

MAG – 123 – Web Development

Content Warnings:

- Body horror
- Spiders
- Insect infestation
- Direct violence
- Extreme aggression
- Emotional trauma
- Grief

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

Rusty Quill presents The Magnus Archives. Episode one hundred and twenty-three. Web Development.

[Tape clicks on.]

(The Archivist is sighing and mumbling to himself, searching his office)

ARCHIVIST

Right, where did the— “A coma? Great! Let’s rearrange his office! Sleeping people don’t need pens.”

[Brief sound of something squelching.]

Urgh. Urgh, what...?

[Sounds of movement outside. Door opens]

[The Archivist & Melanie's subsequent conversation takes place in the corridor and is somewhat distant to the recorder]

ARCHIVIST

Melanie! It'd be good to, uh... Melanie? Are you al—

[Something ceramic crashes and smashes]

Woah! Woah!

MELANIE

(Snarling) Get away from me!

ARCHIVIST

Melanie, it's, it's me.

MELANIE

No, no, no.

ARCHIVIST

Look. No, I-I-I-I-I'm back.

MELANIE

Oh, oh, yeah? Back to your happy little family!

ARCHIVIST

What? No, I, I didn't mean—

MELANIE

How'd you make it out, then, hm?

ARCHIVIST

What?

MELANIE

Tim is dead! Daisy is dead! And you? What, you're just fine?!

ARCHIVIST

Wha— No, I've been in hospital for six months!

MELANIE

Something has been in hospital. Something that's got your face. I, I warned Basira! I said not to let you back in here, but she just doesn't listen!

ARCHIVIST

(Calming) Melanie, Melanie... it's me.

MELANIE

Oh, okay. So what? Hi John, how are you? Get anyone killed lately?

ARCHIVIST

I... I...

MELANIE

(Aggrieved) Wipe that look off your face. Like you're not the reason all of this is happening. Like you're any better than, than him.

ARCHIVIST

(The Archivist burbles for a few moments) But Basira said Elias was gone.

MELANIE

Oh, gone? Right, yes, yes. He's... he's 'gone'. Like that makes any difference.

ARCHIVIST

I don't understand.

MELANIE

No, you don't, do you? **He's** still alive. **You** are still alive! So this place is still...

(Inarticulate sounds of Melanie's rage)

ARCHIVIST

Melanie! Melanie, this isn't you.

MELANIE

(Snarled) Back! Off!

[Fist connects solidly]

You don't know me! And I don't know you. So stay the hell away from me or I swear I'll—

ARCHIVIST

Okay... okay.

[Melanie leaves]

I-I'm sorry.

[Tape clicks off. Tape clicks on]

ARCHIVIST

She nearly attacked me, Basira! I mean, I know me and Melanie haven't always seen eye to eye before, but... Christ!

BASIRA

Yeah, I did warn you. She's not, uh, she's not been having a good time.

ARCHIVIST

Mmm! Yes, I did get that impression.

(Sighs) Elias is gone. I thought— I mean, wasn't that supposed to be... **it?** But she is still—

BASIRA

It's not that simple.

ARCHIVIST

She needs help, Basira. God, it didn't even get that bad with... Even Tim never threatened me, not like that.

BASIRA

Right, just back off. You haven't been here.

ARCHIVIST

O-okay. You're right. I haven't, so explain it to me.

BASIRA

(Long sigh) Alright. Best I can understand it, Beholding or The Eye or whatever you want to call it, we're one of the only powers that hasn't actually taken a shot at a ritual. Yet. And everything out there knows it.

ARCHIVIST

No, I mean, we... we can't be the only ones, surely?

BASIRA

I don't know. Probably not.

But we made a big noise with the Unknowing, and... other stuff... and now they've taken notice. We're safe in here. Usually. But we don't go out much anymore.

ARCHIVIST

"Usually"?

BASIRA

Yeah.

ARCHIVIST

You were attacked. When?

BASIRA

About two months ago. It was, uh... It was The Flesh.

ARCHIVIST

Oh God.

BASIRA

Yeah. It was bad. We took them all out. Melanie did most of them. She was...
She got a knife from somewhere and—

ARCHIVIST

Basira, I... I don't know if that's a good sign.

BASIRA

She saved my life, John. She saved all of us. I won't forget that.

ARCHIVIST

Fine. Fine.

