

## MAG 198 — Precipice

### Content Warnings

- Heights / Vertigo (including SFX)
- Falling
- Panic (including breathing SFX)
- Injury / Pain (including SFX)
- Explicit language
- Discussions of: emotional manipulation
- Mentions of: arguments, death, self-hatred, lack of self-preservation, paranoia, pleading, kidnapping, alcohol
- SFX: wind, creaking metal, screaming & suffering

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro]

**JONATHAN SIMS**

Rusty Quill presents... *The Magnus Archives*. Episode one hundred and ninety-eight: "Precipice."

[Theme finishes]

[Tape clicks on]

**[Footsteps on a gritty track, accompanied by swirling winds]**

(Martin sighs)

(Beat)

**MARTIN**

So... are we going to talk about it or...?

**ARCHIVIST**

When we get back to London. I don't— I think we all need some time to think.

**MARTIN**

...Sure.

[Footsteps continue for a few beats, with the occasional sigh]

**MARTIN (CONT'D)**

I-I mean it's a pretty long walk. We could talk about something else.

**BASIRA**

Like why you wandered off with Annabelle Cane?

**ARCHIVIST**

Basira...

**BASIRA**

It's important.

**ARCHIVIST**

He can tell us when he's ready.

**MARTIN**

Uh, it's fine. It's not exactly a big surprise or anything.

Back in London, after we... uh...

**ARCHIVIST**

Had a blazing row?

**MARTIN**

I, uh... Yeah, that.

**BASIRA**

What?

**ARCHIVIST**

About what we should do with Jonah. With the Panopticon.

**BASIRA**

How, about whether you should, uh...?

**ARCHIVIST**

Yes.

**MARTIN**

Well anyway, after **that** I was coming out to look for you. But the tunnels are just all over the place and you must have used a different way up or something, and well... she was there.

**ARCHIVIST**

Waiting?

**MARTIN**

I guess? It was so quiet. And it looked like London did before. So then I figured that she must have had the camera, which meant Salesa was probably dead, and so... well...

**BASIRA**

So...?

**MARTIN**

So I figured she had come to kill you, John.

**ARCHIVIST**

Me?

W-What about you?

**MARTIN**

What about me? I didn't really think I was important enough to kill.

(Surprised exhale from the Archivist)

**BASIRA**

Wow, Martin that's—

**MARTIN**

Shocker, I have self-esteem issues, not the point. Anyway, she said she knew what you were planning to do, what would happen to you in there and... and then she said she knew another way, one where you'd be okay, but she couldn't tell me, she had to show me.

**BASIRA**

And you took her at her word?

**MARTIN**

Obviously not, but... if she was telling the truth it seemed worth the gamble.

**ARCHIVIST**

Why didn't you come and get me?

**MARTIN**

Because she said if I did she'd leave without me. And then... well... we'd have had to stick with crappy Plan A, and you'd... you'd end up gone.

[The stop walking]

**MARTIN (CONT'D)**

Okay, look, I-I admit it wasn't great judgement, okay? But I didn't see another choice. I figured you were safe enough with the girls, and well...

**ARCHIVIST**

You were angry.

**MARTIN**

Yeah.

**BASIRA**

Right.

**MARTIN**

And... if I could give you another way out, it had to be worth the danger.

Even if it was kinda—

**BASIRA**

Reckless?

**MARTIN**

—a long shot.

**BASIRA**

Hmm.

**MARTIN**

Plus... I knew you'd follow me, and save me (**nervous chuckles**) if things got bad.

(Archivist sighs)

Look, I'm, I'm sorry I worried you.

**ARCHIVIST**

It's okay.

**MARTIN**

**But** it does look like I was right.

**BASIRA**

If she was actually on the level.

**MARTIN**

Well... yeah.

**BASIRA**

And if she was, she went about it in a really weird—

**ARCHIVIST**

Manipulative way.

**BASIRA**

Yeah. Big surprise. But she did kinda hold up her end.

**ARCHIVIST**

Huh.

**MARTIN**

I could've done without all the webbing, though. Still sticky. Urgh.

[Martin rubs some webbing remnants off him]

**ARCHIVIST**

Well, it's over now and you're safe, that's all that matters.

**MARTIN**

Not quite...

**BASIRA**

Mm-hmm. We do have another option to consider.

**ARCHIVIST**

When we get back. I want to hear what the others have to say about it.

**MARTIN**

Then we should get going.

Ah, speaking of? Um... Huh, where exactly do we go now?

**ARCHIVIST**

Forward.

**MARTIN**

Uh, th-that's a cliff, John.

**ARCHIVIST**

**(Sighs)** Over there.

**BASIRA**

Oh great.

