

MAG 174 — The Great Beast

Content Warnings

- Insignificance / Diminution
- Arguments
- Body horror
- Falling
- Dissociative amnesia
- SFX of deep impacts, destruction and 'pressure wave' distortions

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

Rusty Quill presents... *The Magnus Archives*. Episode one hundred and seventy-four: "The Great Beast."

[Theme finishes]

[Tape clicks on]

[A blustering wind, swirling with high-pitched whistling that comes
and goes]

[A distant, thunderous earth-quaking boom]

[Hissing static starts]

ARCHIVIST

The shadow falls over everything Mehreen has ever known.

[Hissing static ends]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

When it had first covered her home, bathing the street beyond her window in unexpected shade, she had thought it an eclipse. There wasn't supposed to be one then, she is sure of that, although, if pressed, she could not have told you what day it is today. Before the shadow fell, she is sure that the sun was shining brightly, although, if pressed, she could not have pictured it. And the humid heat of a lingering summer had left the world sleepy and unprepared, although, if pressed, she remembers the heat but not the season.

All told, the time before the sky was covered is hazy to her, but she knows that there was one: A time before something blocked out the Sun.

It moves in shifts as if it is willed, clearly a part of some greater whole. A foot? A hand? Perhaps a single finger. To look up is to see only the smallest fraction of it covering the sky, and half of Mehreen's mind screams at her to get back, to get further away, to get to a distance where perhaps she could see the whole of it. A position where the idea of comprehending what she is looking at isn't some bitter joke. But the other half of her mind whispers the truth: That it is already so far away that to see it in its entirety is impossible. And if she did, she could not understand it.

[A distant, thunderous boom]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

But there is another certainty within her, another piece of terrible knowledge that bubbles up unbidden from somewhere in Mehreen's soul that is no longer hers: It is coming closer. It is descending on her home and everything that she has ever known. And when it arrives, it will not even notice that it has destroyed her. That it has so casually wiped from the world everything that she

will ever know or love. It will crush her home. It will crush her family and her city and her world. The shadow is over everything.

Mehreen gathers her mother, who sits in the kitchen over a pot of sour-smelling tea, berating her that they should have left earlier. She gathers her husband, who snorts in derision and tells her that he's heard that there isn't really any danger at all. She gathers her daughter, who asks with wide eyes and the voice of nervous innocence where they are going. What's going on?

Mehreen cannot quite make out their faces as she bundles them into the car, old and shuddering as it coughs into life. Does she remember having a child? A spouse? Does she remember her mother having such a cruel sneer? It doesn't matter. They are here now, and she has to save them. She cannot leave them to the growing shadow and the thing coming ever-closer.

[A thunderous boom, now closer]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

She starts to drive. The streets are empty, the blank-faced strangers around them frozen, staring to the sky in still and silent expectation. There is no traffic, nothing to stop the laboured grinding of the elderly car as it careens down the street, hunting desperately for the edge of the shadow. Mehreen knows if she can just escape it, find where it ends and the sunlight hits the earth, they can be free. They will not be beneath it when the vast being arrives.

But there is no hope in her for it, no glimmer of optimism as they hurtle down street after street. Only the crushing dread, the leaden knowledge that they started too late, that they're not fast enough, that the shadow reaches a thousand miles in every direction, and they could drive for a month. Have they been driving that long? How many miles have they travelled now? And still

they would never get away, never cross that line from below the shadow into open, sunlit air.

[A thunderous earth-quaking boom, closer]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

The world gets darker, and the thing moves closer. It will be upon them any moment now. The car grinds and crunches somewhere in its engine and rolls to a stop. Mehreen grabs her daughter, now crying with fear and confusion, and begins to run. Where is she running to? It will be upon them all soon, wiping out everything they were or are or will be, rendering their lives an unremembered blip, crushed beneath its unstoppable significance. It is right above them, and it will. Not. Stop.

How long has she been running? Minutes? Days? Her unfamiliar daughter laughs cruelly, carried in Mehreen's exhausted arms. They cannot escape the shadow as their doom gets forever closer.

[A thunderous earth-quaking boom]

[The blustering wind becomes stronger]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Far, infinitely far above her, Edward holds his grip tight. His fingers are white with strain, and his own arms burn and ache deeper than he thought possible. He is interlocked, woven into an unending tapestry of suffering, contorted bodies. The shape that they create is a mystery to him, but as it moves he can feel his own muscles twitch and stretch with those he holds onto, together shifting and pulling and lifting the bulk of the thing of which he is only the tiniest part. Where the impulses come from, he does not know, traveling

through the impossible colossus, rippling down the people who form its bulk. Moving as one. He does not know where in the thing he is, but suspects that it is not too far from the edge, for sometimes he can see something he might almost believe to be sky.