Haven't seen Martin about yet?

BASIRA

Yeah, he comes and goes. He's busy. Well, he seems it.

ARCHIVIST

Working for Peter Lukas.

BASIRA

Don't be too hard on him, John. Your, uh, 'situation', it hit him. Hard.

ARCHIVIST

(Sighs) Yes, well, I'm sure there are better ways to deal with it than getting cosy with Elias' successor. Who I've yet to meet, by the way.

BASIRA

(Small laugh) Join the club.

ARCHIVIST

Sorry, you haven't—

BASIRA

Nope. Never seen him. Far as I can tell, Martin's the only one who has.

ARCHIVIST

Right. A-And you're sure he's... real?

BASIRA

We get emails from him. Memos.

(Archivist chuckles in disbelief)

BASIRA (Continued)

He's been restructuring, separating out the departments a bit. Not a surprise, I guess, with his pedigree.

ARCHIVIST

But i-if you never see him, I mean...

BASIRA

Rumour is a couple of researchers up on the third floor decided to ignore some of his new directives, and... whoosh.

ARCHIVIST

Sorry, what's, "whoosh"?

BASIRA

Whoosh. Gone.

ARCHIVIST

Oh. **(Chuckles bitterly)** The more things change... So, we're under siege, Melanie is aggressively unstable, Martin is working very closely with The Lonely, who is, predictably enough, isolating him. And, oh yes, uh, Tim and Daisy are still dead, which is at least easy to keep track of.

BASIRA

That isn't funny, John.

ARCHIVIST

(Snapping) I know it's not—

Sorry. It's just— It's a lot.

And we've got an audience. Perfect. I thought you said you'd decided to throw them all out?

BASIRA

Yup. And I did. And here's another one.

ARCHIVIST

Maybe it's hungry?

BASIRA

Seriously?

ARCHIVIST

I mean, I did have a statement I was planning to record.

BASIRA

Great. Perfect. You can get on with that and I'll just leave, then.

ARCHIVIST

Right, uh, what do I do if Melanie comes back?

BASIRA

I don't know. Play dead?

[Door opens]

ARCHIVIST

Right.

[Door closes]

(Softly) Thank you.

[Papers rustle]

Statement of Angie Santos, regarding a website developed by one Gregory Cox. Original statement given 1st August 2015. Audio recording by Jonathan Sims, the Archivist.

Statement begins.

ARCHIVIST (STATEMENT)

Okay, for this to make any real kind of sense, you sort of need to know Greg, or at least understand how he works. Don't misunderstand me, please, I'm very fond of the man, but I have never in my life encountered anyone quite so passive, so willing to go along with whatever situation he finds himself in. No matter how awkward or uncomfortable he might be, he just seems to accept his position.

Actually, now I think about it, it's more that his being uncomfortable actually makes him more likely to dig in, to double down on whatever's happening, as if increasing his investment in a thing will somehow make it easier to endure.

To give you an example, I first met him about seven years ago, when he was twenty-six. At that point, he'd just got out of his first real relationship, and it was one that had lasted nearly a decade, but to hear him talk about it, it sounded like he'd never actually been happy. I mean, it didn't even sound like happiness was a consideration for him when thinking about it. For the last four years of the relationship, she had just treated him worse and worse, taken

more and more liberties and he'd just tried to shrug it off. He still does. He wasn't even the one to end things – she'd found herself a rich, older guy fresh from a divorce and just disappeared, something Greg once described as, "fair enough, I suppose".

Oh, as another example, when I was first getting to know Greg, I went for a drink with him that I mistakenly thought was romantic. I mean, he's not a bad looking guy, but he'd intended the evening as purely platonic. Do you know how long we 'dated' before I realised what had happened and actually pressed him on the whole misunderstanding? Two months. Sometimes I think if I'd just been a little bit more oblivious, we'd be married by now.

Anyway, all this is to try and explain why, when it started to get really weird, Greg didn't just quit the job. I mean, it's a freelance web project, and from what he's said it doesn't even pay very well. He wouldn't be breaking any contract, and the client hardly ever even gets in touch. There is no reason that he couldn't just walk away, but I honestly don't think he ever will. And I really don't know how it's going to end for him.

