

MAG – 143 – Heart of Darkness

Content Warnings:

- Gun shots
- Human sacrifice

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro]

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Rusty Quill presents: The Magnus Archives. Episode one hundred and forty-three. Heart of Darkness.

[Tape clicks on. A door opens and a torch is switched on.]

BASIRA

You're sure it's this one?

ARCHIVIST

Yeah. Tape recorder thinks so too.

BASIRA

Right. Something's coming then?

ARCHIVIST

Could be.

BASIRA

No windows. Guess that makes sense. We still alone?

ARCHIVIST

I never said we were. Just said I couldn't see anybody.

BASIRA

Oh, I thought you meant, like, *see see*.

ARCHIVIST

Uh, no.

BASIRA

We need to figure out proper terms for this stu— What are you doing?

ARCHIVIST

Closing the door?

BASIRA

Leave it open. We want as much light as possible, and I'm not seeing any bulbs.

ARCHIVIST

Right.

[A second torch is switched on.]

BASIRA

Eyes peeled.

ARCHIVIST

Was that a joke?

BASIRA

Yeah.

Any clue where everyone is?

ARCHIVIST

Your guess is as good as mine.

BASIRA

Well, my guess is an ambush.

ARCHIVIST

I don't know. Everyone back at the research base seemed pretty sure this place was empty.

BASIRA

And you believe them?

ARCHIVIST

They weren't lying.

BASIRA

Wait, you did your ...

ARCHIVIST

Oh, yeah, I don't think they noticed.

BASIRA

So they were serious? It's been empty for, what, a year?

ARCHIVIST

Bit more. As far as they knew, anyway.

BASIRA

So what? This was another waste of time? No church. No Dark Sun. I'm going to kill that son of a bitch.

ARCHIVIST

No, I ... I think it's here. I can feel it, like a hole in my mind.

BASIRA

They just left it here?

ARCHIVIST

I ... Maybe. Kind of wish Daisy was here.

...

Basira?

BASIRA

Yeah.

ARCHIVIST

Sorry, I know this isn't— Behind you!

BASIRA

Down!

[A gun is fired, glass shatters, followed by a scream and a thud]

MANUELA

Ah!

BASIRA

Don't move!

(Manuela spits at Basira.)

ARCHIVIST

Oh, charming.

BASIRA

Who are you?

(Manuela snarls at Basira.)

John?

ARCHIVIST

(Compelling) Who are you?

MANUELA

(Pained) Manuela. Manuela Dominguez.

BASIRA

Where is everybody?

MANUELA

Go to hell.

ARCHIVIST

(Compelling) Answer her.

MANUELA

They're dead, because of you.

ARCHIVIST

Me?

BASIRA

What did you do?

ARCHIVIST

Nothing, I don't think!

MANUELA

Your Institute. So, she sent you to finish the job?

BASIRA

Who?

MANUELA

Your Archivist, Gertrude Robinson.

ARCHIVIST

Gertrude?

BASIRA

This doesn't make sense.

ARCHIVIST

(Compelling) What happened?

MANUELA

Don't ... Don't make me. Please.

ARCHIVIST

(Compelling) Tell me.

MANUELA (STATEMENT)

Fine ... And what do you wish to hear? Shall I tell you of the decades of preparation, the long wait for the eclipse, three hundred years from the failure that birthed the thing that preached from the depths of Maxwell Rayner? The sacrifices made to birth the dark star that would make it all possible? It was to be a week of night and horror, culminating in the eclipse that passed over Ny-Ålesund on the 20th March 2015, almost 300 years after Halley's eclipse passed over London. We had hundreds of sacrifices prepared and ready, plunged into darkness and terror for days on end, all prepared to culminate in the unveiling of that point of purest night at the moment of the eclipse's height. It would open the door to a world of true and holy darkness, extinguish the sun and take us to a place where we would be redeemed of our base and corrupt need for light and warmth.

Maxwell was here, with me, prepared for our moment of triumph, and our churches around the world were ready, in those lost and forgotten places of worship shut up and left in shadow. Hither Green was, I believe, where *your* institute was watching, but Natalie's efforts were a small and meagre part of the greater effort. When they collapsed, it was as nothing to the grand ritual, though perhaps we should have seen it as the first sign of what was happening. But we had no idea.

