

MAG 181 — Ignorance

Content Warnings

- Dissociation
- Memory loss / Mental deterioration
- Schadenfreude / Vicarious embarrassment
- Mentions of: suicide, alcohol, excessive drinking

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

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

[Theme finishes]

[Tape clicks on]

[Opera music is playing from a speaker; there is the faint sound of birdsong; and an antique clock ticks]

[Sounds of glassware and pouring liquid; ice clicks; soft footsteps on carpet]

MIKAELE

Hmmm.

[Close mic bumps as the recorder is handled]

MIKAELE

(Very close) Interesting...

[Three knocks on a wooden door]

[Salesa puts the recorder down; ice clinks from the drink he is holding]

Ah, of course! Come in, come in!

[Door creaks opens]

MARTIN

Er... Mr... Salesa?

MIKAELE

Mikaele, please! Come in.

Did you sleep well? Have you had something to eat? Annabelle said she'd shown you the pantry?

[Salesa turns off the opera music]

ARCHIVIST

(Uncomfortable) I...er... We slept. I-I don't know— H-How long's it been?

MIKAELE

About seventy-one hours by my clock. How're you feeling?

(Martin pffts in surprise)

ARCHIVIST

Disorientated. It's like, um, like I've lost my sight or, or—

MIKAELE

Well, you have, haven't you?

(He chuckles; it isn't the friendliest sound)

Annabelle tells me you work for The Eye.

ARCHIVIST

W-I-I w-wouldn't exactly say I-I 'work for' it.

MARTIN

Well... I-I-I mean, you say *that*, but when you stop to think about it, it was *literally* our employer, John, so... meh?

ARCHIVIST

I-I suppose.

MIKAELE

(Friendly chuckles) I like this one. Come on, sit down, have a drink.

[Salesa sits and unscrews a bottle; there is the clinking sounds of glass and ice as he prepares a drink; Martin and the Archivist also take a seat]

MARTIN

You're sure? What time is it? Oh. Huh. I can actually ask that question here.

MIKAELE

You can indeed.

MARTIN

And the sun's high, so...

[Mikaela finishes making the drink]

MIKAELE

Good eye... Martin, was it?

MARTIN

Er, er... Yes.

MIKAELE

Well Martin. It's about ten in the morning. More or less.

MARTIN

And you're drinking?

MIKAELE

Of course! Even in my little bubble of peace, I find drinking after dark leads to some rather morbid thoughts.

MARTIN

Right.

ARCHIVIST

What is... this place?

MIKAELE

I just told you, it's my little bubble. My silver lining on an otherwise cloudy day.

ARCHIVIST

That's not an answer—

MIKAELE

Now tell me, do you know why there's a tape recorder here? I noticed it just now, but I don't believe I actually own one.

ARCHIVIST

Uh... Not really.

MARTIN

They sort of just ... follow us round.

MIKAELE

Hmmmm. Interesting. Did you carry it in? Things shouldn't be able to manifest in here like that.

ARCHIVIST

You had one in your... bag, I-I think, Martin? Did, did you drop it here?

MARTIN

Er, I don't think so.

MIKAELE

Very well. In that case, we shall leave it to be. It's hardly valuable, and it's probably best not to upset whatever it might be involved with. Besides, I have no secrets to hide.

ARCHIVIST

So... you wouldn't mind answering a few questions?

[Mikaela takes a sip of his drink]

MIKAELE

...I am an open book.

MARTIN

(Scoffs) In my experience, open books can actually be pretty dangerous.

MIKAELE

Ha! I do like this one!

[Puts his drink down]

MIKAELE (CONT'D)

Now you mention it, you actually remind me of Jurgen a bit. In his younger days of course. You're sure you won't have a drink? We definitely had some tea around here somewhere...

MARTIN

Er, I, I already had some, thank you. Some of *us* know how to be polite guests.

ARCHIVIST

(Sharply) I don't intend to accept anything offered by Annabelle Cane.

MIKAELE

Oh, you know Annabelle?

ARCHIVIST

Sort of. You do know she's part of The Web?

MIKAELE

(Sarcastically) No, I assumed the thread holding her head together was due to a childhood knitting accident.

(Chuckles) Of course I know she's with The Web.

ARCHIVIST

And that doesn't bother you?

MIKAELE

Not especially. And even if it did, what good would it do?

MARTIN

So what's the deal with you two anyway?

