Sure, sure.

(Beat)

TIM (CONT'D)

Do you think he knows what he's doing?

SASHA

Mm, he'll get there. I just wish he wouldn't take it out on Martin in the meantime.

TIM

If only there had been someone more qualified!

SASHA

Tim.

TIM

Sasha.

SASHA

It's Elias's decision.

TIM

It's some sexist *bullshit*, is what it is.

SASHA

I mean. Probably.

TIM

Look, it should have been you, and you just know if you had called him out, the little weasel would start talking about *traditions*, and— **(bad Elias impersonation)** —*the values of our esteemed founder, Jimmy Magma*.

(Sasha laughs)

TIM (CONT'D)

Joanie.. Magnum?

SASHA

Closer.

TIM

Jack Magnet?

SASHA

That's the one.

TIM

Ah, I'm serious, though. You should *say* something.

SASHA

Mm, *Tim*- I've been in academia for what, ten years now?

TIM

Mm.

SASHA

I know how this goes! I didn't get the job. If I kick up a stink, I'll just get blackballed.

TIM

(Resigned) Ah, yeah.

(Beat)

(Mischievous) What if we kill him?

SASHA

(Amused) What, Elias?

[Stapling and paper noises pause]

TIM

No. Big Boss Sims. Cut the brakes on his office chair; no one would *ever know*.

(Sasha laughs)

TIM (CONT'D)

Swap in a poisoned tea bag, pin it on Martin— the *perfect* crime.

SASHA

(Still laughing) And how do you know that you won't be the one that gets it? That boy makes a *lot* of tea.

TIM

Oh, it's okay; I spent the last few years building up an immunity to iocane powder.

(Sasha lets out an exaggerated groan at the reference)

(Tim *hehs*)

(Beat)

[Stapling and paper noises resume]

TIM (CONT'D)

So, what *are* you gonna do.

SASHA

I don't know, really. Might just get another job.

TIM

What, seriously, just jump ship?

SASHA

Yeah, I guess so. I mean, there's not much out there at the moment, but I've got a few alerts set up.

TIM

I can't believe you'd just abandon our intense will-they, won't-they storyline like that.

SASHA

Eeerm, I'm pretty sure we established it's very much *won't* they.

TIM

No, no, no, no, see— we had the ill-advised hookup, the awkward aftermath, and the gradually rebuilt friendship, but— that's all season two stuff. We've got like five more seasons before we get the heartwarming epilogue that makes it canon.

SASHA

I know it's hard to hear, mate, but you're *not* the love interest.

I think you might be the character they drop after the pilot!

TIM

Uh, *wow*. You *are* vicious today.

SASHA

Sorry, Tim! I can't hear you over all this stapling.

(Beat)

SASHA

(Sigh) I guess it's just- I don't have anything *keeping* me here. You've got your brother...

TIM

(Quiet) Yeah.

SASHA

Sorry. And Martin can't go anywhere that'll look too hard at his CV.

TIM

Wait. How do *you* know about that?

SASHA

It's all on the system. Our digital security is shocking, by the way. Besides, it's not even a good lie.

TIM

Okay, but seriously, you cannot let Martin know. He'll think I told you, and I *swore* to keep schtum.

SASHA

Hey, don't worry. I just— I mean— I kinda just ended up here. And I like it— I, liked it. But if I'm bashing my head against the glass ceiling, it's time to go.

TIM

Well. I'll miss you.

SASHA

(Fond) Yeah. You *will*.

TIM

Oh, for god's sake. "Oh, Tim's so hard to talk to, seriously, he won't stop making jokes and references, not like *Sasha*." **(normal)** They've got no idea.

SASHA

And they never will.

TIM

Seriously, though. Everyone thinks you're just this reliable, down-to-earth *nerd*—

SASHA

And what makes you think they're wrong?

TIM

So what, actually *I'm* the one who doesn't get to see the real you?

SASHA

No such thing.

TIM

As what?

SASHA

A- A real you. I don't think so, at least. It's all just masks.

TIM

(Amused) Alright, Stanislavski.

SASHA

You know what I mean.

TIM

You really believe that?

SASHA

Kind of! I mean, who knows why we do what we do?

TIM

I do.

SASHA

No. All you know is what your brain does to *justify* what you do. It's no more *reason* than the face you put on for John. The only *real* you is the actions you take.

TIM

Hey, I'll have you know I have a rich inner life.

SASHA

How nice for you. But hurry up with your outer one; you're falling behind, and I'm not saving you any staples.

TIM

(Laughing) Yeah, yeah. I still can't believe Gertrude was allowed to let this place get into such a state!

