

MAG 189 — Peers

Content Warnings

- Scopophobia
- Arguments
- Mass suffering (including coughing & crying SFX)
- Poverty & Food insufficiency
- Guilt
- Political expediency
- Harsh static SFX
- Mentions of: Blood, self-inflicted wounds, physical violence, cults, yelling

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

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

[Theme finishes]

[Tape clicks on]

[A noisy scene as multiple helicopters and drones hover while a multitude of cameras iris and click]

[Martin turns to the Archivist]

MARTIN

This is it, then.

ARCHIVIST

(Nervous edge) This is what?

MARTIN

Don't play dumb.

It's the final battle, right? We climb the tower, take out the bad guy, figure out how to change the world back, and back in time for tea.

Right?

ARCHIVIST

We've certainly got the audience for it.

MARTIN

Yeah. They did roll out the red carpet, didn't they? Must be nice getting the star treatment.

ARCHIVIST

I'd hardly call flooding Oxford Street with blood, the "star treatment".

MARTIN

Oh no? What would you call it?

ARCHIVIST

A very lazy metaphor.

MARTIN

Wow, you're *really* determined not to engage aren't you?

ARCHIVIST

I'm just nervous. Jonah Magnus is waiting at the top of this tower, and he obviously knows we're coming.

MARTIN

I mean, yeah, okay, but—

ARCHIVIST

And not only that, every eye in an entire city *made of nothing but eyes* is staring at me while I try to prepare.

(An amused snort from Martin)

What?

MARTIN

(Amused) Seriously? Stage fright? The great Archivist, master of all he surveys can't handle a bit of public attention?

ARCHIVIST

Well, clearly not.

I'm more comfortable actually *doing* the looking.

MARTIN

(Sarcastic) Oh, I'm so sorry John, I didn't realise. God forbid you get *uncomfortable*. I guess I'll just tell everyone it's off then, shall I? We'll just go.

ARCHIVIST

You don't need to be sarcastic, okay?

MARTIN

You're right, I'm sorry. If it's any consolation, I'm scared too.

ARCHIVIST

That's what concerns me.

MARTIN

I don't follow?

ARCHIVIST

What if *our* fear is feeding him? Making him stronger?

MARTIN

But you're with The Eye too, though, right? So, maybe it's making you stronger as well.

...John?

ARCHIVIST

(Softly) No, you're... you're right. Of- of course you're right. I can't believe I didn't consider it before...

MARTIN

John? Use your words.

ARCHIVIST

Me- me vs Elias— Jonah. We... We both draw power from The Eye.

MARTIN

Well yeah, obviously.

ARCHIVIST

No but— That— There's— I mean, if we face off, try to destroy each other, it's not like it's going to be an actual fight—

MARTIN

Hey! **Don't** talk like that, okay, we can take him!

ARCHIVIST

No, Martin, listen, what I'm saying is that whichever way you cut it, ultimately it just comes down to who The Eye *chooses*.

MARTIN

So what, it's just a, an eldritch popularity contest?

ARCHIVIST

Yes. Except one of the contestants is *also* planning to try and murder the judge.

MARTIN

...Um.

(Searchingly) Maybe it hasn't realised?

ARCHIVIST

Martin I... I don't see any way I can win this. Not now, not like this.

MARTIN

(Spluttering) Well, hang on, hang on, okay, let's think about this a moment. You're- you're making a **load** of assumptions here. You can't see inside, remember? We have **no idea** what's happening up there.

ARCHIVIST

You're right, meaning we have no idea what **he's** got planned for us.

MARTIN

(Frustrated) Yeah, but that was always going to **be** the case, wasn't it?

[Footsteps as the Archivist backs away]

MARTIN (CONT'D)

Wait, where are you going?

ARCHIVIST

We shouldn't have come.

[Martin pulls the Archivist back]

MARTIN

A-oh, yeah, sure! We should just go with one of all those other options that we have hidden up our sleeves, yeah?

ARCHIVIST

Martin...