**MARTIN**

W— S-seriously? What happened to the big lake or whatever Basira was talking about? I was looking forward to the lake! I-I'm-I'm fine rowing. I'm **good** at rowing!

**ARCHIVIST**

I'm sorry, some routes are one-way.

**MARTIN**

**(Mildly distressed)** So, so what, this is our new path then? Some rickety ladder on a cliff edge that's so high you can't even see the bottom? Really?

**ARCHIVIST**

I admit it's not a subtle metaphor.

**(Basira chuckles)**

**MARTIN**

**(Whispers)** God...

**(Sullen)** Yeah I get it. I don't need another lesson on nightmare geography. It was obvious as soon as I said it out loud.

**ARCHIVIST**

If there was another way...

**MARTIN**

**(Sullen)** Yeah, but there never is. Urgh, fine. Come on.

**[The start walking]**

**[Tape clicks off]**

**[Tape clicks on]**

**[A blustering wind, with metal creaks and groans and every so often the sound of dirt falling]**

**[Footsteps on metal as they descend the ladder]**

**MARTIN**

**(To himself)** Okay... Easy does it.

One at a time. One at a time.

**BASIRA**

Careful of your next one Martin! It's loose.

**MARTIN**

Hmm.

Right! Thank you!

Brilliant.

**[Careful footstep, then metal creaks and the rung gives way with a  
clatter and shower of dirt]**

**[Martin exclaims in shock as he regains his footing]**

**ARCHIVIST**

Martin! Martin, are you alright?

**MARTIN**

**(Mildly panicked)** Mm-hmm!

**BASIRA**

**(Gentle)** I did warn you.

**MARTIN**

Mm-hmm!

**BASIRA**

Are you good to keep going?

**MARTIN**

...Yeah, just... just... Yeah.

**ARCHIVIST**

Martin, would it help to know that if you do fall, you'll be okay?

**MARTIN**

**(Suspicious)** Define "okay".

**ARCHIVIST**

I, uh— You wouldn't die.

**MARTIN**

Yeah, but it would still hurt, wouldn't it?

**ARCHIVIST**

Uh, yes.

But not as much as th—

**MARTIN**

And, crucially, it would still **feel** like I'm falling an incredible distance. Wouldn't it?

**ARCHIVIST**

I mean, you **would** still be falling an incredible distance.

You just wouldn't die when you hit the bottom.

**MARTIN**

Yeah, and there it is.

**BASIRA**

Oh I have missed your pep-talks.

**ARCHIVIST**

I'm afraid, it's the best I can manage.

**MARTIN**

Yeah, well, thanks for trying.

**BASIRA**

Can we just keep going?

**ARCHIVIST**

Right.

**[Footsteps as they start descending again for a few beats]**

**ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)**

Ah.

**BASIRA**

What?

**ARCHIVIST**

Right.

**BASIRA**

“Right”, what?

**MARTIN**

Guys, what’s going on down there?

[They stop descending]

**ARCHIVIST**

The, uh... The ladder ends.

**MARTIN**

What do you mean it ends?

**BASIRA**

I’m guessing you’re not talking about the ground.

**ARCHIVIST**

No. No ground. And... no more ladder.

**MARTIN**

So what do we do?

**BASIRA**

What do you think? We jump. And we fall.

(Martin chuckles in disbelief)

**MARTIN**

Wh-wh-what?! No! No, no. I'm not, I'm not doing that. This is, this is obviously like, like a wrong turn or something.

**BASIRA**

It's a ladder, Martin.

**MARTIN**

Yeah, I know Basira, but somehow we've still managed it!

**BASIRA**

You said it won't kill us, right?

**ARCHIVIST**

Right. We'll just need to try and—

**(Martin babbles to self, building into his next words)**

**MARTIN**

Jesus... Seriously? Hah! If, if all your friends jumped off a cliff would you join them? No! No, I wouldn't! cos it's stupid!

**BASIRA**

**(Sharply) Martin! Enough!**

**ARCHIVIST**

We just want to make sure we separate out, so we don't hit each other on the way down or—

[Hissing static starts]

**ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)**

Oh! Ah.

[Hissing static ends]

**MARTIN**

Oh Christ, what now?

**ARCHIVIST**

Sorry, I, uh... hah.

**MARTIN**

A- are you serious?!

**ARCHIVIST**

Mm-hmm!

**BASIRA**

You couldn't have made a statement **before** we got on the ladder?

**ARCHIVIST**

That's not how it works!

**MARTIN**

Oh c—

**BASIRA**

Fine. I'm out, then. You coming Martin?

**[The ladder creaks particularly ominously in the wind]**

**MARTIN**

Oh.. S-So my choices are jump off a cliff, or cling to it while John does a statement?