I knew it was going to be bad as soon as he started telling me about it. I mean, Greg doesn't really talk about work unless something's gone badly, and he wants to not listen to me tell him to drop whatever project he's locked himself into. And this job was red flags all the way down. An email out of the blue from what looked like a personal address, rather than a business one. Vague, occasionally contradictory descriptions of what they actually wanted the site to do. I mean, even the email was a bit strange: not the broken or algorithmic English I'd have expected – the short message was quite well composed – but for some reason something in it caused the font to appear incredibly large, and

Greg had had to scroll through almost word by word. None of it was exactly what you'd call a good sign.

But, Greg being Greg, he was taking a train down to Guildford before you know it to meet the client in person in a small coffee shop just off the high street. As he told it, she was young, rail thin underneath an oversized, brown hoodie, which she kept pulled up, trying to cover up a network of pale stitches that stretched over one side of her head. She didn't say much, other than to briefly outline the job.

She wanted a forum made, though she couldn't seem to explain exactly what audience or topic she wanted it to be targeted towards, or why she couldn't use any of the countless online services that specifically made and adminned forums. She just mumbled something about custom requirements and told Greg to drink his latte. Which he did, so he tells me, though he can't stand milk in his coffee. All through it, she just kept staring at him, hands pressed into the pockets of her hoodie, occasionally pushing long, spindly fingers out against the fabric, smiling to herself.

I haven't given the name of this mystery client, because, to be honest, Greg's never told me. I've asked him, plenty of times, but whenever I do, he gives me this surprised look, insists he's told me before, and then immediately forgets and changes the subject. I know that's not exactly helpful, but honestly, I'm a bit lost here myself. I mean, none of this feels normal. Some of it doesn't even feel natural. Greg's an odd one, sure, but until recently he's always been very sharp.

This was all about six months ago. He's been working on the website ever since. The actual basic setup took him all of two days, maybe a bit more since

the client insisted on him coding from scratch. It was bare-bones, since he'd been given no copy or indication of how it was to be organised except for the name of the site – Chelicerae – which he made sure stood prominently at the top in a tasteful sans-serif. The client had requested only a single area where threads could be posted, labelled 'Come In'. Of course, there was never anything in there.

The site was called Chelicerae, but the URL, the web address, was nothing like the name, just a long string of letters and numbers with no pattern or reason to them, almost impossible to memorise. Once the site was live, Greg would get an email every few weeks with a new domain name, another long string of gibberish, and he would have to change it all over.

There were other things, though, that the client would email through. Things she insisted were included not on the website itself, but in the code. I'm not really a computer person, but according to Greg they had nothing to do with any coding language he'd ever seen. Meaningless strings of words, or weird little fragments of poetry, or a name, different every time, repeated over and over again, hundreds of times. He tried to explain to her more than once that just pasting these things into the code wouldn't cause them to appear on the page, or have any effect at all, but she insisted, so he did it.

And he'd been doing it ever since. He's on some sort of retainer to 'administrate' the site, and this amounts to changing the domain name every few weeks, checking the statistics that, yes, still no-one has visited, and pasting whatever the latest nonsense the client wants in the code. I'd have said it was good money for doing basically nothing, except that over the last two months it's all started to go really, really weird.

It started with an email he got from a Hotmail address he didn't recognise. The subject line was simply, 'ARE YOU THE CHELICERAE?'. At first, Greg thought his client must have passed his details on, but opening the message, there were just four more words: 'Please make it stop.'

Now, Greg being Greg, he just deleted the message and pretended it didn't bother him, but after he told me about it, I pressed him further, and he admitted that it wasn't the first unsettling email he'd gotten from strangers about the site. He wouldn't tell me the others. He kept insisting I drop it, that it was fine. That I shouldn't worry.

But, of course, I did worry. I knew that secretly he was as well. I started to do a bit of searching online, just to see if there was anything we were missing. And there was. A lot, as it turns out. It didn't take more than an hour or so to discover that Greg had apparently found himself the web administrator for an urban legend. The Chelicerae popped up on the occasional paranormal site or edgy message board, each time accompanied by a now-defunct link. According to those who follow such things, all you had to do was start a new thread as a guest – something that Greg had been instructed to make sure was possible – and the title of that thread should be the name of someone you want dead.

As the stories went, you would receive a reply almost immediately and it would simply ask you for a story. You would have to write out and post, in full, a horrible event that had happened to you or someone that you loved. All the instructions were very clear that the target would only die if the account satisfied the "story-spinner". None of them made any mention of what happened if it did not.

