

MAG 197 — Connected

Content Warnings

- Heights / Vertigo (including SFX)
- Spiders (including SFX)
- Manipulation
- Body horror (including SFX)
- Threats
- Explicit language
- Discussions of: altered reality, mass suffering, arson
- Mentions of: mental disorientation, kidnapping, death & murder, apocalypse, paranoia
- SFX: insects, high-pitched noises, overlapping voices

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

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

[Theme finishes]

[Tape clicks on]

[A dark electric void sound, swirling winds, and distorted, crackling thunder; an impossible web stretched across a gaping chasm]

[Speeding by every so often is a chitinous rewinding tape sound]

[Careful, sticky, footsteps]

ARCHIVIST

Watch your step. Long way down.

BASIRA

(Sighs) It's fine, the stickiness helps.

(The Archivist grunts)

Come on.

ARCHIVIST

Right behind you.

BASIRA

(Light sarcasm) Feeling better now are we? Without those horrible sunny skies and fresh winds?

ARCHIVIST

(Light sarcasm) Yes, the colossal web stretching down into an endless pit is a significant improvement.

BASIRA

(Dark chuckle) Don't pretend like you're joking.

ARCHIVIST

At least I can think straight now. So we have a chance to— Don't touch that one!

[A large, distorted twang that thrums and echoes with high-pitched static, the sounds reverberating and moving outwards]

[They stop walking]

BASIRA

Sorry.

(Beat)

[The sounds of the web-twang settle]

ARCHIVIST

It's okay. She already knew I was here, I just... I hoped we might be able to sneak you in.

BASIRA

I'm guessing she's waiting at the centre.

[Hissing static starts]

ARCHIVIST

Naturally. They both are. Martin is... he's okay. He's... scared, but also... frustrated.

BASIRA

You can't see Annabelle's plan?

ARCHIVIST

I know she has something to tell me... and i-it's about the hole below us... her thoughts are all down there and... and the threads are so closely woven, I-I follow them out and in and down and through the strands of web and twisting

tape and down and down and down into the chasm into the emptiness, that stretches—

BASIRA

(Crosstalk) Woah! Woah! Careful! Careful!

ARCHIVIST

(Crosstalk) —out belo— Woah!

BASIRA

[The Archivist loses his balance and Basira grabs him]

[Hissing static ends]

ARCHIVIST

Thanks.

There's a— Sorry, there's a s-sort of, pull to it.

(Basira lets go of a held breath)

Every time I get a glimpse it-it, it draws me in...

BASIRA

What's down there?

ARCHIVIST

I don't know.

BASIRA

That makes a change.

ARCHIVIST

It's... somewhere else. That's all I've got.

(The archivist exhales heavily)

[Sticky footsteps resume]

BASIRA

So. The tapes. They're from the Web, then?

ARCHIVIST

Looks like it.

BASIRA

Were they always? Right from the start?

ARCHIVIST

As far as I can tell, it's hard to s— If I look too closely at them, my own voice, things get... recursive, hard to follow.

BASIRA

I always assumed they were with The Eye. The whole 'watching, listening, waiting' thing y'know?

ARCHIVIST

No, they were always using them to spin their own web. Out of my words.

BASIRA

Mine too.

ARCHIVIST

True.

BASIRA

But what for? And why here?

[Hissing static starts]

ARCHIVIST

I, uh—

[Basira grabs the Archivist again as he loses balance; they stop walking for now]

BASIRA

Forget I asked.

[Hissing static ends]

ARCHIVIST

Oh! Ooh. Hmm.

[A group of chitinous rewinding tape sounds pass and a distant reverberation]

BASIRA

Can't keep catching you every two minutes.

ARCHIVIST

Heh.

BASIRA

At some point I'll give in to the temptation.

ARCHIVIST

(Sarcastic) Hah hah.

BASIRA

Different question then. How do we play this one?

ARCHIVIST

You get Martin to safety, then I deal with Annabelle Cane.

BASIRA

Right.

(Beat)

I think we should hear her out first.

ARCHIVIST

Excuse me?

BASIRA

Before you "deal with her", we should try to get some answers. All of this... taking Martin... she wants to talk.

ARCHIVIST

She's had plenty of chances. She didn't need to kidnap him.