To begin our seven-day feast, we slew the still and lightless beast and drank of its stagnant blood, submerging the first of the sacrifices in the brackish water it had blessed with its stillness. Maxwell plunged its claws into his chest, freeing the darkness within him, and we waited, and we sang, and we exalted in divine stillness. The darkness was beyond anything that could be imagined, and even in my wildest experimentations in the void of space, I could not have believed such a peace was possible as I felt in the quiet whimpering terror of that place. The sky was light, but we were well protected, and we knew that when the sun was swallowed in eclipse the darkness would be complete.

We believed it far too late for anyone to stop us, and the crude methods of your Archivist least of all. The death of a few have never been more than an inconvenience, and that's all she was ever really capable of. You were not the first to try and stop us, you know, not even within living memory. I was but newly joined when Lynette fled the church and Maxwell had her silenced, but I remember her brute of a husband. He fed the beast for us, you know, when first he believed Lynette might still be saved, then later we faithful served as his fuel to banish it. But not for long. That's the thing about darkness, isn't it? You try your hardest to eradicate, flood your surroundings with light, but it's always there at the edges, waiting for the glow to weaken, to return and cover

you forever. Robert Montauk discovered that the hard way, and someday, so will your Gertrude.

But we got so close. We touched it. There is another world, a world of still and quiet darkness, where no heat touches and death cannot find you. You might wander beneath that empty sky of void forever and never see a light to guide your way. No left, no right, no up or down, only forward into the crowded, shivering gloom. For that night is not empty, far from it. Things move there: the sounds of shuffling, scuttling, crawling. A scream. The fall of gentle stagnant raindrops that chills you as you try desperately to know if that is the sound of the storm or something out there? It is a world of the fear of darkness, and as I began to see it, I felt again that celestial terror that had not gripped my heart since first I gazed upon the pitch-black sun that I had created. The scream was mine and it was joined by uncounted voices in fearful song. I was complete. It was so very close.

We were to slice a hole in the world, and this paradise would flow through the wound like ink, smothering the sun and all its children. Maxwell had always had the visions, the drive. Whatever was inside him pulled him to this end, to this great undertaking, like a magnet, and I was so very honoured to be his right hand. Natalie and the others followed, but they did not truly understand, with their talk of peace and unity and “Mr Pitch” – a friendly name to try and hide from a concept they couldn't grasp. Vardan Darvish had an inkling, I thought, but he crossed a Montauk, which has, traditionally, gone poorly for us. But as the hours turned into days and the final dusk got closer, it seemed as though all the uncertainty was washed away.

I don't know exactly when it all started to come undone. I think Maxwell first felt the ripples four days before the eclipse was due. It was strange, like a

pause in the hysterical whimpering and fruitless prayers of the sacrifices and a ripple that was felt through the waters and the stagnant blood that bound us. A disruption. We would later learn that this was the collapse of the ritual at Hither Green, but it was only the first. Our congregation in Alaska disappeared the next day, and Russia as well. One by one, it seemed our scattered whisperers of night were falling, and holding it together, keeping the lightless world anchored to our star, bringing it closer, was becoming an almost unbearable strain on Maxwell. I helped as I could, but without knowing what was happening there was little I could do to stabilise it. I began to drown the sacrifices, too soon, perhaps, but it worked to keep it going and keep it together. Until at last, we felt it: the eclipse.

We had been worshipping in the deepest dark, and yet when it crossed the sun, I felt it roll over us like a cooling balm on a summer's day, plunging us into a deep, black void far more complete than I can ever convey with mere words. It was more than beautiful; it was divine. And as we unveiled our new and absent son, the sacrifices who remained screamed and fell in holy agonies, and the world of endless night we had been promised began to pour in, shining out and all around us. It touched and caressed our souls with the soothing fears of night, and I heard Maxwell weeping with joy at what we had done.

And then ... it stopped. It just stopped. All at once, that loving embrace was stripped from us, and it began to retreat, to recede back into the place that it had come from. We were so close. We were so close. I heard Maxwell cry out, scrambling desperately to the Dark Sun, stopping just short of touching it, but it was too late. Whatever it was that you and your Archivist did, it clearly worked. We left, half of us dead and the other half destroyed by coming so close to the true essence and being denied. In my most wretched hours, I

wonder, “Perhaps it was us? Perhaps we simply lacked faith: we weren’t worthy; the world wasn’t worthy.” But no, we were ready. We had earned our dark rapture, and we were robbed.