Some part of it hits the ground—

[A thunderous earth-quaking boom]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

—however distantly below him that may be. A foot, perhaps, or a limb of some sort. The shuddering impact of it resonates up through the bodies that surround him, and all at once they cry out in pain. He can hear bones snap and tendons rip as the force of the step sharply shifts the twisted arrangement of human misery.

Edward's own neck is spun, pushed by the shoulder of the woman crushed in behind him, and turned so far to the side that he is sure another millimetre—and it would break entirely. For hours he holds that position, dreading every moment that the next motion of the thing they construct will break him like thin porcelain. And then it comes: Not another stepping impact, for those are rare and ponderous, but the agonized pull of the whole trying to lift itself. Every muscle in every body tenses all at once, and Edward finds himself moving, pushed and squeezed and gasping for space and... free.

Without warning, he finds himself in open air, forced out of the thing like a shoot pushing up through the soil. He takes in a deep breath, his protesting limbs now limp and almost useless, and collapses upon a ground that looks up at him in envy.

No. Not a ground. For it is only now that Edward realizes how thin the air is, how cold it is without the warmth of uncountable bodies surrounding him on all sides.

Behind him he can see the shifting sea of people stretching out forever, but in front of him, a few hundred meters away, there is what appears to be... an edge.

In a place where time has meaning it might be said it takes Edward hours, days to drag himself over the writhing floor. But eventually he finds himself laying upon that horizon, willing himself to look out, over, and down, see where he is. If there is any place to which he might escape.

And so finally, he looks.

**[With a swirl of wind comes the thunderous earth-quaking boom,
loud and clear]**

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

His stomach drops, and his arms seize as he looks upon a hundred miles of slowly-moving humanity down to a stark and barren ground far below. It is so far down that if he climbed for a year he would not reach the end of it.

His tears fall down and away into the open sky. His teeth lock in fear and he begins to try and move backwards, away from the precipice.

But there is a movement. A shift in the people below him as the great beast stretches some part of itself. A wave of spasming limbs passes beneath Edward, and in a moment he is flung, upwards and away, out into the empty air below.

He is falling. He cannot breathe as the air is forced from his lungs and the razor-cold wind lashes at his skin. He is falling. The beast he was once a part of is a blur beside him as he plummets, human forms lost in the strange, moving texture. He is falling, and he is so small and so afraid he wonders if he will ever hit the ground. He does not want to die smeared over that flat and hateful wasteland far below, and he flails, limbs throwing themselves violently around, trying to catch a hold of something, anything to save himself.

Edward feels a hand grip his. The stop is sudden, violent, wrenching his shoulder from its socket with a wet pop. He screams in pain but also in relief as he hangs there, suspended above his fate. Despite his dread, it takes only a moment for him to make his decision. He reaches out with his other arm and feels it gripped by a dozen hands as slowly, inexorably, Edward allows himself to be pulled back into the great, suffering colossus. Far below, there is another impact—

[A thunderous earth-quaking boom]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

—as if something were being stepped on.

[Hissing static starts]

[Tape clicks off]

[Tape clicks on]

[Blustery wind; gritty footsteps as Martin and the Archivist walk]

(Martin makes a small sigh)

MARTIN

(Irritated) Is it much further?

(The Archivist makes an amused exhale)

ARCHIVIST

(Amused) Yes.

(Martin sighs dramatically)

I'm not entirely sure what you were expecting; it's the Vast. The clue is in the name.

MARTIN

Yes, alright.

ARCHIVIST

Just be glad that this is one of the domains that actually has ground to walk on.

MARTIN

Whatever.

(Beat)

[A thunderous earth-quaking boom from some distance away]

MARTIN (CONT'D)

S-so how far are we from the other side? And-and don't say time and space don't work here; that's a cop-out and you know it.

(The Archivist sighs)

ARCHIVIST

Fine. (**smug**) Three days.

MARTIN

(**Immediate**) Thank you!

(**Beat**)

MARTIN

Wait. Wait, what counts as a day?

ARCHIVIST

(**Amused**) What an excellent question.

MARTIN

(**Under breath**) Oh my god— (**normal**) You can be *infuriating* sometimes, you know that?

ARCHIVIST

Yes.

MARTIN

Fine! Fine. How ‘bout Simon, how close are we to him?

ARCHIVIST

[Hissing static starts]

Um... Close, but he's able to move a lot faster than we are in this place.

[Hissing static ends]

MARTIN

Meaning...?

ARCHIVIST

Meaning I know where he is, but, if he doesn't want us to reach him, I don't know if we'll have much of a chance.

MARTIN

So, so what, we're just going to trust him to (**slight laugh**) show up to his own execution—

[Martin is cut off by a fast whooshing sound followed by the sound of brick and rock destruction; this is Simon Fairchild landing at speed in front of them, somewhat explosively]

(Martin and the Archivist give a short yell of surprise)

MARTIN

Jesus!