Pretty standard fare spooky stuff. At least, I would have thought so, if it hadn't been for the messages that Greg kept getting. Someone more technically adept than him had clearly found his email associated with the site and had posted about it, so he had become the de facto mailbox for this... forum. Greg swore blind the site had never received any visitors at all, never had a single thing posted in it, but still the emails came: 'Bring them back'; 'What is happening?'; 'I'm sorry I lied'.

It's been getting to him; I know it has. He's lost weight. He rarely goes out anymore and, judging by the cobwebs, he definitely doesn't clean his house like he used to. I've tried talking to him, but it's like talking to a brick wall that refuses to admit it's crumbling. That's why it's me here, rather than him. I mean, I had to talk to someone.

We were walking home from The Cricketers, a pub just off Horsell Birch. We were heading back to his house, since I'd missed my last train and, when that happened, I tended to sleep on his sofa. We were turning down into his road, when there was a small voice from a doorway next to us, asking for help. Now, the last few years there have been a lot more homeless folk around Woking. I know, welcome to Tory Britain, but my point is that Greg usually made a habit of giving whatever change he had left over from the pub to whoever we stumbled across on the way back. So, when we heard this, he turned towards the voice and held out his hand towards the dark, crumpled shape, offering some change.

What grabbed his wrist was not a hand. Not exactly. Not anymore. It was coarse and bony, and covered in fine, sharp hairs. Greg screamed, falling backwards, pulling the figure under the streetlamp, where, for a second, I saw

it more completely than he did. It was definitely human once, at least based on how it was screaming, but it was thin, with bits of it twisted and discoloured, covered in small, scurrying shapes.

Its face was the most human part of it remaining, except for the two black and hollow spaces where its eyes once were. From which now poured an endless stream of scuttling legs and fangs. The mouth was full of them too, but I could see, as they grasped desperately at Greg, it was trying to say, 'I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Tell her I'm sorry.' But words were not what tumbled from those lips.

We ran, of course. The thing was frantic, but clumsy, and it wasn't difficult to get away. I wanted to go to the police, to tell them everything, but Greg refused, of course. He said there must have been some mistake, that it was just 'a tramp with an unfortunate condition', that he wasn't going to bother the police just because we'd had a bit of a shock. I didn't have the energy to argue with him. I still don't, really.

I don't know what to think. Greg's my best friend, but I might have to stop seeing him. He's still working on that site, still updating the domain name, still pasting gibberish into the code. I think he might be a part of something really awful, and I don't know how to make him see that. If I had a little bit more courage, I might just hang around a few message boards I know, waiting for a link to The Chelicerae, waiting to post a name that might end it. I've got a story for it, alright.

But I won't. I'm just too much of a coward, I suppose, so I guess I'm telling it to you instead. For all the good that'll do.

ARCHIVIST

Statement ends.

The Web does seem to have a preference for those who prefer not to assert themselves. The investigation is tricky. I don't want to impose on Basira, and obviously Melanie and... Martin aren't available, but I did do some light searching myself on Gregory Cox. Vanished, unsurprisingly, sometime in late July 2016, which is... two years ago.

That doesn't seem right. It doesn't feel like— There's just this great gap of time where I wasn't. No notes or follow-up here that I can see, just— It looks like the statement came in just after Gertrude 'disappeared'. Another gap, and whoever took it didn't do any follow-up, just filed it away. I may be the first person to actually read it, so... sorry Angie, I suppose.

There's a small supplemental document with it, though, that is a bit alarming. It's apparently a list of people whose names appeared in the various pieces of text Mr Cox was pasting into the code. It's unclear if they were meant to be users or victims, but I cannot help but note that there seem to be the names of several statement givers who found their way to the Institute, including noted arachnophobe Carlos Vittery. Perhaps a coincidence, just people shopping their traumatic event around? But I have to wonder how much their actions were their own.

I have no theories on this, no, no sudden insights. I wish I could talk it through with Martin. Or Tim. Or Sasha. Though we never really did that, did we?

Everything's changed.

(Sighs) Two days out of a coma, and I'm already tired.

End recording.

[Tape clicks off]

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Outro]

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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, and Lydia Nicholas as Melanie King.