

MAG 195 — Adrift

Content Warnings

- Arguments
- Thalassophobia & drowning
- Second person POV
- Suicidal ideation
- Mental disorientation (including vertigo)
- Futility / Inconsequence
- Mentions of: explicit language, loss of time, scopophobia, cults, death, isolation, police, spiders, injury, nausea, mass suffering
- SFX: extensive water sounds, coughing, crying

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

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

[Theme finishes]

[Tape clicks on]

**[Still water parts under the oar blades of a fibreglass rowing boat,
in an otherwise quiet landscape]**

(The Archivist's exertion is clearly audible)

ARCHIVIST

(Weary) Come on. How much further can it be?

[Extended sounds of lackluster rowing]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

The one time I'm on my own, and it's this domain where—

Really? (**chuckles**) Now?

[The Archivist retracts the oars]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Fine.

[Hissing static starts]

[Sounds transition to the deep underwater, bubbling and dark, with
the suggestion of a body swimming]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Down in the depths, there is a cold beyond cold.

[Hissing static ends]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

An icy, liquid chill that surrounds you, embraces you, pierces every inch of your naked gooseflesh skin with its needling touch, and gets inside your bones, the marrow frozen into nothing but agony.

[Sporadic swimming — sometimes thrashing — becomes clearer]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

The shivers that wrack your body are so intense that when you stretch your arms or kick your legs to swim, their movements are wild, uncontrolled, pushing you through the water in shuddering bursts.

Water? Yes, you remember. The darkness around you, the forever of it all. Sometimes you forget just what it is that keeps you gripped so tight, suspended in place above nothing. But the thought comes to you quick enough when your lungs begin to burn. When did you last breathe? How much longer can you hold out? You consider for a moment opening yourself, simply letting it in, drowning. What are you so afraid of? But you know there is no release in it. You have been drowning as long as you can remember, and to invite the impossible cold into yourself, through your lungs and into your core, will bring no end to it, no relief. So you hold on. You hold out as long as you can, ignoring the agony, straining against the pressing darkness that has consumed you, and that implores you to consume it in return.

There is air above you. You know that. Far, far above is the surface, the inky stillness of that silent barrier between water and sky, motionless as black glass, an obsidian expanse that stretches away. You could break that stillness, shatter its peace as you emerge, clawing, spluttering into the air. But the idea repels you. Your heart seizes at the thought, and your blood shoots through with a cold that has nothing to do with the water. Why does your mind recoil and beg you to stay down, to hold fast in the darkness, to simply keep drowning?

[Deliberate swimming begins]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Just swim, that's the key. Pick a direction, and swim until you find something. Someone. Land perhaps, or just another who is suffering as you are. Were you doing that already? Which way have you been going? The shivers that pass convulsively through your body make it so hard to tell for sure, and no light will condescend to reach down here. But still you press on, try to keep moving through the pain, through the fear that attempts to paralyse you, to lock you in place as surely as the water that presses all around. How long have you been moving now? Seconds? Years? Your lungs still burn and beg you to succumb.

[A deep creaking growl]

[Swimming falters]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Something moves. Something deep and old, and larger than your frostbitten imagination can conceive. You cannot see it, you cannot hear it, but you feel it. The water shifts and pushes against you, spinning you around, and tearing apart your thin idea of up and down. It is coming closer, its smooth motion relentless as an iron bell tolling in the silence. It is close.

[Deep pulsing sounds and creaks from the behemoth]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Closer.

It is here.

You can feel its titanic bulk moving past, just below you. Or perhaps above. It almost brushes against you and, despite the pressure of the water all around you, you cannot fight the frantic instinct to run.

[Flailing swimming; the behemoth sounds continue]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Your legs begin to move, flailing, and where your feet press against it you feel its skin, rough and leathery, strangely almost dry despite the ocean through which it moves, and sharp enough that you feel it tear through the soft flesh on the soles of your feet. There is no pain, simply a wave of sickened nausea that passes up through your legs and into your stomach. You keep moving, limbs splaying in that strange pseudo-run, moving along it, and begging for this thing to end. Sometimes your feet do not land upon its skin, but press on something else. Something smooth and hard that feels like bone. Or tooth.

[The behemoth sounds fade; swimming pauses]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

And then it is gone, passed away from you, and out into the expanse of dark and quiet cold. You cannot stay down here. The darkness hides terrible things, and your whole chest screams for air. You take a moment and focus, concentrate on the feeling of the water around you, the gentle pull that promises to be down, and then you begin to swim, a desperate crawl up through the black towards the vague hope of a surface.

[Swimming]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

You do not know how long you have been swimming, how far you have climbed, but when you thrust your hand forward you feel something change. It is a sudden release, a weightless freedom that seems so alien to you now.

