

MAG – 091 – The Coming Storm

Content warnings:

- Body horror
- Graphic injury
- Choking
- Character death
- Falling & vertigo
- Police brutality

Discussions of: murder, burns, trauma, electrocution, physical violence, threats of violence and death

Mentions of: building collapse, parental death, guns, knives, hospitals, blinding

SFX: low drone, gunshots, choking

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro]

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Rusty Quill presents: The Magnus Archives. Episode ninety-one. The Coming Storm.

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro – Continued]

[Tape clicks on.]

MIKE

You're sure I can't get you a cup of tea?

ARCHIVIST

Uh, it-it's fine, really.

MIKE

Okay. You just seem a bit... jumpy, is all.

ARCHIVIST

Oh, I just, er... Coming in I thought... It's fine.

MIKE

Grand. Er, okay, what can I do for you?

[A cup of tea is made.]

ARCHIVIST

Er... You're... you're Michael Crew, right?

MIKE

It's Mike, please.

ARCHIVIST

Right. I'm from the Magnus Institute.

MIKE

Oh, you, uh, yeah, you said.

ARCHIVIST

I, er... I read... You feature in some of our statements!

MIKE

Oh. Statements of what?

ARCHIVIST

You... There was, there was a book? Er, two of them, at least. Er... *Ex Altiora, The Boneturner's Tale*. You, uh, I think you threw a guy off a skyscraper in Paris.

MIKE

Hmm. Last chance for that cup of tea.

ARCHIVIST

I... Where did you get that scar?

[A sudden rush of air, as if someone is falling]

MIKE

And I was trying so hard to be polite.

[The Archivist makes scared noises]

Hard, isn't it, trying to ask prying questions at terminal velocity? The air... it doesn't... leave your lungs like you expect it to. I mean, *I* know you're still sat down, *you* know you're still sat down. But whether your *body* knows it when I decide you hit the ground, that's... that's something I haven't made my mind up about, yet.

A little bit of privacy. Is that really so much to ask? I suppose it is, isn't it? From you and yours at least. We have a lot in common, really. After all, what, what good's the height, the terrifying draw of gravity, unless you, unless you really know the scale of what you're facing?

Maybe I'll let you live, allow you to drag yourself back down to your den, but... you need to learn some respect.

MIKE (STATEMENT)

My scar, wasn't it? Always the scar. Ironic, in some ways, because that was one of the few marks that was only really ever physical. I got it when I was struck by lightning, age of eight. I was playing outside with a friend of mine, and the storm just came on quickly. That's really all there was to it.

Have you ever been struck by lightning? No. No, of course not. Not unless that's what happened to your hand, but I'm guessing that burn came from sticking it somewhere it wasn't wanted. And you still didn't learn. Well, imagine a white-hot, stinging pain, your whole body becoming rigid, like for an eternal moment you're frozen, you're trapped in a statue of yourself with a thousand needles of agony just erupting through you from the inside out. I don't know if it's **the** most painful thing that can happen to the human body, but... beyond a certain point trying to quantify and measure pain, it becomes pointless. That point is being struck by lightning.

The part that always bothered me was how I didn't remember it. Not really. The sensation's still vivid enough, but it exists in my mind completely detached from any actual memory. I remember the feeling, but not the event. One moment I'm playing amid raindrops the size of blueberries, and the next I'm in a white hospital bed, that acrid smell still surrounding me, and these lines of agony just carved through my skin.

The doctors told me there would be no long-term damage from my accident. They, they were wrong, of course, but the damage wasn't something they could see, so how were they to know? Sitting alone in my room, tracing the lines of electricity with my finger, imagining my pain travelling these branching pathways. I was obsessed with it, and every time my finger reached the end of

the line I felt a jolt of fear, because I, I knew they went further, went deeper than would show on my skin.

By age ten I was reading everything I could on what had happened to me. Electricity, Lichtenberg's experiments, meteorology. My parents thought it was simply my way of recovering, of processing my trauma, but there was something else there. I know that now.

Did you know that Lichtenberg figures are fractals? I didn't, not back then, but as they travelled along the length of my scars, I sometimes think like my fingertips could feel it. When I was twelve, curled under my bed to escape the pounding of the rain against my window, the roll of thunder that just rattled my skull, I began to travel them once again. My hands ran down and along those jagged, discoloured lines, every branch, every turn, my nostrils full of ozone, my veins full of fear. And they didn't stop. I knew where my scars ended, but... those I traced in the dark that night, they just went on and on and on, far beyond me and to somewhere that still flashed with that unspeakable white light.