MARTIN

(Growing angry) No, d-d-don't "Martin" me, okay! We're here, because it's this or nothing, right?

ARCHIVIST

Right.

MARTIN

And we can't *do* nothing, right?

ARCHIVIST

Right.

MARTIN

Great. So, lead on.

(Annoyed exhale)

...John?

ARCHIVIST

Oh. Um.

MARTIN

Where's the door. John? How do we get inside this monstrosity?

ARCHIVIST

I, uh... Hm.

MARTIN

You don't know?

ARCHIVIST

I'm, I'm not sure.

(Exasperated sound from Martin)

MARTIN

(Whispered) Damn it. **(normal)** Something's probably blocking you...

ARCHIVIST

Maybe. Maybe The Eye doesn't **actually** want me in there. Or, or it's something Jonah Magnus put in place, or... ah.

MARTIN

Or?

ARCHIVIST

Or...

(The Archivist sighs)

MARTIN

(Sternly) Or?

ARCHIVIST

Or maybe I can't bring myself to look. Maybe I don't actually want to go inside.

MARTIN

(Harshly) For god's sake John!

ARCHIVIST

I'm sorry!

MARTIN

(Suppressed anger) No it's—

(More calmy) I get it. It's fine. Maybe there's another way in? What's this thing made of anyway, like, like, obsidian or something, right?

ARCHIVIST

One-way mirrored glass.

MARTIN

Of course it is. Well, if it's just glass, then it won't be hard to break, right? We can just grab something heavy, like one of these cameras, and then all I need...

ARCHIVIST

Oh, I wouldn't.

[Martin grabs and there is a fleshy, farty, yet pneumatic-like sound]

MARTIN

Oh! Oh! Eurgh...

(Martin gags)

ARCHIVIST

(Softly) Warned you.

MARTIN

(Raging) Brilliant! Just **brilliant!**

[Thick glass is kicked twice, and a can in the firing zone rolls away]

MARTIN (CONT'D)

Argh! Damnit!

ARCHIVIST

(Quietly) Martin...

MARTIN

(Sharp) What?

ARCHIVIST

Look, just... just give me... Let me try to focus, tune out all these watchers. I-I've-I've got a statement to make anyway.

MARTIN

Already?

ARCHIVIST

(Tired) Yes. There's a lot here, Martin. A lot.

MARTIN

(Harshly) Fine... fine.

(Calmer) I'll do a lap of the base. See if I can find any way in through any of the bits that used to be the Institute.

ARCHIVIST

Just be careful, okay?

MARTIN

Yeah, alright. Don't worry about me.

Besides if anything happens... least there's plenty of witnesses.

ARCHIVIST

That's not funny.

MARTIN

No.

(Martin sighs)

Be back soon.

[Brisk footsteps as Martin walks away]

[two spotlights ka-chonk on]

ARCHIVIST

Right, here's your bloody performance...

[Hissing static starts]

[The Panopticon exterior is replaced with the urban sounds of a distant car alarm, helicopters and traffic; camera iris movements are also heard]

[Footsteps on pavement]

[Hissing static ends]

ARCHIVIST

The minister hurries onwards, his eyes downcast, focusing on anything that breaks the monotony of the street. Cracks in the paving stones, boot-stomped cigarette ends, the mouldering yellow lines that snake along the pavement's edge. Anything so that he doesn't have to meet their gaze.

[Faint sounds of coughing, shuffling and crying people starts]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

The gaunt and hollow-cheeked figures that stare at him from every corner of this blighted city that might hide them from the chill. Stick-brittle women, dresses covered in second-hand blood; old men bloated from what we sold to them as food, skin discoloured from malnourishment; and the children. God, the children.

[Distant sound of Big Ben tolling]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

They won't stop looking, won't stop following him with their piteous, desperate gaze that speaks so loudly his knees feel like they will buckle. 'Help us.'