[Surface water splashes start]

[Sounds of coughing and gasping for air]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

A new panic begins to overtake you, but it is too late, as your whole body rips through the unbroken surface of the sea and into open air.

You feel dark water explode from your throat in something that is half-screaming, half-disgorging foul and icy liquid, and you take a breath. The air burns, perhaps a new feeling, or perhaps one long forgotten, and you open your eyes.

[Splashing and gasping calms]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

There is... nothing.

You look around you, neck twisting violently, trying to take it all in, but the ocean that stretches away is smooth against the reddened sky, unchanging.

[Faint sobbing gasps and some splashes]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

There is nothing else. No boat to save you, no land to make your escape, not even another lost soul who shares your torments. Deep down, in the icy

depths, you could imagine... you could hope. The darkness hides terrible things, but it could also hide salvation. You cannot know what is down there, but up here it is laid out in such terrible stark detail that there is *nothing*. You only know you are crying because the water on your face is warm enough that it feels like fire upon your cheek.

[An unpleasant shifting tone also heard in the Panopticon slowly
fades in]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

And beyond that, up in the sky you feel it. Looking down on you in something approaching delight, drinking in your despair and bitter dread. Enjoying your misery and terror as you cast about for something that might be hope. It disgusts you, the waves of smug satisfaction that pervade your being as it stares at you. You cannot bear for it to see you like this. It makes you want to scream, but you know your screams are exactly what it wants.

[Splash to dive below the surface; shifting tone is gone]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

You choke it down, and slip once again below the surface. Into the concealing darkness of the freezing waters below, and you leave behind the nothing that waits above.

[Hissing static starts]

[Transitions to sounds of a boat drifting in still water]

[Hissing static ends]

(The Archivist exhales)

[The Archivist redeploys the oars and resumes his journey]

ARCHIVIST

Well, not quite nothing. Not for me.

[Tape clicks off]

[Tape clicks on]

[Rowing continues across the still water]

(Heavy breaths as the Archivist exerts himself)

ARCHIVIST

(Softly) There you are.

BASIRA

(Faintly) John?

ARCHIVIST

(Calling) Need a ride?

BASIRA

I, uh... Sure.

**[Footsteps on pebbles as Basira approaches; the boat pulls up to a
shingle shore; some plastic bangs as Basira boards and they
shove off, the Archivist rowing]**

BASIRA (CONT'D)

How did you find me?

Oh, right. Obviously.

Thanks.

ARCHIVIST

Oh, uh, you're welcome.

BASIRA

What?

ARCHIVIST

No-Nothing. I-I just... I was worried you might be upset if I interrupted your whole 'solo reflection' thing.

BASIRA

It's fine. I mean, I would have at first but... honestly? There are a bunch more hells between me and London than I thought.

[The Archivist briefly chuckles]

I've been hoping for a friendly face for a while now.

ARCHIVIST

Glad I could oblige.

[Rowing continues]

BASIRA

Not that I couldn't make it on my own.

ARCHIVIST

Of course.

(Beat)

BASIRA

You're not... You're not here to just give me a lift are you?

ARCHIVIST

I need your help.

[Rowing stops]

BASIRA

You need **my** help? I thought you were basically a god now?

ARCHIVIST

Annabelle Cane has Martin.

BASIRA

Shit.

ARCHIVIST

Yeah.

BASIRA

When? How?

ARCHIVIST

I think she's taking him to Hill Top Road, and... I don't know, I just— I needed *someone* I could trust, and I couldn't ask Georgie or Melanie to come all this way, so—

BASIRA

They're alive?

ARCHIVIST

Oh, uh, y-yes, I, um...

BASIRA

Oh, it's, it's fine, you can catch me up later. Let's focus on the Martin situation.

ARCHIVIST

Right.

BASIRA

Can you, y'know, 'see' him?

ARCHIVIST

No. A-Annabelle has a— Sh-She can block The Eye. There's a, a camera. It's an artefact that was protecting Salesa's— Right. So, um, shortly after we left you we found a—

BASIRA

Magic camera that keeps them hidden. Got it.

ARCHIVIST

Yeah.

BASIRA

So they're at Hill Top Road?

ARCHIVIST

Yes.

BASIRA

And you're sure? Even if you can't see them?

ARCHIVIST

Yes.

BASIRA

And you know the way?

ARCHIVIST

Yes.

BASIRA

So what are we waiting for? Stop messing around, let's go.

ARCHIVIST

(Irritated) I'm not messing ar— Right. Of course.

[Long moments pass with the Archivist's audible exertions and slow
rowing technique]

BASIRA

It's lucky for me you needed help. I just got out of this weird mirror-maze thing, and then I was just... on an island. I was seriously considering swimming.