That was the night everything changed. Before it I was odd, certainly, probably traumatised, and gripped with a terror of storms, but after that night, things were different. I think, looking back, that was when I called it. That was when it caught my scent.

It delighted in toying with my perceptions, making me believe a storm was approaching, forcing me to run for shelter or desperately hunt for cover without warning. In the dark it would stand beneath my bedroom window, the light flaring, flashing the awful brightness of sheet lightning across my room.

I could never look directly at it. The bright, arcing glow of its insides almost blinded me when I tried. It was almost a man, but I could never be sure. Its strobing, flashing Lichtenberg organs changed and flickered too fast. It... never hurt me. Not once in all the years I was chased by its... malevolence. Of course, I know why that is now, but at the time it did nothing to dull my fear.

I remember when it found out where I lived. I had dreamed that night of shifting, branching avenues of light. I travelled them so fast I could feel my flesh peeling away, leaving nothing but the coursing, buzzing pain within me as I ran down these hideous corridors, aching for an end I knew simply wasn't there. I woke up screaming into the darkness. Walking to the window, I looked out over the tiny garden below. I was sixteen at the time, and the house I lived in had a small patch of green behind it, just fighting against the pressing grey of the city, the dull glow of the light pollution overhead. But where the back wall should have been, there was a small wooden gate.

I didn't feel the cold as I opened the back door, and walked out towards it. My... my tormentor was nowhere to be seen, but the blackened edges of the gate showed clearly it had passed by. Was I afraid? It's hard to remember now, but I have to assume that I was. I mean, I must have been. As I pushed the ancient hinges back to reveal this darkened forest, how could I not have been?

It stretched away forever, I think, or as close to forever as the human mind can contain. The trees were long and spindly, their branches bare and reaching, as they grew down towards me out of the sky, their roots pulsing upwards into this roiling mass of clouds; the scorched and shattered trunks reeking of ozone.

I found *The Journal of a Plague Year* when I was seventeen. I was lucky, I suppose, that it wasn't anything worse. It infected the house, of course,

brought it crashing down upon my parents in a collapse of diseased brick and septic foundations, but I escaped. And more than that, my eyes were opened to the powers that might save me. Might protect me from a past that followed me so brightly I could barely see it. But I knew that Filth was not for me. Buzzing flies and rot disgusted me, but they never spoke to my soul. I threw the book into a sewer, and began my hunt.

The Boneturner's Tale was next. Found tucked away in a waterlogged library basement, and deposited back in another. I played with it, but when I tried to shift the bits of myself I thought might set me free, the only shapes I could form with them were laced with that horrid, hunting fractal. My experiments weren't entirely pointless, though, they did have a truth to me. I learned that I was more than capable of killing, if it brought me closer to what I needed.

I spent some time with a small grey volume, I think it was in Cyrillic, that decided it was at home amongst my bookshelves. I couldn't read it, of course, but... when it tried to read me back, I buried it on a lonely stretch of moorland.

Finally I found what I was searching for. In the back of a Chichester bookshop, I found my release. *Ex Altiora*. 'From the Heights'. The owner didn't want to part with it, a nasty, grubby little man who stank of sweat and self-importance, but I got it. And at last I had what I needed.

The thing that chased me, you see, it was an arcing branch of the Twisting Deceit, taken shape to follow me. But the shape it had taken more rightly belonged to the sky. To those same vast unknowable heights that blessed book wanted to take me. Falling had always held a special place in my heart, that wonderful border between terror and delight. When my parents would take me to the fair, I always found my way to the highest ride, the one that would

just send me plummeting. It wasn't simply the rush of adrenaline, but something, something deeper, something that just gripped my soul with this ecstatic horror. And I knew within that book was something that could not only release me from my pursuer, but chain my being to that rush of wind and vertigo forever.

I don't remember that night in detail. The two most important events in my life, and I have clear memories of neither. I know it was the first storm, the first real storm, I had seen for almost ten years, but nothing else remains in my mind. There are echoes of resignation, I think, almost desperation. That *can't* be right, though. What reason would I have had not to jump? Not to become as I am now. Perhaps I just didn't know the true joy of vertigo. It doesn't matter. In the end I threw myself into the arms of that vast emptiness, and I bound my tormentor to the book.

That's... that's all, I think. Since then I've embraced my new life; gladly fed that which feeds me.

A... uh, a Paris skyscraper, was it you said? I honestly, I, I can't say I recall it in detail, but that does... sounds about right. Sometimes it's hard to keep track.