MIKAELE

It's an odd situation, but not a complicated one. Shortly after I decided to stay here, she arrived — wandered in from the chaos out there, and told me she was going to stay with me. I didn't get this far by pitting myself against The Web, so I welcomed her in.

ARCHIVIST

And...?

MIKAELE

And sometimes she cooks.

ARCHIVIST

She ‘cooks’?

MIKAELE

I don’t know what you want me to say. It’s a big house and I don’t see her much. Can’t even say which corner she’s made her nest in. Whatever she’s doing, all I can do is hope it doesn't wreck my little oasis. And if it does then I hope that by keeping her in good graces she’ll at least do me the courtesy of killing *me* first.

(Discomforted noise from Martin)

Anyway, let us talk of happier things. Or perhaps just take a moment to enjoy not being out there. You are, of course, welcome to stay as long as you like.

MARTIN

Ah- That’s... very generous.

ARCHIVIST

What is this place — how did you find it?

MIKAELE

(Slightly curt) I didn’t *find* anything. I made it.

ARCHIVIST

(Compellingly) Tell me what happened.

MIKAELE

No.

ARCHIVIST

I- uh... W-What?

(Deep chuckles from Salesa)

MIKAELE

(Laughing) The look on your face! Look, he's so confused!

(Martin laughs a bit too)

ARCHIVIST

Martin!

MARTIN

(Laughing) Sorry. Sorry. Y-You did look kind of funny. It was I-I-I-like you were flunking an exam or something.

(More chuckling from Salesa)

MIKAELE

Yes! Exactly that! Your powers won't work here, Jonathan Sims, Head Archivist of the Magnus Institute, London. The Eye can't see this place.

ARCHIVIST

So what now?

MIKAELE

Ah, no need for the suspicion, I'm not going to hurt you. You're quite safe. I'll tell you soon enough. Like I said, I have no secrets. But it will be in my own time.

ARCHIVIST

Right.

MIKAELE

You know, Gertrude once used that little trick to ask if I was trying to sell her a forgery. Admittedly I was, so I don't hold a grudge, but I didn't much care for the experience. Anyway, for now, just relax, and no doubt I'll get there eventually — I haven't had anyone to talk to properly in months.

MARTIN

I thought... what about Annabelle?

MIKAELE

She keeps mostly to herself, and when she does talk, it's usually more of the sinister monologue variety or cryptically telling me I've got 'guests'.

MARTIN

(Crosstalk with 'variety') Ah.

Er, yeah, that sounds familiar.

ARCHIVIST

I'm trying to be less cryptic.

MARTIN

I-I know, I know.

MIKAELE

So what's it like out there? I assume the Archivist must be a rather powerful position, since you seem to be travelling through it pretty freely.

ARCHIVIST

It's a... uh... um...

MARTIN

John?

ARCHIVIST

Sorry I just, ah... Hmm.

MARTIN

I-It's bad. Really bad. It's all carved up between the powers, and everyone has just been sort of, scooped up, and chunked into their deepest fears. It's just- it's just nightmare after nightmare after nightmare, and, er...

Why are you smiling?

MIKAELE

I'm sorry, you're quite right – it's inappropriate. It's simply... I have spent the last decade preparing for this to happen. Not just something like this, but almost exactly this situation. There was every chance, in fact the great likelihood, that I was wasting my time, and throwing away years of my life on a ridiculous precaution. But I was right. I. Was. Right.

And now here I am, safe, warm and comfortable while out there the whole world screams. I don't mean to be sound... a-as if I'm happy that people are suffering—

MARTIN

Good, 'cause it does sound a bit like that.

MIKAELE

Then I apologise. I'm just not sure I can fully communicate the sense of... of *vindication* that I feel — all those long nights I spent wondering if I was paranoid or overreacting... But no. I am here. And I am safe.

MARTIN

(Sighs) I mean... I guess that makes sense?

MIKAELE

So what of you two? What... Wh-Where are you going? You seem to be travelling with some purpose.

ARCHIVIST

Did Annabelle not tell you that?

MIKAELE

She said you were travelling to the Tower. The Panopticon, she called it, whatever that might be. She didn't say what for.

(Suspiciously) Nothing that might cause me trouble, I hope?

MARTIN

We're going to try and end this. Turn the world back.

ARCHIVIST

Martin!

MARTIN

What? Okay. Maybe he can help. We could use some support. And it's, it's not like he wants the world to stay like this either.