BASIRA

Sure, but maybe she—

What? What's with the look?

ARCHIVIST

How are you feeling, Basira?

BASIRA

(Sharply) Do you want to look inside my head? See if it's full of spiders?

ARCHIVIST

I—

No, I'm sorry. I-I trust you.

BASIRA

How are *you* feeling?

ARCHIVIST

(Sighs) Yes, alright, you don't need to make a point.

BASIRA

Yes I do. You're too close to this, and I need to make sure you aren't going to do anything dumb.

Situation like this, we can't make rash assumptions. Right?

ARCHIVIST

Right.

But if she hurts Martin, all bets are off.

BASIRA

She hurts Martin, I'll be right there with you.

[They begin to move off]

[Tape clicks off]

[Tape clicks on]

[The Web; the deep tail-end of a large twanging sound; multiple chitinous, rewinding tape sounds pass by with it]

[In every direction comes the sound of many recorders playing statements, too faint to be heard distinctly although the voices are recognisably those of archive staff]

ANNABELLE

Hmm. He's getting close.

MARTIN

(Archly) As if you could hear him over all this racket.

ANNABELLE

(Chuckles) I am sorry you find them irritating.

They're a side effect of the very specific way this web has been spun.

I thought you liked his voice?

[Sticky web sound as Martin responds]

MARTIN

I do, when it's *his* voice. I've never liked the statements. It always felt— Yeah.

ANNABELLE

Well, you can trust me when I say you'll be hearing his real voice very soon.

MARTIN

I can't see anything. How can you even tell?

ANNABELLE

Vibrations.

MARTIN

Urgh, yes, web, vibrations, sure. Yeah but that's not actually what's happening here is it? So why don't you just tell me straight? It's not like I'm going to run off. I'd only trip over my own feet and fall in, even if I tried.

ANNABELLE

It's a good way to visualise these things. Symbols and metaphor... they give easy channels for the Great Powers to flow through. Ready forms for their energy to manifest.

MARTIN

Blah, blah, dream logic, blah. I've had this lecture before.

ANNABELLE

You'd prefer we stay silent until he arrives?

MARTIN

I'd hardly call *this* silence.

ANNABELLE

I'd stop them if I could.

MARTIN

Fine.

Let's talk then.

ANNABELLE

Alright.

(Long beat)

Is there anything you want to talk *about*?

MARTIN

I don't know! It's kind of hard to think of small talk suspended over an endless void!

ANNABELLE

You're perfectly safe as long as you don't do anything foolish and unstick yourself.

MARTIN

Ah, yeah, yeah. You **say** that, but it seems like you've got this whole **thing** prepared for John, and I-I don't really know whether I should be trying to derail it, or, or whether that's just what you *want* me to do, and, and so doing

nothing is actually the right thing, y'know? And... you're a hard person to talk to.

ANNABELLE

Why? Because of what I say, or because of the assumptions you make about my motives?

(Martin makes a frustrated exhale)

MARTIN

Either. Both.

ANNABELLE

I see.

(Beat)

(Martin makes an annoyed noise)

We could play a game?

MARTIN

Uhhh...

ANNABELLE

Twenty questions? Animal, vegetable or mineral?

(Martin makes an annoyed exhale)

MARTIN

(Sarcastic) Animal. Does it have eight legs? Yes. Is it a spider? Yes. Oh look, I win.

ANNABELLE

(Smiling) On edge are we?

MARTIN

Of course I am! You've stuck me in a weird interdimensional web, and threatened to fill me with spiders!

ANNABELLE

No. I said I had "considered" filling you with spiders.

MARTIN

Y-yeah, whatever, the point *is*, there was a time when it was very much your go-to option! And this **one** time I chose to **almost** trust you, you've immediately turned around and used me as bait!

ANNABELLE

I haven't broken your trust.

MARTIN

(Sputters) Wh-what!?

The deal was you'd tell me a way to end this without John trapping himself in that tower. Using me to trap him here instead, in the most hackneyed metaphor imaginable, is not exactly what I had in mind.

ANNABELLE

Perhaps I was wrong about how well suited you are to us. I'm not sure you have the patience for The Web.

MARTIN

Oh *piss off*.

ANNABELLE

...You don't need to worry about John.

MARTIN

You're literally luring him into a trap. This trap. This one right here.