MIKE

Hm. You know, that was... that was nice. I'm not, not usually the sort for speeches. That was... pleasant change. So.

[The sound of rushing air as the Archivist gasps for breath]

Off you go, then.

ARCHIVIST

I, er... You –

MIKE

Archivist. Take my mercy and leave. You have touched something few ever walk away –

[Someone knocks at the door]

I thought you said you came alone? Hm.

[Mike opens the door]

Can I hel– UGHH!

[Sounds of a scuffle.]

ARCHIVIST

Detect... Detective?

DAISY

Shut up. He human?

ARCHIVIST

What?

DAISY

Is this man human?

ARCHIVIST

I... Er, no, I, I don't think so. Not anymore.

DAISY

Right. What does it do?

ARCHIVIST

Er, he... It feels like, he makes you... Vertigo. Like you're falling.

DAISY

Has he killed people?

ARCHIVIST

Er, y-y-yes. Yes, a few, I think.

DAISY

Does he need to see you to do it? Does he need to speak?

ARCHIVIST

I-I-I don't know.

DAISY

Okay.

[The sound of kicking]

Doubt he can do it in a coma. Now turn that off, and help me get him in the car. Don't try to run.

ARCHIVIST

What are you –

[Daisy punches the Archivist]

DAISY

What did I say about questions? I said turn that off!

[Tape clicks off. Tape clicks on. There's the sound of wind, as if outside.

Voices are muffled.]

DAISY

This is it.

ARCHIVIST

So... so what now? You kill us?

DAISY

You think he's going to save you?

ARCHIVIST

What? What, no –

[The sound of a gun being fired. The Archivist shouts in surprise.]

DAISY

Now... let's see the bag.

[The bag is unzipped]

DAISY

One wallet, brown leather, no cash. One packet cigarettes, Silk Cut. One lighter, gold, spiderweb design. One pocket knife... blunt. Huh. One set of keys to the Magnus Institute. And one tape record-

[The voices become clearer as she finds the recorder.]

You sneaky little freak! You want to record this? Alright. I'd have to destroy it anyway.

ARCHIVIST

What, I? I, I didn't – Pl-please don't shoot me. Why are you doing this? Tell me!

[The Archivist makes a gurgling noise, as if Daisy has grabbed him around the neck.]

DAISY

Stop... asking... questions! That's how you want it? Fine. You brought a knife.
So we go through the voicebox.

BASIRA

Daisy! Daisy, put him down.

DAISY

You been following me, Basira?

BASIRA

Didn't need to. I know what you do here.

DAISY

He tell you?

BASIRA

He didn't need to. You're not that subtle. But I – I always thought you just killed monsters.

DAISY

I do!

[Sounds of someone struggling]

BASIRA

Just let him go.

DAISY

You don't know what he **is**. You don't know what it's like to have your secrets pulled out like teeth, just because he asked?

ARCHIVIST

I'm sorry, I didn't –

DAISY

Shut up!

BASIRA

Daisy!

DAISY

Don't you... Don't you dare look at me like I'm crazy! It got you too, or do you think we gave him those tapes because we like handing out evidence?

ARCHIVIST

What?

BASIRA

That's not how it happened.

DAISY

No? You ask me to take a tape over to this murdering freak, and I'm all set to tear you a new one for it. But then I get the cassette in my hand, and suddenly all I want to do is deliver his tapes, and spill my guts.

BASIRA

So, so now you kill him?

DAISY

First him, then his creepy boss.

BASIRA

This is too far, Daisy. You know it is.

DAISY

He murdered two people, Basira. Maybe more. I've done one monster today, no reason not to do another.

ARCHIVIST

I didn't... I didn't kill anyone!

BASIRA

For god's sake look at him!

DAISY

Then who?

ARCHIVIST

I thi- I thi- I think it was Elias.

DAISY

Yeah. Well he's on my list too.

BASIRA

What if he asks?

DAISY

What?

BASIRA

You reckon he can mind control people. Make them tell the truth? Why not try it on Elias?

DAISY

He's got, he's got his own... He knows things. Would that work?

ARCHIVIST

I don't know. I, I could try.

BASIRA

Daisy! This might be our only chance to find out what's going on.

DAISY

Alright. But if this doesn't work, you're still dead.

ARCHIVIST

Yeah. Yeah. What about Mike?

DAISY

Who? Oh. Grab a spade.

[Tape clicks off.]

[The Magnus Archives Theme - Outro]

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