MIKAELE

You are right, to a point. I would welcome a return to the real world. Ha! To be the only man to weather the greatest disaster in history of reality utterly unharmed. What an achievement that would be, quite the boast. But alas no, I can't help you.

MARTIN

What? Why not?

MIKAELE

I have nothing to offer. Well, except perhaps some... basic provisions — I have food, drink, a few luxuries. But none of that would help you out there and I'm certainly not going to follow you. No, I think the best thing I can do is to welcome you to stay in my sanctuary as long as you wish.

MARTIN

Oh, well, thank you. I think we just might. John?

ARCHIVIST

I can't use my powers here. I-I can't protect us.

MARTIN

Protect us from what?

ARCHIVIST

I-It's going to be difficult to relax with a spider lurking around.

MIKAELE

It gets easier with practice.

(Beat)

ARCHIVIST

Alright, I-I guess we can stay. Just for a bit.

MIKAELE

Excellent! I haven't had guests since the world ended!

ARCHIVIST

(Flat) Lovely.

MIKAELE

Oh saying that, I suppose there was that insect thing that stumbled in here a month or so back...

MARTIN

Er, ah, insect thing?

MIKAELE

Some creature of the Crawling Rot. Anyway, it didn't actually make it into the house before Annabelle managed to get rid of it, so I refuse to count it as a guest.

MARTIN

Mmm.

ARCHIVIST

I suppose that makes sense.

MIKAELE

Of course, I can't actually stop things crossing the border into my hideaway, as *you* both discovered. Another reason I'm content to leave Annabelle to whatever schemes she might be weaving.

ARCHIVIST

How big is your safe zone? Is it, is it always the same size? How did this happen?

MIKAELE

(Chuckling) Look at him. Not three days without his master spooning knowledge into his head, and he can't bear it! I thought ignorance was meant to be bliss.

(Sighs from Martin and the Archivist)

MARTIN

F-F-For what it's worth, I'd also quite like to know how this all happened?

MIKAELE

Fine, I'll tell you how it happened. But you must sit *quietly* while I tell you.

MARTIN

Don't worry, I have had *lots* of practice.

(Beat)

MIKAELE

And you?

(Sound of a disgruntled Archivist)

MARTIN

He'll behave.

[The ambient sounds in the room continue]

MIKAELE

My story is not a long one. Not the parts that you care about, at least. The powers I first learned about from Jurgen Leitner. You're familiar with him? Then I don't need to explain further. When I say I was one of his assistants, you know exactly the kind of education that would be. Terrifying, fascinating, misguided. The man was a genius and an idiot. It didn't take me long to see what he was blind to his whole life: that trying to control the Fears was a good way to get yourself killed, or worse.

I left long before he got what was coming to him, and tried to forget what I knew. I lived my life, and I lived it well, successful, wealthy, and a little bit feared. Smuggler to the rich and famous. There wasn't an art dealer or curator out there who didn't pretend not to know me. But the trouble is, once you've seen backstage, it's hard to believe in the show anymore. You understand, I'm sure. You can never quite shake off the desire to have a peek. To see what's waiting in the wings.

When I first stumbled across one of the cursed objects, I recognised what it was immediately. It took the form of a leather pouch, filled with 1888 Morgan silver dollars. It was aligned to The Slaughter and... well, let us call it 'blood money' and talk no more of the grisly details. Selling them, well, it went very badly for the buyer...

But not for me. I walked away unharmed, and with a healthy profit and counted myself lucky. And then it happened again — this time it was a painting: a drab English pastoral that pulled you into The Lonely. Again, I made a lot of money and remained untouched. It's the sort of thing to set a man thinking about his life, you understand?

I began to think hard about the world, about my place within it, and about fear. About the figure of the merchant, the trader who deals in strange and dangerous goods, how it can be found in so many myths and fables, dealing in second-hand nightmares. And how rarely the merchant themselves is ever punished in those stories.

I would love to pretend that it was out of self-preservation that I committed to my new trade, but that would be mostly a lie. To tell you the truth, I got a real kick out of playing my role. To think of myself as a purveyor of curses, walking softly through the most dangerous edges of reality so that the rich and

arrogant could buy their own doom. Sometimes people would come to me for solutions, protections or talismans to ward off the attention they had already called down on themselves. I sometimes did what I could to help, but I had to be careful. I could never afford to forget who I actually was working for. And do you know what? I managed to walk that tightrope for decades without falling. You know, I think there were times when I was perhaps skirting close to The Stranger, but I kept my name prominent and, well... **(chuckles)** I'm not exactly a small personality. Anonymity just wouldn't have suited me.