He will. Of course he will. He wants to. He hasn't lied to them, he really hasn't. He used to be one of them, he remembers what it can be like. He is there to speak for them. And if necessary, he will join them again. The minister grips his black leather briefcase closely to his chest, bile rising in his throat at the

sudden jolt of fear that races through his veins. Where did that come from? Is he afraid of it, of returning, of that sharp stab of hunger, the shivering of a cold that you can't escape? Or is he afraid that, should it come to that, they will see him as a deceiver?

But he cannot dwell solely on his worries, he tells himself – a sentiment that his journey is proving quite inaccurate. He glances at his watch, trying to hide it from his observers so that they might not see how expensive it is.

[The sounds of coughing, wailing and crying people intensifies]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

He's late, of course. The minister is always late. There are never any taxis, you see. If he was in a car, it would be alright. Then he wouldn't have to see them, be seen by them. No, that's not the way to look at it. These are his people, it's important he stays connected to them. So why does it make him so afraid?

Before him rises the great shining glass palace, jagged and angular, clear crystal fogged and smeared with sweat and grease and breathy condensation, but still its denizens can be seen by the masses of the starving that crowd around the edges. They cannot help but look inside, begging and weeping and hissing and falling as they wait for somebody, anybody, to stop the things that kill them.

[Door opens and closes, outside sounds disappear]

**[In the distance, distorted gleeful laughs while old-time dancehall
music plays]**

[Footsteps as the Minister continues, getting closer to the laughter]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

The minister uses the back entrance; the stale and humid air hits him immediately, the light from the not-a-sun reflected through a dozen layers of glass.

[A slap of gore]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

The light takes on a crimson tinge as he passes an office dried with gore, and turns away from a back room where three men in fine suits laugh among themselves as they weave their pile of nooses.

[Distorted laughs and music clear]

[In the distance muffled yells and screams]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Time was, the minister thinks, they'd have at least put up a curtain, a token effort to hide their intentions. But now they work in full view, unafraid of what the masses outside may see. Their lies are just as transparent; there is no choice here but to believe.

[The Minister stops walking]

[Laughter and music has faded away; muffled yells and screams are louder]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Finally, he reaches the chamber, the heart of the wretched place. Though the corridors are hard to navigate in this place of clear walls, you can always follow the sound of blustered roaring, echoing down the way. It gets louder and

louder with each step, until the minister crosses the threshold into the great room, and it swallows him whole.

[Door clicks open and the clamouring becomes clear and loud, a rowdy debate chamber, an indistinct rabble]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

The two sides scream and hoot and holler at each other, each on their end of the pit of sand, the arena in which they fight. The minister ignores the cobwebs in it as he makes his way to his chair. It is politer not to mention the thick layer of dust that has accumulated on the arena floor.

[Footsteps, then leather seat creak]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

He takes his place, marvelling again at how comfortable the seat is, how well it seems to fit, before the memory of the eyes outside, the knowledge that he can still be seen, wipes the contented smile from his face with a jerk. He looks across the divide at his opponents: pale and gurning things that smirk and guffaw and howl. They are content and safe and happy in this place, and only scream so loud from sheer hatred of the idea that any might make noise except themselves. On their thighs can be seen the glint of gold from the great polished nails they have driven through their legs and into the chairs, gangrenous wounds that ensure they shall never have to rise again, their position utterly secure.

On his side of the arena the shouts should be sharper, more angry, but their tone and pitch are such as to merge seamlessly with the others. There are no golden stakes on this side pinning down his would-be comrades. But the

minister must be careful not to look too closely, or else he might see how many of his allies are fused to their own chairs, on which they have sat comfortable for so long.

His eyes drift away, through the walls to the crowd outside. Their baying cries for justice cannot be heard in here. If any whisper should make it through, it is utterly destroyed in the deafening shouting that surrounds him. But he cannot forget their eyes, watching him, piercing him with their wounded humanity. The minister swallows, and tries to speak over the din.