(A short laugh)

ARCHIVIST

(Surprised) Uh... apparently!

SIMON FAIRCHILD

Hello!

(Simon makes a pained sound)

[The sound of rubble as Simon pulls himself up out of the ground]

SIMON (CONT'D)

Hello, dreadfully sorry!

(Simon makes another pained sound)

I only just noticed you were both here! That's the problem with having such a big place, you know, you can miss things if you're not careful.

ARCHIVIST

Uh-h. Right.

(Martin makes a small shocked noise)

SIMON

Good to see you again, Martin! And you must be the famous Archivist. Herald of the Ceaseless Watcher, Harbinger of the New Age, etcetera. Lovely to meet you at last.

(Small exhale from Archivist)

Simon Fairchild, at your service.

ARCHIVIST

I know who you are.

SIMON

(Laughing) Of course you do. I imagine you know pretty much everything by this point. How is it? How does it feel?

ARCHIVIST

Strange.

SIMON

Yes. I can imagine! These gifts can feel very disconcerting at times. I'm sure you'll get used to it eventually.

And how are you, Martin? Still trying to save the world and all that?

MARTIN

Yes.

SIMON

Pity. Well, armageddon... (**considering**) it's not for everyone, I suppose. I'm quite enjoying it, of course, although Junior over there can be a little bit of a handful.

[A thunderous earth-quaking boom from “Junior”, who is still some distance away]

MARTIN

(Disgusted) I might have guessed you'd be happy living in this nightmare.

SIMON

I mean, not that it matters, but, yes I am! Honestly, I think you could be too, if you set your mind to it. But I'm not one to tell you how to live your eternity.

MARTIN

No. You're not. Because I'm done listening to you!

SIMON

I'm sorry? I'm not sure I follow.

MARTIN

All those lies you told me — you helped to do this, you turned the world into your, your playground.

SIMON

Um, not to be a pedant, but if you recall, I was actually doing a favour for Peter. And if Peter had won, none of this would have happened. Also, not to make excuses, but they weren't exactly lies. Just... oversimplifications of complicated truths. And guesses.

A lot of guesses.

Almost all guesses, really, now I come to think about it.

MARTIN

Shut up! I don't care.

SIMON

Goodness! We're rather tetchy, aren't we?

ARCHIVIST

We've... (**slight laugh**) not been having an easy journey.

MARTIN

John.

ARCHIVIST

What, it's true; we haven't.

SIMON

Well, in that case, thank you for swinging by to my, huge corner of the apocalypse. We don't get many visitors these days, and, well, you might be the closest thing the universe has ever had to an important person.

ARCHIVIST

Oh, I... um...

SIMON

I mean, obviously you're still ultimately finite and all that, but altering the very fabric of reality, that's... (**'phew' whistle**) That's pretty good going, all things considered.

[Martin turns to the Archivist]

MARTIN

That's enough. John?

ARCHIVIST

Uh... yes?

MARTIN

Do it.

[A distant thunderous boom from “Junior”]

ARCHIVIST

Uhh...

SIMON

Do what?

MARTIN

Kill him.

(The Archivist splutters, exhales)

SIMON

Ha-hang on. Can he do that?

MARTIN

(Firm) He can, and he's going to!

SIMON

(Crosstalk) Oh! Right! Um. Seems a bit rude, to be honest. Uh...

ARCHIVIST

(Crosstalk) erm o-okay, just...

MARTIN

John?

ARCHIVIST

(Crosstalk) J-Just give me a moment! I—

SIMON

(Crosstalk) I-In fact, yes! Y-you know what? I'll, I'll probably just be going, then-I, I- I'd prefer to keep existing, if it's all the same to you, uhm—

MARTIN

J-John!

ARCHIVIST

I...

SIMON

(fast) Been lovely chatting to you! Good to see you both. Feel free to pop by again when you're feeling less, um... murdery.

(Martin splutters while he speaks)

MARTIN

(yelling) John!

SIMON

Byeee!

[With a whoosh and the sound of debris scattering, Simon leaves]

(The Archivist sighs)

MARTIN

You let him go.

ARCHIVIST

(Quiet) Yeah.

MARTIN

Why?

ARCHIVIST

Because, uh... uh—

MARTIN

(Interrupting) Why did you let him go, John?

ARCHIVIST

(Sharp) I don't know, I just... **(sigh)** I didn't want to kill him.

MARTIN

(Calm, becoming sarcastic) Why not? Because he was nice to you? Because he was charming, 'cause he was fun?

ARCHIVIST

No, I, I, I just— **(sighs)**

[A door creaks open]

[Faint hissing static and a high-pitched tone start]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Not now, Helen!

HELEN

I just wanted to add my vote to the disappointed side.