SASHA

Mm. I just wanna know *why*.

TIM

What d'you mean *why*? You saw her, she's like a hundred years old and more cardigan than woman. She just started to lose it. Sad, but it happens.

SASHA

You never talked to her, did you?

TIM

Well, I mean, I must have at some point.

SASHA

Heh, you'd *remember*.

TIM

Why? What was she like?

SASHA

Stone. Cold. Bitch.

TIM

Sasha!

SASHA

And sharper than you! No way this is accidental.

TIM

Oh, yeah, this is all a big geriatric conspiracy.

(Beat)

TIM (CONT'D)

Wait, seriously?

SASHA

(Yes) Mm-hmm.

TIM

What *possible* reason could she have for being criminally incompetent in a manky old archive?

SASHA

No idea. And honestly, it kind of worries me.

TIM

Well, tell you what. If you get eaten alive by improperly filed statements, me and Martin will avenge you.

SASHA

Well, aren't you sweet.

TIM

I mean it! We'll burn this place to the ground; it'll be all like **(mock yelling)**

SASHA! SASHA!

SASHA

And what about John?

TIM

(John impression) Well, given the incoherence of this statement, I find it hard to believe it ever occurred.

(Sasha laughs)

TIM (CONT'D)

In fact, based on the evidence, I find it highly unlikely that Sasha ever even existed at all.

SASHA

No. You took it too far! I'm unforgettable!

TIM

(Laughs) Alright. He fires you because of all the drugs and the wild orgies on Archive property.

SASHA

(Laughs) Yeah, that's fair. Now, get back to work.

TIM

Yes, ma'am! See? Told you you'd make a good boss.

[Tape click]

[The strange howls, wind and creaks resume]

(Shakey breaths)

[Hissing static starts]

ARCHIVIST

(Quiet) Wha?-

[The static rises in volume]

ARCHIVIST

There is a place, deep in the heart of fear, where you trap yourself and claim that it is safety.

[Hissing static ends]

**[As he speaks, there continues to be the sounds of strange howls,
wind, the log fire, and wood creaks from the cabin]**

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

It was once a cabin and professes still to be such, but as with all in this new world that promises respite, it is a trap.

The land outside is warped and twisted by the touch of those things that feed on your suffering, and behind those rough, wooden planks it seems they cannot reach you. The screams may linger on the distant breeze, and your Eye may wander beyond the curtains from time to time, but you and the one you love are, it seems, safe. If you had need to eat, no doubt there would be food; if you had need to sleep, no doubt the beds would be welcoming. But you have need of neither, and so you sit in your meagre comfort and belief of security with nothing to do, nothing to distract your mind from the agonies that lie just beyond your window. And those diversions you *do* find will offer no relief, but simply numb the mind into mournful nostalgia for a time when the world you inhabited seemed to make *sense*.

[The howls from a creature outside seems closer for a moment]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Something moves outside, struggling to crawl upon a hundred reaching, grasping hands. It shudders, and grips the earth, pulling itself along as nails rip

free and skin scrapes loose. It is afraid of what it has become and where it might be going.

Close your eyes. Ignore the sounds. You, at least, are safe.

There, within the thing that pretends to be a cabin, is the one you love. You hold each other whisper words of reassurance, but the place knows this comfort to be a lie, and laces upon it instead the awful fear of losing what you have. Of it being stripped away by the chaos that waits for you beyond the walls. *Hold each other*, it croons. *Be happy*. But know always that this happiness is a lie, built on the squirming bones of those whose suffering you have caused. It will not let you feel the warmth and joy that this love may claim to gift. It is only a mouldy treasure to be clung to. Something to fear the loss of as you hold it so tight that it withers and warps. It is a rotten sanctuary of lonely companionship.

Outside it is raining. Heavy drops fall, ice-cold and laced with salt. Tears of voyeuristic delight from the eyes that see and drink in all. It sinks, into the dry, cracked ground, and from the mud faces struggle to push themselves free and breathe. They cannot reach the surface, as the slick soil flows down their throats. Look closer at the rough planks that make this cabin, and see that they are warmer, softer and more yielding than the hard timber they present. Are the dimensions of this place quite what they were when you stayed here before the change? Or are the walls thicker, the doors heavier when they close? Were the curtains always stained that dull maroon? Or has the dust of the horrific world they keep at bay dyed them so. The one you love is always near, so close that refuge sometimes feels a prison. And yet your voice does not echo when you call to them. And they find they sometimes cannot hear it. *Stay*, the cabin says.