**[Martin motions and twangs the web, setting off strong
reverberations]**

ANNABELLE

Please don't do that.

Technically, yes. This is a trap. But the only one in *actual* danger is going to be me. If he chooses to kill me I can't stop him. Not even here. And you're not bait, you're just... an invitation.

MARTIN

Oh. Wonderful. I can't wait to attend the Annabelle Cane Show.

ANNABELLE

Huh! You know, I did consider it once.

MARTIN

Excuse me?

ANNABELLE

A TV show. Reaching out into the homes of millions, giving the more vulnerable ones a subtle nudge towards terror. Probably something for children. It never went anywhere, of course. These things rarely do.

MARTIN

I'm, I'm sorry, what are you talking about?

ANNABELLE

You're the one that didn't want to wait in silence.

MARTIN

W— Yeah, well—

[A low vibration, with some chitinous, rewinding tape sounds passing]

Wait... Wait, hang on, is that him?

ANNABELLE

Yes. I guess you're better with the Web than we thought.

[Multiple chitinous rewinding tape sounds pass]

MARTIN

And— Wait, ha— No, uh... is that... Basira? He, he's got Basira with him!

ANNABELLE

Yes.

I did wonder if that would be the case.

Interesting.

And unfortunate for me. That's two heads we'll need to keep cool. My odds aren't looking good.

MARTIN

Odds don't matter if you've stacked the deck.

ANNABELLE

True. Now settle back. Try to look... intentional.

MARTIN

What does that mean?

ANNABELLE

They're going to expect a suitably elaborate scene when they arrive, a monstrous tableau. I'd hate to disappoint them.

MARTIN

Right...

[Martin gingerly tries to adjust his position]

So, w-were you thinking something like this, or—?

[Annabelle releases a burst of webbing, gagging Martin and wrapping him firmly]

(Muffled indignancy from Martin)

ANNABELLE

My apologies for the inconvenience, but appearances are everything, Martin.
Now, if you'll excuse me, I need to change into something more suitable.

[Extended sounds of visceral arachnoid transformation: Bone cracks and flesh tears, accompanied by a twisted glitching static then stops]

[Annabelle's voice is deeper]

ANNABELLE (CONT'D)

It is so very important to prime your audience.

[Visceral arachnoid transformation continues]

ARCHIVIST

Annabelle Cane!

[Annabelle's transformation completes: her voice is even deeper; her breaths have a growl to them, and her talking ends with small chitters; whenever she moves it sounds chitinous yet fleshy]

ANNABELLE

Hello, John. Basira.

[All the tape decks playing statements stop at once]

(Muffled agitation from Martin)

ANNABELLE (CONT'D)

Calm down Martin. You wouldn't want to slip off, would you?

BASIRA

Let him go!

ANNABELLE

Not just yet.

(Muffled anxiety from Martin)

ARCHIVIST

Ceaseless Watcher, see this scuttling thing. Take it—

[Annabelle hoists Martin up]

ANNABELLE

Ah. Ah. Ah!

(Martin's muffled anxiety increases to muffled terror)

You know better than I do if I could actually kill him, but we both know that if I drop Martin from here, he's gone.

So, let's all settle down.

(Muffled sadness from Martin)

(Beat)

BASIRA

What do you want?

ANNABELLE

To give you... all of you, a way out of this.

BASIRA

And you couldn't just, I dunno, tell us?

ANNABELLE

I could, but I needed him to believe me. And for that, I needed him to *feel* this place, this opening beneath us.

ARCHIVIST

Put. Him. Down.

(Muffled demand for release from Martin)

ANNABELLE

Very well.

[Annabelle lowers Martin gently]

BASIRA

Martin, are you okay?

(Muffled mm-hmm from Martin)

You know, we'd probably be more willing to listen if you hadn't kidnapped our friend.

ANNABELLE

I didn't. He came of his own free will.

(Muffled point of contention from Martin)

ARCHIVIST

"Free will," she says, as we stand in the middle of her fucking web!

ANNABELLE

(Laughs) A fair point. But that's a debate for another time.

I simply mean I did not bring him here through force, threat or false pretence. I made an offer, and he agreed.

ARCHIVIST

Martin, is this true?

(Martin tries a muffled attempt to explain, followed by a muffled sigh and finally a muffled mm-hmm!)