[Leather creak as the Minister stands]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

At first his words are lost, vanishing into the cacophony without a ripple, but they are words, clear and distinct from the shapeless expostulation of his peers. And as he says them, one by one the others fall silent, their disgusted attention landing on him until his own voice falters in the sudden quiet.

**[Gradually the clamour of voices stops; it is suddenly very quiet
aside from the soft creaks and shuffles of many attentive people]**

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Across the pit the pallid things gurn at him in indignant curiosity, while on his side he is surrounded by expressions of horrified betrayal.

They can all hear him now. Any words he speaks will ring out through the chamber. He wants to talk of the people outside, the bruised and abandoned ones that suffer and die to slake their appetites. He wants to cry for restitution, for justice, for a future, for anything. But all eyes are on him and he falters. He remembers the cold, the hunger, the ache of concrete beneath him. He is

afraid. And his chair is so very comfortable. The minister coughs, once, uncomfortably, and sits down.

[He coughs and sits]

[A bell sounds over and over, followed by scuttling and sounds of crockery being placed]

As he does so the great bell tolls for dinner, and a thousand scuttering servants swarm out and into the chamber, depositing their silver trays before each seat, piled high with succulent, steaming meat.

[Sounds of consumption and cutlery]

The minister eats as those outside look on, and all he tastes is salt.

[Hissing static starts]

[The extreme surveillance sounds from outside the Panopticon resume]

[Hissing static ends]

MARTIN

(Brightly) All good?

ARCHIVIST

Yes. Just, uh... Left a little bit of a bad taste in my mouth.

MARTIN

(Unusually upbeat) Oh great! Fantastic!

ARCHIVIST

Martin? Wh— Something's up.

MARTIN

(Blasé) No! No, nothing's up. Everything's just — still awful.

ARCHIVIST

Why are you smiling?

MARTIN

I'm... just... really happy to see you.

ARCHIVIST

(Demanding) Martin?

MARTIN

Ah well! Looks like we aren't getting in here! Never mind! Better... Best head off then, eh?

[They start walking]

(Beat)

ARCHIVIST

What's going on?

MARTIN

(Hissed whisper) It's fine, just trust me.

ARCHIVIST

Martin, this is not the sort of place where acting strange means I will still ju—

[The Archivist exclaims in shock as a hatch opens and he is bundled inside]

[Fast domain-transition static and glitches]

[Harsh metal scrape as the hatch is pulled back into place]

[Their words reverb on barren concrete and corridors; the tunnels]

MELANIE

Shut! up!

GEORGIE

It's alright John just, keep quiet.

ARCHIVIST

Wha— Georgie? Melanie? I thought— This—

MARTIN

(Whispering) Sorry. Sorry, John. I'm-I'm not sure how much everything up there actually understood what was going on. But, y'know, I didn't want to take any chances so it made sense to... um...

ARCHIVIST

Put on a show?

MARTIN

Ah, yeah, basically, more or less.

GEORGIE

Martin says it's much harder for you to avoid attention up there.

MELANIE

Another reason we should have left them up there. Still. Glad you're alive and that.

ARCHIVIST

Likewise, I... oh... Ooo...

MELANIE

Oh, I know that sound. He's going pale, right? Five quid says he's about to collapse again.

ARCHIVIST

(Archly) I am not going to collapse. What do you mean again?

MELANIE

Oh come on. You do it all the time.

ARCHIVIST

(Brokenly) I do not— I... I'm just feeling a little bit woozy alright? I-I can't quite think straight. Like at, um... um, Martin, you remember?

GEORGIE

Is this what you were talking about?

MARTIN

Ah-yeah, if something messes with his connection, he can get a little... vague.

ARCHIVIST

I don't like being discussed like I'm not here.

MELANIE

Then you are going to *love* the others.

MARTIN

What others?

GEORGIE

There's a small group of... survivors we managed to pull out of some of the nearby hells. They, um... They think we're... 'special'. You know, because The Eye can't see us.

MELANIE

It's fine, Georgie. You can use the c word.

MARTIN

E-Excuse me?