[The deep pulsing sound from the behemoth fades in]

ARCHIVIST

That would not have been a good idea.

[Suddenly the boat is jostled from beneath, rippling water and splashes until it settles; the behemoth sounds are gone]

(Small gasp from Basira)

[The Archivist restarts rowing, post-jostling]

BASIRA

I don't remember there being a huge lake between London and Oxford.

ARCHIVIST

That's because there wasn't one.

BASIRA

Right.

I'm a bit over the whole horror-geography thing at this point.

ARCHIVIST

That makes two of us.

BASIRA

So I'm guessing it represents academic isolation or something? Maybe something to do with 'the dangerous unknown', skimming to the surface, that kind of thing?

ARCHIVIST

(Weary) Maybe it just represents the feeling of sore arms.

BASIRA

Been rowing a while, then?

ARCHIVIST

Hard to say. Certainly feels that way.

BASIRA

Yeah, you look like crap.

ARCHIVIST

Thanks.

BASIRA

You're welcome.

ARCHIVIST

I'm trying to think of it as a metaphor.

BASIRA

And that helps?

ARCHIVIST

Not at all.

I'd be more than happy to let you take over, if you'd like?

BASIRA

No, I wouldn't want to cramp your style.

ARCHIVIST

At this point, that's just about the only part of me that isn't cramping.

BASIRA

Alright, give 'em here.

[The Archivist transfers the oars to Basira, who begins rowing at a faster pace than The Archivist]

ARCHIVIST

Here you go.

BASIRA

Okay. So... what do we know about Hill Top Road?

ARCHIVIST

Not much.

BASIRA

Another blind spot?

ARCHIVIST

No, it's— I could look at it, but it... it was... it was like a... a hole. You know that feeling you get when you look down from a, a great height, like you're being pulled into the abyss?

BASIRA

Kind of?

ARCHIVIST

(Getting lost in thought) Well it was... was like that. Normally I can see it, see the... webs, and feel the power of The Spider emanating from it, but... as I would look... it's like my mind.... follows the paths of The Web...

[Hissing static starts]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

the strands going down and... out...

(Catching self) It's quite disorientating.

[Hissing static ends]

BASIRA

So what? It's like a... a Web-Vast team-up?

ARCHIVIST

Almost, but... no. It... It's different. Something else. Either way the important thing is that right now, I can't see it at all.

BASIRA

So we know they're there with the magic camera.

ARCHIVIST

Exactly.

BASIRA

(Sighs) And we're charging off into the unknown again? It's just like old times.

ARCHIVIST

Old times wasn't actually all that long ago.

BASIRA

Hmm. True. Feels it, though doesn't it?

ARCHIVIST

Well, hopefully this one will go a bit better.

BASIRA

Would be hard for it to go worse.

ARCHIVIST

Yeah.

(Beat)

So... how was the trip down? How are you doing?

BASIRA

Not great. But I think I'm doing better having done it.

ARCHIVIST

Yeah?

[Basira slows and pauses her rowing while contemplating]

BASIRA

I always used to think I was helping people get what they deserved you know?

But then you see people suffering like this, with their deepest fears everywhere, and it's people who I'd say were good people, or bad people or... And there are avatars, jailors and torturers, and some of them seem to hate it as much as the people they're guarding. But they still do it...

[Back to normal rowing]

BASIRA (CONT'D)

I don't know. I guess it's... It's hard to look back on what I did as all that different.

(Bitter laugh) Bit late for self-discovery though, right? After the world's ended?

ARCHIVIST

We're still here.

BASIRA

True. But I don't really know what I even am anymore. Am I an avatar, or what?

ARCHIVIST

Technically... yes. I think you might have effectively inherited Daisy's role.
That's very much The Hunt's thing, isn't it — you kill, and then you become?

BASIRA

(Mournfully) Yeah.

ARCHIVIST

Sorry ah; what I mean is, Daisy moved through the domains, tormenting **you** with the chase, but also spreading fear wherever she went, and watching the results with hungry eyes. I think that's what **you're** doing now: travelling through, seeing places, and feeding The Eye with your observations. And your revulsions.

BASIRA

(Exhales) So I'm what? Just a freelance watcher?

ARCHIVIST

If you like. You'll probably end up with your own domain, eventually.

[Basira pauses rowing]

BASIRA

But if it's The Hunt, what am I supposed to be chasing? All I've been doing is wandering around, hoping I might find something to do, some way to help—
Ah.

Damn it.

ARCHIVIST

And there it is.

[Rowing restarts]

(Beat)

BASIRA

So catch me up. What's been happening? You found Melanie and Georgie?