BASIRA

Told you.

ARCHIVIST

We'll talk about it later. Once you're safe.

(Muffled downbeat acknowledgement)

ANNABELLE

He's perfectly safe right now. As long as everyone remains civil.

ARCHIVIST

Fine. Speak your piece. Tell us about your "way out".

ANNABELLE

As you wish.

(Beat)

The Great Fears, do you believe they think the way we do?

ARCHIVIST

They don't "think" at all. They just... are.

ANNABELLE

Almost true. In truth, it depends on the Fear. Some exist in an eternal moment, some make use of memory to reflect and corrupt, but for most, time is simply another thing for them to play with. To consider the future, to plan, is not something they're capable of.

ARCHIVIST

But not The Web?

ANNABELLE

No. Not the Mother-of-Puppets, the Spinner-of-Schemes.

BASIRA

Hang on. What about the rituals? Those were plans.

ARCHIVIST

No. They were... desires, filtered and interpreted by people, and the thinking creatures that they spawned.

ANNABELLE

You **are** well informed, aren't you? Exactly this. They hungered for the world, to step from the shadows, and gorge themselves on all humanity.

ARCHIVIST

And they have.

ANNABELLE

But only two of them could truly conceive of such. Terminus, The End, knows that in such a world they will ultimately consume themselves. And it desires that finality.

ARCHIVIST

(Realising) And The Web understands it as well. That eventually a successful ritual would doom them all. Leave them trapped and starving in a used-up world with no-one to feed on.

BASIRA

Hang on, what? This is news to me.

ARCHIVIST

We passed a death domain, of The End. The victims there **do** actually die, meaning even though it would take... I don't know how long. Eventually The End **will** claim everyone and everything. It's inevitable.

BASIRA

Oh. **(Exhales)** Okay. Right. And what, the powers don't realise?

ARCHIVIST

They don't understand things like we do. But The Web is all about connections, unforeseen consequences. Of course, it realises.

ANNABELLE

Of course. And knowing this, knowing for centuries you would eventually be trapped, doomed to starvation, what would **you** do?

(Beat)

ARCHIVIST

Plan an escape.

ANNABELLE

Just so.

BASIRA

An escape? To where?

ARCHIVIST

Below us, Basira.

ANNABELLE

This is not “*the*” world, it is “*a*” world. And though it has taken so very long to prise it open, the gate to a thousand new realities now stands wide. However, despite this effort, the worlds beyond them remain so far unspoiled by the Fears’ touch.

ARCHIVIST

The Powers don’t exist there? They’re, what, *unique* to our... dimension?

ANNABELLE

Unique? Oh, I don’t know about that, but certainly there are many, many worlds without them.

BASIRA

Sorry, we're talking about alternate dimensions now? Seriously?

ARCHIVIST

Really, Basira? Look around us! This is where you get sceptical?

BASIRA

(Remaining skeptical) Yeah.

(Beat)

[Some chitinous, rewinding tape sounds pass]

Okay, cut me some slack. This is a lot of new and weird information.

ARCHIVIST

So The Web, it wants to spread? To escape into new realities?

ANNABELLE

Yes, but not alone. Any attempt to separate the Fears is ultimately doomed, as you well know.

ARCHIVIST

But *how*?

ANNABELLE

We found the one we believed most likely to bring about their manifestation. We marked him young, guided his path as best we could. And then, we took his voice.

ARCHIVIST

No...

ANNABELLE

His, and those he walked with. We inscribed them on shining strands of word and meaning, and used them to weave a web which cast itself out through the gate and beyond our universe. So that when the Fears heard that voice, and came in their terrible glory, they might then travel out along it.

Or be dragged.

BASIRA

Is she talking about the tapes?

ARCHIVIST

Yes.

BASIRA

So, how is any of this a solution?

ARCHIVIST

Because for the Fears to spread into these new worlds, they would need to leave ours, wouldn't they?

ANNABELLE

If one should leave this place for... greener pastures, the rest *must* follow.

ARCHIVIST

Leaving us behind in the process, freeing our world at the cost of others.

BASIRA

What are you saying?

ARCHIVIST

We can pass them our apocalypse.

(Muffled discomfited realisation from Martin)

ANNABELLE

Nothing so extreme. In these new worlds they would exist as they used to in ours, lurking just beyond the threshold.