MARTIN

Wait, really?

HELEN

I was rather looking forward to watching an old man metaphysically explode.
Honestly, I feel a little bit cheated. The others were exceptional fun.

(The Archivist sighs as she speaks)

ARCHIVIST

Wait, y-you were watching?

HELEN

(Amused) Of course. As much fun as the new world is, I am not about to miss a real, honest-to-godless demigod murder spree!

(She laughs)

(Martin sighs)

MARTIN

You're really not helping.

HELEN

(Cheerful) I'm not trying to!

ARCHIVIST

Look, it's none of your business. Either of you.

[A distant thunderous boom from “Junior”]

MARTIN

Like hell it isn't.

ARCHIVIST

Martin.

MARTIN

Don't '*Martin*' me! Sure, he looks like a harmless old man, but if—

ARCHIVIST

I know, Martin; I know all the things he's done.

HELEN

Fantastic! So, rip him up! Pop him! Oh, oh, but, um, just give me a bit of a heads-start so I can find a good spot.

MARTIN

Enough, Helen.

HELEN

I won't be in the way! He won't even know I'm there. Again.

MARTIN

What is it, John? What's wrong?

ARCHIVIST

I just— This whole... avenging angel thing, I, I'm not...

It doesn't feel right.

MARTIN

(With a humourless laugh) It seemed to feel right when we were avenging all the wrongs done against *you*.

ARCHIVIST

I-I know. I, I, I know, alright? But well ah—

That's kind of the problem; I-I have all this power, and, and I, I want to use it to try to help, but I — **(under breath)** I don't know — **(normal)** I mean, I do. **(emotional)** I-I've done so much damage, and- and anything that might help to balance that is— **(composed)** But killing other avatars is, is not— I, I don't think it makes anything better. I think it just makes me worse.

MARTIN

You're removing evil from the world.

ARCHIVIST

I, I'm not though, am I? The tenement fire is still burning. The mortal garden is growing wild. The carousel—

HELEN

Aah!

ARCHIVIST

(Annoyed) What.

HELEN

How are we still having this intensely boring conversation? I honestly thought that actually ending the world would be enough to stop you whining, but no! You're the most powerful person in a world where the worst consequences imaginable have already happened! Absolute power, with zero responsibility! What more can you possibly need to just enjoy yourself a tiny bit?

[A distant thunderous boom from “Junior”]

(Beat)

HELEN (CONT'D)

Fine! Guess I'll just leave then! Hang out inside myself until you get angry again and accidentally have some fun.

ARCHIVIST

It's not. Fun.

(Helen laughs)

HELEN

And here I thought you'd forgotten how to make jokes.

[Her door creaks as she leaves, then shuts]

[The faint hissing static and high-pitched tone ends]

(The Archivist sighs)

ARCHIVIST

I, I-I, I'm sorry, Martin. After meeting the child, I thought, I'd been— (**sudden burst**) I really hoped things would be simpler, you know? A nice straightforward apocalypse.

MARTIN

(**Sighing**) No, I'm sorry; cheerleading you when you're on a magical murder spree probably *wasn't* a great idea.

ARCHIVIST

I started it.

(**Beat**)

MARTIN

Good point! (**small laugh**) I'll keep my apology, then.

[Fabric rustles]

(Martin makes a happy hmm and exhales)

MARTIN

I do kinda wish you'd waited until after Fairchild to have your crisis, though.

ARCHIVIST

You really want that old man dead.

MARTIN

I mean, sure-yeah, sure, when you say it like that it sounds bad.

ARCHIVIST

What did he *do* to you?

MARTIN

He threatened to throw me off a rollercoaster.

ARCHIVIST

(Amused) Ah.

MARTIN

Okay, I, I know it *sounds* like a joke, but—

ARCHIVIST

(Straight-faced) No, obviously, he's an avatar of the Vast, I understand, it's a scary threat coming from him.

MARTIN

(Surprised) Yeah!

ARCHIVIST

It just... doesn't, **sound** like a scary threat.

MARTIN

Thanks for that.

Hang on, you're still down to kill Elias, right? Uh-uh Jonah. Whatever.

ARCHIVIST

I'm still going to confront him. I don't know if killing him is something I'm even... capable of, but if I can and I have to, I will.

MARTIN

Yeah?

ARCHIVIST

Don't worry. I won't hesitate.

MARTIN

Right.

[A distant thunderous boom from “Junior”]

MARTIN (CONT'D)

Right, alright then. Good.

[He takes a step]

MARTIN (CONT'D)

Let's go, then. We don't want to keep him waiting.

ARCHIVIST

Lead on.

MARTIN

Uh, wh, I—

ARCHIVIST

Oh, right, yes. Follow me, then.

[They start walking]

[Tape clicks off]

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Outro]

JONATHAN SIMS

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