I don’t know how long we waited after that. It was weeks before anyone spoke. And then, when they did, the arguments began, the recriminations, the desperate resolutions to try again, to find what went wrong. But I could see in his eyes that Maxwell was so very tired, and all the words fell to nothing. Instead we began the search for his successor, a new host for his continuation. He would regain his strength and we would plan our next move. It was difficult, though; the approaching culmination had meant Maxwell had not prepared another host, and the search for another vessel was long and involved. Finally, about 18 months ago, we found one – a child whose father had, by coincidence, been directly marked by the dark. It was a desperate plan, but we were desperate, a shadow of what we had been. Maxwell left me here to guard the black sun, and everyone else left to help in his rebirth.

But it didn’t work, did it? I can only assume we were too weak to hide from you and you struck when Maxwell was vulnerable. For the first six months, I let myself hope that my suspicions were unfounded, that the silence I felt was simply him lying low, recovering before returning to his abandoned disciple. But no. Soon enough, I could no longer fool myself. He had been slain and I was alone, and here I have remained. Perhaps I have told myself that I am preparing, gathering my own strength and making my plans to continue the church in his name, but I think in my heart I have been waiting for this moment, for the final axe to fall and finish the last remnant of our holy crusade. And here, at last, you are.

MANUELA

There. Now you can kill me like the others.

BASIRA

She telling the truth?

ARCHIVIST

Yeah, I mean, unless she can lie to me somehow. You said it wasn't the eclipse.

BASIRA

It's not the time.

ARCHIVIST

Well, she believes it, at least. This doesn't make any sense.

MANUELA

Well, where is she? Afraid to face what she's done?

BASIRA

Just shut up.

MANUELA

Hm, coward. So, how did she do it? It's been three years, waiting, guarding this place without hope. At least do me the courtesy of telling me how she collapsed our moment of triumph.

ARCHIVIST

You really don't know, do you?

MANUELA

Know what?

ARCHIVIST

Gertrude's dead. She died right around the time of your ritual.

MANUELA

Ha, so stopping us took everything she had.

BASIRA

You wish. She was murdered. Unrelated, as far as we can tell.

MANUELA

That's ... I ... Then why are you here? Maxwell is dead. The ritual failed. What's left?

ARCHIVIST

A good question.

Basira?

BASIRA

You said the Dark Sun was still here.

MANUELA

(Snorts) Fine. If you're so keen to take everything, undo the work of centuries, it's just through that door.

[Footsteps]

BASIRA

John?

ARCHIVIST

(Compelling) How dangerous is it?

MANUELA

Only myself, Maxwell and Natalie could even look upon it. It will annihilate you both in an instant.

BASIRA

Ask her how we can destroy it.

ARCHIVIST

I know how. I just need to see it.

BASIRA

See, as in ...

ARCHIVIST

As in, actually see it.

MANUELA

Go ahead. Just try.

BASIRA

Look, it's alright, John. No-one else knows it's here, and if we just leave it, no-one will know.

ARCHIVIST

No, I'm doing this. Get out.

[Static can be heard, growing louder]

It's ... beautiful.

MANUELA

(Gasps) No!

[The static suddenly stops]

BASIRA

John!

ARCHIVIST

No, I— I'm okay.

[Smashing glass, then footsteps running]

BASIRA

Get down!

[Two gunshots]

ARCHIVIST

Basira?

BASIRA

I'm alright. Just, just one second. Stay here.

[Footsteps run off]

ARCHIVIST

Look, I'm okay.

I can help.

(The Archivist exhales.)

[Static rises and a door creaks open]

ARCHIVIST

Did you catch her?

HELEN

Yes.

(The Archivist gasps.)

HELEN

She needed a door.

ARCHIVIST

H-how did you—

HELEN

Oh, finding this place was easy without the darkness.

ARCHIVIST

Will she be coming back?

HELEN

No. Uh, this one I think I'll keep.

ARCHIVIST

I— Why are you here?

HELEN

I told you, I've decided to help. I thought you might like a way home.

ARCHIVIST

Another door?

HELEN

If you want it.

...

How was it, looking upon The Dark?

ARCHIVIST

I thought I was going to die.

HELEN

You seem to think that a lot. I remember when you thought you were going to die at my threshold.

ARCHIVIST

Yeah.

HELEN

Go find your Basira, then let's get you both home.

[Tape clicks off.]

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Today's episode was written by Jonathan Sims and directed by Alexander J Newall.

It featured: Jonathan Sims as the Archivist, Frank Voss as Basira Hussain, Layla Mannings as Manuela Dominguez, and Imogen Harris as Helen.