ARCHIVIST

Until someone is stupid enough to release them there as well.

ANNABELLE

Perhaps. Even the Mother cannot see the future. Only try to shape it.

ARCHIVIST

And so they spread through realities like a disease!

ANNABELLE

Perhaps.

ARCHIVIST

...I won't do it.

ANNABELLE

Possibly. You've seen your other options.

BASIRA

What happens to you if they escape? What happens to us? We've all been touched by them.

ANNABELLE

I would either travel with them, or I would die. I do not know which. My life is only sustained by The Web. Most would simply lose whatever power they have been gifted.

John would lose much of himself, the parts of him that are The Eye. But he would survive. And perhaps more importantly, he would remain who he believes himself to be. And you would end the suffering of all those others who remain here.

(Beat)

BASIRA

How would we do it?

ARCHIVIST

Basira!

BASIRA

We need to know, John.

ANNABELLE

It's very simple.

Destroy the Archives, and cut out The Eye's pupil.

BASIRA

(Sarcastic) Oh is that all?

ANNABELLE

Simultaneously.

(Muffled despondency from Martin)

ARCHIVIST

I see. Destroy the Panopticon, and you release its power. Kill Jonah, and you cut the connection between the Fears and the world. Do both at the same time, and... for just a moment, all that power rushes through their only remaining connection with reality: the tapes.

ANNABELLE

And they would be swept along by it, dragged out of our realities, and into new ones...

BASIRA

And how exactly are we supposed to destroy the Archives?

ANNABELLE

Many years ago a draughtsman made an unfortunate and egregious error on certain city planning documents. As a result, an unusually large and dangerous gas main just happened to be constructed directly below the building you knew as the Magnus Institute, in a place where it would be protected by the tunnels of Robert Smirke, unchanged by the world's reformation. You need only ignite it.

ARCHIVIST

Ignite it?

ANNABELLE

Indeed. And it just so happens that the perfect tool was once delivered to you as a token of appreciation. Though you really do need to learn to keep better care of it. Somehow, it always seems to slip your mind, doesn't it?

ARCHIVIST

What?

BASIRA

John, it's that stupid lighter of yours.

ARCHIVIST

(Indignant) My what?

[Hissing static starts]

[The Archivist pulls the gold lighter with embossed spiderweb from pocket and flicks it open]

Oh?

Oh.

[Hissing static ends]

ANNABELLE

A little anchor of our power, so that we, and our tapes, may follow wherever you go.

ARCHIVIST

I see.

So...

[Flicks lighter shut]

...if I were to throw it away—

(Annabelle gasps)

—into your little pit...

(Muffled worry from Martin)

ANNABELLE

(Carefully) I would advise against that.

ARCHIVIST

Oh, would you.

BASIRA

John, she still has Martin.

(Muffled mm-hmm! reminder from Martin)

(Beat)

ARCHIVIST

Fine!

Fine.

That's it, then? Everything you wanted to tell us?

ANNABELLE

It is.

ARCHIVIST

Then we're done here. Give us Martin.

ANNABELLE

As you wish.

[Annabelle rips Martin free from his sticky restraints]

[Martin staggers to the Archivist, coughing and spluttering]

MARTIN

John!

ARCHIVIST

Martin!

[Fabric rustles as Martin and the Archivist embrace]

MARTIN

Oh god, I'm sorry, I—

ARCHIVIST

It's fine.

MARTIN

—didn't realise that—

ARCHIVIST

We'll talk later.

BASIRA

What about her?

ARCHIVIST

(Harsh) Good question. As far as I can tell there's now nothing to stop me killing you. And throwing this lighter away forever.

ANNABELLE

Nothing, except your own indecision.

I've played my part to its completion. You get to decide how I exit the stage.

(Long beat)

MARTIN

John?

ARCHIVIST

Go!

ANNABELLE

Very well. We shall not see each other again, Archivist. But I eagerly await your decision.

[Annabelle withdraws, scuttling up and away across the webbed chasm, twangs of static and rewinding tape noises in her wake]

MARTIN

So... what do we do now?

ARCHIVIST

Let's get out of here. After that... we'll see.

[Tape clicks off]

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Outro]

JONATHAN SIMS

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