But the years, they wear on you, and as I talked to more and more people versed in that secret world, more acolytes and would-be cultists about rituals and destinies, I began to come to a conclusion. As the number of people in the world grew, and the amount of fear grew with it, I began to become convinced that it was only a matter of time before one of them succeeded. Before the world was transformed into... Well, you'd know better than me.

So I began to plan for my... retirement. I spent most of my fortune preparing. Some on supplies, but mostly hunting down an artifact that I hoped might give me some... protection. One I had sold right at the start of my career: an old broken camera. One that through some *quirk* had the ability to hide you from the Powers. It was in the possession of another scared old man, one who had long been running from his own supernatural debts. I believe it operates as a sort of, er, battery, charging itself on all the quiet worries that come from living in hiding, and then when the sanctuary collapses, all that fear flows out at once. No doubt if my oasis breaks before I die, The Eye will get quite the feast from me, but in this new world I would hope it has other things to keep itself busy. Anyway, it took a lot of resources to find it again, and even more to

retrieve it. Staging my death was a comparative, erm, afterthought, in some ways just, just a happy accident.

And so I waited, and lived out my days in comfort. For the longest time I thought that, well, maybe I had simply entered normal retirement really dramatically. But then... well... I was right. I. Was. Right. Both about the world and about the camera — it hid me from The Eye which, in the new order of reality, also protects where I am from the hellscape all around us. And when I realised that the power moves with the camera — well, hmph, let's just say I loaded up a truckload of supplies, and went on some journeys of my own, before I found *this* place.

[Mikaela adds more ice to his glass]

No reason to not live the Apocalypse in style.

[He takes a sip of drink]

In the end I find myself quite happy. I have supplies for a good few years, and then I plan to take my own life. I think perhaps that's the greatest blessing the camera can bestow. I. Can. Die. Here. Escape this place. Not yet, of course, and maybe the wine will do me in before I have to take matters into my own hands, but still, it remains a comfort.

Anyway, no more stories, I think. Let us relax, and talk and drink. And not worry about who might be... listening.

[Tape clicks off]

[Tape clicks on]

[Bag-packing noises inside an otherwise quiet room]

MARTIN

You're sure we can't stay longer?

ARCHIVIST

Yes. I-I-I've been...um... Er, these last few days I-I've been getting weaker. Dizzy spells, vagueness. You've seen it.

Being cut off from the Eye... It's not good for me.

MARTIN

Yeah, but if, if you're that connected, that *dependent*, what happens if we actually, y'know, *do* manage to—

ARCHIVIST

We'll cross that bridge when we come to it. For now, I just need us to be moving on.

MARTIN

Mm.

[Footsteps, and a door creak]

ANNABELLE

All packed?

ARCHIVIST

Mm.

MARTIN

Oh! Finally showing your face?

ANNABELLE

I'm sure I don't know what you mean.

MARTIN

Pffft. All week you scuttle around with... with food and drinks and all that other stuff, whatever we need and just when we need it, but if we actually try to *talk* to you, you're gone.

ANNABELLE

(Smilingly) I'm very busy.

ARCHIVIST

Martin, don't bother; we're-we're not going to get any answers out of her.

MARTIN

Y-You're joking right? She's been lurking at the edges of this whole thing since the beginning, and now we can finally actually talk to her, and, what, you're just going to pass? You don't have *any* questions? Nothing at all?

...John? John!

[Martin clicks his fingers in front of the Archivist]

ARCHIVIST

(Distant) Wha... Oh, yes... sorry.

Look, it's no accident we finally meet face-to-face in the one place I-I **can't** get any answers out of her.

ANNABELLE

(Smug) I'm sure I don't know what you mean.

MARTIN

Why are you here? Hmmm? What's your game?

ANNABELLE

Perhaps I just value my privacy.

MARTIN

Fine, fine. Why did you *call* me before?

ANNABELLE

Perhaps I thought you could use a friendly voice?

MARTIN

Friendly!? You told me John didn't need me!

ANNABELLE

Objectively true. And more importantly, perhaps I thought that you might need a little bit of righteous indignation to help you power through the next steps.