**(The Archivist makes some pained breaths)**

**BASIRA**

And then jump off it. Yeah.

**MARTIN**

**(Distressed)** For fuck's sake...

**(Voice break)** Fine.

**BASIRA**

Okay.

**MARTIN**

Mm-hmm.

**BASIRA**

On three.

One...

**[The ladder rattles as Martin leaps with a grimacing shout that is soon swallowed by the wind]**

**BASIRA (CONT'D)**

(Sighs) Or just go then, I guess.

[Basira jumps with a noise of determination and is similarly gone]

(The Archivist's exhales turn from pained to normal)

[Hissing static starts]

[Synchronous ladder footsteps, lots of heavy breathing and  
ominously creaking metal, loose rock dust; the blustery wind is  
stronger and whistles]

**ARCHIVIST**

Down

And down

And down again

[Hissing static ends]

**ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)**

Rung after rung after rung to run down a long forever way to nowhere

A simple path, a line that was defined before we first stepped off the edge

We beg to find another way but all around despair is only empty, hollow air

Don't look down.

Don't see how far it is to fall.

And still we do not know what lurks so far below and waits upon the ground

The only sound the howling gale that tries to break us and the tinny click and  
clack of rusted rungs begun so far above

Or below.

Which way we move is but a distant glimpse of what might once be hope

But now is only only vertigo

As metal creaks and screams the beams of this iron thin and dying skeleton we hold to spite the sky

We don't want to die

But what else is there to do but climb

Don't look down

Don't look up

The rung above is smooth and white and cool as aged bone

Slick and brittle as the future

Dead and silent as the past

The rung below is eaten through with rust

And creaks and snaps to amber dust when we try to place a foot upon it

**[A rung breaks, sending metal and stones falling]**

**[Footsteps pause]**

#### **ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)**

Fall away, rotten thing

And leave us to grip with stiff and frozen fingers as we try to linger here and

Not look down

Not follow in your path

Not surrender to the air

There is another noise

**[Screeching starts, faint then drawing nearer; the sound of clothing  
rustling rapidly in the wind]**

**ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)**

A screeching cry from out the sky and lost as fast within its wide embrace

It is a body, no, a pair, a dozen panicked flailing shapes their mouths agape

With all the terror that we keep within our heart and try to swallow

As the void that claims these souls will swallow them

**[Screeches turn to discordant shrieks and then to screams]**

**ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)**

It's raining

Cadavers that do not know they're dead

Or do they

For from their ragged throats they seem to have no doubt as to their fate

They shout and plead and bargain for gravity to wait and give another chance  
to hold the ladder close

Then they are gone

Abandoned by all but the indifferent pull

Of the waiting ground below

But they fall slow enough that maybe we may see within their faces

Us

In feature or in name there's no reflection but the dreadful pained inflection of  
their fall

We see our end

And when they pass so fast it seems perhaps they were not there at all

We pause and sweat and shake and swear

It will not be us

**[Sounds of falling people fade away]**

**ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)**

And we don't look down

The wind returns to shake the rails to which we bind our path and bids us to  
continue but

Something has changed

**[Many hands reach up]**

**ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)**

We reach up with a shaking hand

No

**[Many feet reach down]**

**ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)**

We reach down with a nervous foot

No

And all within an instant comes the gut-felt blow that we no longer know  
which way we were directed

A moment comes to mind from tinted memory of finding that the sole escape  
for us was down

Beyond the crumbled precipice to descend upon this shaking metal thing

And find a solid earth below it where we might be free

And yet there is another other coloured but no less in focused clarity and recall

Of a muddy foetid swamp that clings in cloying clumping damp

And tried to pull us to itself and claim our last breaths within its awful depths

So in the dread of our extremity we grasp the slick and filthy rungs

To pull us up and out

But now the air is all we see and there may be no cliff or swamp to flee

Or imagine as salvation from this ladder that is all we know exists

All else is empty

And so we wait

Our breath held close within our chest

As we wait for a sign of what's to come

Where we might go

**[Many heads move]**

**ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)**

We look up at last

And see its twisting stretch that pulls away in all infinity to nothing

And we retch to think of all that way to climb to find nothing but a waving  
orphaned tip

Surmounting all our fears

**[Many heads move]**

**ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)**

We look down at last

And the space below us is not endless

But far worse the ground is there so bleak and bare and hard and waiting  
hungry for our fall

How many miles we cannot count for as we try to think about such  
measurements

It seems to move away

And yet such distance does not dim its need to feed upon our shattered  
broken form

And so we cling

Desperate

Unmoving

Holding out with all our might against the smouldering fire of that awful dark  
desire to surrender

To the open arms of empty air

As the bodies start to fall around us once again

**[Falling people scream again]**

[Hissing static starts]

[The wind and ladder creaks lessen, and only the Archivist can  
be heard]

[Hissing static ends]

**ARCHIVIST**

Right. Well. I guess that's it then.