GEORGIE

Fine. We've got, sort of a... cult.

MARTIN

Wh— Ooooh... kay...

ARCHIVIST

That's... not what I was expecting.

MELANIE

Mm-hmm. It's *extremely* weird.

GEORGIE

It wasn't intentional. It just sort of happened. Although... I have to admit it can be *useful*, occasionally.

ARCHIVIST

Okay, this is, uh... this is a-a lot. Why don't we take it from the top?

GEORGIE

Alright.

ARCHIVIST

You're alive!

GEORGIE

Yeah.

ARCHIVIST

Good.

MELANIE

I keep telling her that technically there's no proof of that.

ARCHIVIST

I'm really glad.

MARTIN

Friendly faces have been kind of rare. Or weird.

ARCHIVIST

H-How are you here? What, what happened?

GEORGIE

When the world started to change, it just didn't hit me and Melanie. Not, not really.

MELANIE

Georgie's got that fearless thing going on, and me and The Eye, well, you remember our messy divorce.

ARCHIVIST

Sure.

GEORGIE

We figured you'd know what was going on, so we headed for the Institute, but it was, um, well, you saw it up there. We couldn't find you, and by the time we arrived the world was full nightmare.

MELANIE

There was nowhere to go back to, so I told her about the tunnels. Turns out, not only were they still here, they actually do a decent job of hiding things. When **you** aren't painting a huge target on our backs.

GEORGIE

Melanie...

MELANIE

(Sharply) What? I'm here, aren't I? I didn't say anything about being nice about it.

GEORGIE

No you didn't.

MELANIE

So... let me moan.

ARCHIVIST

...I'm sorry to cause a fuss.

MELANIE

(Snorts) Bit late for that.

MARTIN

How did you know we were there?

GEORGIE

How could we not? The entire city knows you were there.

MARTIN

(Under his breath) Oh, yeah.

MELANIE

(Sarcastically) Everyone is *so* excited to see the Ceaseless Watcher's special little boy.

(Martin and Georgie giggle)

ARCHIVIST

Yes, well.

GEORGIE

Always did enjoy being the centre of things.

(Martin and Melanie giggle)

ARCHIVIST

So, what's next?

MARTIN

Well, I vote we catch up somewhere that's maybe not *quite* so close to the sinister mega-tower.

[Martin starts to move]

GEORGIE

Not so fast. Is it safe? If we take you to the others, is that going to put them in danger?

MARTIN

Um. Oh, er...

ARCHIVIST

No. No, I don't think it will.

MELANIE

(Intensely) I'm going to hold you to that.

GEORGIE

...Fine. Come on then.

MARTIN

Oh, uh, uh, Melanie, do you need a hand or...

MELANIE

No. No, I'm fine. Somehow managed to keep my cane through all of this.

[Melanie unfolds her mobility cane]

MELANIE (CONT'D)

And I know this part of the tunnels pretty well. Besides, do *you* even have a torch?

MARTIN

Oh, uh, no, not anymore, we ah, we lost it w—

MELANIE

(Sharply) Then *I'm* not the one with the problem. I'm told it gets pretty dark.

[Footsteps head off along with cane taps]

(The Archivist chuckles)

GEORGIE

Oh, and John?

ARCHIVIST

Yes?

GEORGIE

No tape recorders.

ARCHIVIST

Oh, right you are.

[Tape clicks off]

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Outro]

JONATHAN SIMS

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Archivist, Alexander J Newall as Martin Blackwood, Lydia Nicholas as Melanie King, and Sasha Sienna as Georgie Barker. To subscribe, buy merchandise, or join our Patreon, visit rustyquill.com. Rate and review us online, tweet us at [TheRustyQuill](https://twitter.com/TheRustyQuill), visit us on Facebook, or email us via mail@rustyquill.com. Join our community on the Discord via the website, or on Reddit, at [r/TheMagnusArchives](https://www.reddit.com/r/TheMagnusArchives). Thanks for listening.