MARTIN

I don't like being manipulated.

ANNABELLE

Then we probably aren't going to be friends.

(Sound of frustrated Martin)

For what it's worth, I'm sorry. The call was... clumsy. There are so many things to keep track of at the moment. I must confess it did lack my usual... *nuance*.

ARCHIVIST

And perhaps you're now just trying to humanise yourself so we underestimate your next move.

ANNABELLE

Perhaps.

(Beat)

MARTIN

So...So that's it, then? We-We're just going to leave her here?

ARCHIVIST

Yes.

MARTIN

We could *make* her tell us.

ARCHIVIST

No, we couldn't. I don't have my powers, and if it came to a physical fight I really don't rate our chances.

MARTIN

Hey, I can handle myself!

ANNABELLE

But can you handle me?

(Beat)

MARTIN

I don't like you.

ANNABELLE

I know.

MARTIN

God... F-Fine. Fine!

[Backpack is grabbed]

MARTIN (CONT'D)

Come on, John.

ARCHIVIST

(Vague) Oh... I'm sorry, what?

MARTIN

We're leaving.

ANNABELLE

Don't worry, Martin. We'll meet again. Hopefully when you're feeling a little bit more... open-minded.

MARTIN

I wouldn't count on it.

ANNABELLE

I would.

(Martin exasperated sigh)

ARCHIVIST

(Vague) That's the trouble with old houses, I suppose. Full of spiders.

ANNABELLE

You boys better take care of yourselves. I'm sure we'll see each other again very soon. Here, why don't I show you out.

ARCHIVIST

Fine.

[Footsteps proceed through the hallways and doors of the country house]

[A door creaks open, followed by faint sounds of opera]

MIKAELE

Ah, you are off, then?

ARCHIVIST

Yes, uh...

MARTIN

Thank you, for all your hospitality.

MIKAELE

You are sure you won't stay a little longer? You're more than welcome.

ARCHIVIST

No. I... uh... I got to, um, leave.

MARTIN

What he said.

MIKAELE

Ah, such a shame. And you're sure I can't give you a little something for the road? Food? Wine?

MARTIN

Ah, no, thank you. Ah, **(sighs)** nice things they... tend not to stay nice out there.

MIKAELE

Huh, true enough. Well, best of luck I suppose. And if in the end, you can't save the world... you know where I am.

ANNABELLE

(Smiling) Actually, he doesn't.

(Mikaela chuckles)

MIKAELE

Ah, of course. What a shame. Well, then I guess it really is goodbye. Travel well. Don't be Strangers!

(Mikaela chuckles, lower and more dark)

MARTIN

Hah... Yeah, ah, come on, John. Let's go.

ARCHIVIST

Mm? What? Oh, yes, r-right. Yes.

[Footsteps walk off]

[Tape clicks off]

[Tape clicks on]

[A wasteland wind swirls with the sound of distant distorted howls]

MARTIN

Feeling better?

ARCHIVIST

Um... yeah. I'm afraid I am.

MARTIN

Alright.

ARCHIVIST

I'm sorry. It would have been nice to stay.

MARTIN

(Wistfully) Yeah.

I'd almost forgotten what it was like, you know? A bit of peace.

ARCHIVIST

I mean, you could have—

MARTIN

No, don't say it, John. You know I never would. I c-can't just forget about all the people out here. Besides, I'd rather be trapped in a post-apocalyptic wasteland with you than spend one more moment in paradise with her.

ARCHIVIST

(Chuckling) That might just be the nicest thing you've ever said to me.

MARTIN

Yeah, yeah. Come on. We've got a job to do.

ARCHIVIST

I suppose we do.

[Footsteps head off across soft gritty ground]

[Quiet hissing static starts]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Ah. Pity.

MARTIN

What?

ARCHIVIST

It's, ah... it's going away. That peace, the-the safety, the memory of ignorance...

[Quiet hissing static ends]

MARTIN

That's... Yeah, I guess that makes sense. Do you remember any of it? W-What Salesa said? Annabelle?

ARCHIVIST

Some, I think. It's, uh... Do you mind filling me in?

MARTIN

Wait, you need *me* to tell *you* something for once?

ARCHIVIST

I guess so. It's, ah... It's gone. Like a dream.

What was it like?

(Beat)

MARTIN

Nice. It was... It was really nice.

[Tape clicks off]

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Outro]

JONATHAN SIMS

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