[A clap of thunder]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Stay within my false defences, cling so close to what you desperately wish to save, and live in shaking fear of the things beyond that may take it from you. Throw another log on the fire and curl up close. There are *always* more logs for the fire here. This is your home, and here you can be safe, as you putrefy, body and soul. This place wishes to be our tomb. But the Eye does not wish that. No, the Eye wishes instead that it be my chrysalis.

[Hissing static begins]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

It is time that I emerge.

ARCHIVIST

Ah-ah!

[The Archivist staggers, knocking against items]

[Martin enters]

MARTIN

John? Is it— I thought I heard— are you, are you okay?

ARCHIVIST

I, ye- yes, I **(sigh)** I think so.

MARTIN

What happened? The tapes, were yo—

[Hissing static ends]

ARCHIVIST

I, I was listening, and, i-it, it was the one with Tim and, and Sasha, uh, where they're—

MARTIN

Yeah, y-yeah. **(soft)** Yeah. Look, John, I-I know it hurts, but you've just got to—

ARCHIVIST

No, no— O,Oka— I, I was listening, and I, I was *filled* with this... hatred. This anger; I, I wanted to leave and hunt down *Elias*, uh, and—

MARTIN

Uh- w,wow, okay.

ARCHIVIST

But when I thought it, th-there was, there was something else.

[The safehouse creaks]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Th-This place, it- it didn't want me — it didn't want *us* — to go.

MARTIN

What do you mean?

ARCHIVIST

This cabin. It's not right. And when I thought that, I-I felt— It, it all poured out of me, down into the tape. I, I, I- and it— felt good. I-It felt *right*.

MARTIN

Okay.

(Beat)

So you're recording again?

ARCHIVIST

I- I might need to. If we're going to make it.

MARTIN

(Surprised) Back to the Archives?

ARCHIVIST

Seems the best place to start.

MARTIN

Oh- **(surprised exhale)** Y,yeah, alright!

ARCHIVIST

Martin, it's going to be a hard journey. One in which w—

MARTIN

(Fast) Yeah, yeah, yeah, so, I've actually had a couple of bags packed for a while now.

ARCHIVIST

Oh!

[Martin starts getting out the bags, and as the conversation continues, he begins packing and sorting items into them]

MARTIN

Um, I found some rope in the attic—

ARCHIVIST

(Crosstalk) Okay—

MARTIN

(Crosstalk) —and I packed that with the maps.

ARCHIVIST

(Smiling) Uh, *Martin-*

MARTIN

No, no, no; I- I know what you're going to say, **(John impression)** *What good are maps when the very Earth has...* eh, blah blah blah.

ARCHIVIST

W,w,well yes.

MARTIN

—But I, I packed them anyway, because you never. Know.

ARCHIVIST

(Fond) *Martin.*

MARTIN

I- I actually — heh — I actually found a stash of tea under the kitchen sink- I-I realize we don't need to *eat*, or whatever, but, you know, that doesn't mean that we won't—

ARCHIVIST

(Fond) Yes- Yes, yes, it- alright. Alright.

MARTIN

We've *got* this.

[Martin puts another item in a bag]

ARCHIVIST

(Smiling) Apparently so.

MARTIN

D'you think it'll do anything? Confronting Elias?

ARCHIVIST

I- **(sigh)** Maybe?

MARTIN

No, I'm serious- Do we-

[The sound of bags being packed pauses]

MARTIN (CONT'D)

Is there a chance that we can undo this?

ARCHIVIST

Gertrude didn't think so.

(Beat)

MARTIN

Right.

ARCHIVIST

But she's dead. Let's find out for ourselves.

[Bag packing recommences]

MARTIN

You're- taking the recorder?

ARCHIVIST

Uh, just in case I need to- vent. Again, it— **(inhale)** it helps.

MARTIN

(Heavy breath) Okay.

MARTIN (CONT'D)

You said this place— the, the cabin was— it, it's *feeding* on us, right?

ARCHIVIST

Yes.

MARTIN

So, should we destroy it? Before we go?

[The cabin creaks very loudly]

ARCHIVIST

I honestly don't know if we can.

MARTIN

Mm.

ARCHIVIST

Besides, there's far worse out there. Better to try and avoid it, I think.

MARTIN

We're not even gonna try? Look, we've got your lighter; maybe if we just—

ARCHIVIST

We can't fight the *world*, Martin.

(A little breath of a laugh from The Archivist)

MARTIN

Says *you*.

ARCHIVIST

Let's go.

[Martin and the Archivist grab the bags]

[Tape clicks off]

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Outro]

JONATHAN SIMS

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