ARCHIVIST

Uh, they found me.

BASIRA

So I was right, then?

ARCHIVIST

I don't know what you mean.

BASIRA

Yeah, you do. Just after that meat factory, we were talking, and I said maybe you couldn't see them because Georgie couldn't feel fear and Melanie had cut herself off from The Eye. And then you said that—

ARCHIVIST

I said it was plausible.

BASIRA

Yeah, but you did the face when you said it.

ARCHIVIST

Fine. You were right.

BASIRA

So does this mean there are others?

ARCHIVIST

What do you mean?

BASIRA

Like, they can't be the only ones like that, right? Maybe there are other people out there, naturally immune, wandering around or hunkered down?

ARCHIVIST

Uh, maybe. I mean, probably. But, y'know, well, I can't see them, can I?

BASIRA

Ah, yeah. Suppose not.

(Beat)

ARCHIVIST

I also killed Helen?

BASIRA

Oh.

Right.

ARCHIVIST

Yeah.

(Beat)

BASIRA

Didn't expect that.

ARCHIVIST

She was dangerous. And not like the others out there. It was only going to be a matter of time before—

BASIRA

No, no, I get it.

Honestly, it's kind of a relief. How did Melanie take it?

ARCHIVIST

Melanie?

BASIRA

Yeah. She and... She and Helen were pretty tight back when, uh... Oh.

ARCHIVIST

What?

BASIRA

Back when you were in your coma.

ARCHIVIST

I see. Well, I haven't told her yet. So, I suppose I have that to look forward to when we get back.

BASIRA

If we get back.

ARCHIVIST

That's not the part I'm worried about.

BASIRA

He'll be okay.

ARCHIVIST

Hmm.

(Beat)

BASIRA

I know a good way to take your mind off it.

ARCHIVIST

I wouldn't want to cramp your style.

BASIRA

Ha!

ARCHIVIST

Besides... we're almost there.

[Tape clicks off]

[Tape clicks on]

[Gentle waves against a shore; footsteps on shingle and sand]

BASIRA

So we're just gonna leave the boat?

ARCHIVIST

Would it make you feel better to know that it's not technically real?

BASIRA

No.

ARCHIVIST

Look, it's fine. We probably won't even be coming back this way.

BASIRA

If you say so.

So anyway, run this by me again, they're like a proper cult, cult?

ARCHIVIST

Ish. They all seemed fairly normal given the circumstances. Bit of a let-down in some ways.

BASIRA

But like, they actually worship Melanie and Georgie?

ARCHIVIST

Worship is maybe a bit strong. They just... revere them.

BASIRA

(Laughs) Melanie must hate that.

ARCHIVIST

And that's the issue. I'd say it's as culty as it can be, when the 'leaders' are actively trying to stop it.

BASIRA

Oh it must have been funny though—

[Static and glitch crackles as they transition between domains]

[Their footsteps are now on pavement, a few birds tweet]

Huh.

Hang on, is that—? That's the real sun isn't it?

ARCHIVIST

Yes. We've entered the, uh... um...

BASIRA

John?

ARCHIVIST

Sorry, I should have said. The camera, it... it blocks my connection, and I, uh... It's hard.

BASIRA

Are you okay?

ARCHIVIST

It doesn't matter. Martin's here, and we need to find him.

[Faint sound of the Archivist's voice coming from a tape recorder]

ARCHIVIST ON TAPE (BACKGROUND)

(Crosstalk) ...this one dressed in baggy overalls. Next to it stands a much smaller fly—

BASIRA

Okay, how do we do that?

ARCHIVIST

I, uh... I, I, I don't know. We'll have to—

BASIRA

Shh! Do you hear that?

[The tape recorder gets louder as they approach]

ARCHIVIST ON TAPE (BACKGROUND)

(Crosstalk) —dressed in what appears to be a child's version of those same overalls.

BASIRA

There. In the...

[The stop walking]

BASIRA (CONT'D)

The spider web. Great.

(Archivist exhales)

ARCHIVIST ON TAPE

(Crosstalk) They are both openly weeping. 'IT'S MR. HORSE. AND HE'S BROUGHT YOU HIS SON'.

ARCHIVIST

It's not exactly breadcrumbs but, uh... but... uh...

ARCHIVIST ON TAPE

(Crosstalk) The close-up on that fly's face is an image that still comes to me when I'm having trouble sleeping. Then the text:

BASIRA

You're sure you're okay to do this?

[They restart walking]

ARCHIVIST

(Resolute) I'll be fine.

BASIRA

(Unconvinced) Hmm.

ARCHIVIST ON TAPE

‘MISTER SPIDER WANTS MORE.’

[Tape clicks off]

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Outro]

JONATHAN SIMS

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