A one...

(Big inhale then sharp exhale)

[He releases his grip and falls]

[Increasingly furious wind noise as the Archivist and tape recorder  
gain speed]

[Tape clicks off]

[Tape clicks on]

[A wasteland wind swirls]

[Gritty gore sound as the Archivist recovers]

(The Archivist groans in pain)

**MARTIN**

John?

**ARCHIVIST**

(Pained) Mm-hmm. I'm here.

I am here.

**BASIRA**

Come on, even Martin didn't make this much fuss.

**MARTIN**

I resent that.

(Martin coughs)

**ARCHIVIST**

(Wincing) There is a big difference between knowing pain and experiencing it.

**MARTIN**

Don't worry, it passes pretty quickly.

**ARCHIVIST**

I know.

**MARTIN**

Of course you do.

**ARCHIVIST**

But it hasn't passed yet.

**MARTIN**

Nope.

**BASIRA**

Alright, let's get you up.

[Archivist is assisted up with some pained exclamations]

**ARCHIVIST**

Okay. I'm okay.

**BASIRA**

Martin says that's London up ahead.

**ARCHIVIST**

Yes.

**BASIRA**

Looks even more messed up than usual.

**ARCHIVIST**

Yeah. We, uh, we should be okay, but best be careful.

**MARTIN**

Yeah keep an eye out.

**BASIRA**

Was that a joke or...?

**ARCHIVIST**

Come on. Let's get home.

**[Footsteps as they start walking]**

**MARTIN**

You mean the tunnels?

**ARCHIVIST**

I suppose. I don't really know.

(A few last pained noises from the Archivist)

[Tape clicks off]

[Tape clicks on]

[Footsteps and voices echo as Martin, the Archivist and Basira proceed through the tunnels]

**MARTIN**

Hello?

**ARCHIVIST**

Georgie? Melanie?

**MELANIE**

(Muffled) In here.

[Footsteps continue; they open the door to the supplies/Leitner room and enter]

**MARTIN**

Hey, what happened here? Are you both okay? Where is everyone?

**GEORGIE**

(Upset) They came for them. Took them away. Like before.

**ARCHIVIST**

Oh god.

**MARTIN**

Who's 'they'?

**GEORGIE**

The... things from the city. You know, the, the ones that serve that big eye.

**ARCHIVIST**

Because of me?

**MELANIE**

**(Accusatory)** Probably.

**GEORGIE**

W— It doesn't matter. **(sighs)** It's the same as last time. We thought, maybe keeping our numbers down might help, but... No, it was um, it was always borrowed time.

**MELANIE**

W-We tried to stop them, but—

**GEORGIE**

There, there were just too many. W-we couldn't do anything. Just had to listen as they were dragged off.

**MARTIN**

I'm so sorry.

**BASIRA**

Damn.

**MELANIE**

Ha-Hang on? Basira, is that you?

**[Basira steps towards Melanie]**

**BASIRA**

Heya Melanie. How, um, how are you?

**MELANIE**

I'm fi— I mean...

**[Melanie fidgets with her folded can]**

**MELANIE (CONT'D)**

fine compared to— You know.

Anyway, come here.

**[Melanie and Basira hug]**

Where've you been?

**BASIRA**

Just wandering. I'll tell you about it later.

**GEORGIE**

You got Martin back, then?

**ARCHIVIST**

We did.

**MARTIN**

I was actually doing alright until you showed up, and then Annabelle started acting up for company.

**BASIRA**

At which point we rescued you from certain death.

**MARTIN**

**(Grumbling)** Well, hardly certain death.

**GEORGIE**

Well, it's good to see you in one piece. I assume the spider-woman is, um...?

**ARCHIVIST**

Actually, no, it's a bit more complicated than that.

**(Georgie makes an unsatisfied noise)**

**MELANIE**

No, I'll have a real answer thanks.

**MARTIN**

Annabelle wasn't trying to kill anyone. She just wanted to offer us a choice.

Sort of, tell us about another option, I guess.

**GEORGIE**

That sounds... ominous.

**MARTIN**

Hmmm.

**BASIRA**

It is.

**ARCHIVIST**

Yeah.

**[The Archivist walks to the supplies]**

**ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)**

You got anything to drink in those supplies of yours? I think I could really do with one.

**[Rattle of plastic and glass as the Archivist rummages]**

**ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)**

We need to talk. All of us.

**[Tape clicks off]**

**[The Magnus Archives Theme – Outro]**

**JONATHAN SIMS**

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