

MAG – 088 – Dig

Content warnings:

- Human remains
- Supernatural compulsions

Discussions of: death

Mentions of: physical violence, asphyxiation, drowning

SFX: low drone, high pitched tone

[The Magnus Archives theme – intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

Rusty Quill presents: The Magnus Archives. Episode eighty-eight. Dig.

[The Magnus Archives theme – intro – continued]

[Tape clicks on.]

BASIRA

Huh.

You still recording then?

MARTIN

What?

[A chair moves]

BASIRA

Why? I thought that was John's thing.

MARTIN

I mean, yeah, a bit. You wanted to see me?

BASIRA

Yeah, well, your boss is busy and I tried talking to Tim, but...

MARTIN

Yeah, right.

BASIRA

And he said Sasha's gone, so I thought I'd talk to you.

MARTIN

Okay. What do you want?

BASIRA

I'm looking for Daisy.

MARTIN

Oh for – Okay, I don't know where she is! I don't know where anybody is! Why does everyone... okay, why does everyone think that I always know where everyone is, all the time?!

BASIRA

Alright, okay, alright, sorry. They just... well, they said at the station that this was the last place she checked in.

MARTIN

When she was interviewing us. That was like a month ago!

BASIRA

Yeah, I haven't heard anything so I went to check in with her at the station, and they said she hadn't been in since February.

MARTIN

And no-one's looked into that?

BASIRA

I mean, they don't keep a close eye on... Well, she goes off the grid sometimes when working a case. Never this long, though. I thought it might have something to do with... y'know.

MARTIN

Look, he didn't kill anyone, okay? There's... I think something's going on, okay. I actually think he was framed.

BASIRA

Yeah, well, I hope so. If not, well... I just can't believe I was so stupid, you know? He really got me.

MARTIN

Got you how?

BASIRA

I actually thought I misjudged him. Hell, I liked the guy.

MARTIN

Wait, you mean... like you...

BASIRA

Oh, what? Urgh, no! Why does everyone think that?

MARTIN

Right, yeah, 'cause I don't actually... I don't actually think he...

BASIRA

I just, I mean he was good company. Y'know, when he wasn't being a paranoia machine. He was funny, you know?

MARTIN

What, John?

BASIRA

Yeah.

MARTIN

I don't think I've ever heard him tell a joke.

BASIRA

Maybe you weren't listening.

MARTIN

Right. Well, I'm sure it'll get sorted out when Daisy brings him in and you can probably talk to him then. Oh, sorry, I forgot you're not actually with the police any more, are you.

BASIRA

Thanks. So, you have no idea where Daisy is?

MARTIN

I'm sure she's fine. She's probably just using her "operation discretion" to bully someone else.

BASIRA

What did you say?

MARTIN

Well, she was really rude, actually. She threatened to say I –

BASIRA

No, no. Did she use the phrase "operational discretion"?

MARTIN

Yeah. She said she had "full operational discretion". Is everything alright?

BASIRA

I need to find him.

MARTIN

Well, I'm sure your partner will find him; I just hope she's not as –

BASIRA

No, I need to find him now! You're sure you don't know where she is?

MARTIN

No! I don't know anything.

BASIRA

Okay, alright, fine. Just... Here's my number. You call me immediately if you find anything out, okay?

MARTIN

Fine. Now please, we're really busy.

BASIRA

Yeah, I need to go.

MARTIN

Yeah, good luck.

[Basira leaves, closing the door]

MARTIN

Right, um, let's...

[Martin shuffles the statement pages.]

Martin Blackwood, Archival Assistant at the Magnus Institute, recording statement number 0031104, statement of Enrique MacMillan, given 4th November 2003.

Statement begins.

MARTIN (STATEMENT)

I never really loved the digging. Too much like hard work, I always used to say, and I'm not a young man anymore. So generally, if the finds aren't near enough the surface for me to just pick them up, I'll leave them be. Sometimes, though, you just can't help yourself. You need to know what's under there, so you get down on your knees and dig, dig, dig.

Last Saturday was like that. I hadn't thought it would be, really. My knees had been acting up all week because of the damp, and I was mainly going out for the walk, rather than looking for any particular finds. To be honest, I was in two minds about taking the metal detector at all; it's not exactly a lightweight piece of equipment. Back when I lived in London I always used to do mudlarking down the Thames. Wandering through the low tide with nothing but a bag, my eyes and a pair of thick gloves. I miss those days, without the weight of the detector. Without the need to dig.

I don't even know why I took it. In the end, that stretch of beach is hardly virgin territory for hobbyists like me, and it's usually been picked perfectly clean. So you can imagine my surprise when I started to pick something up just before Smeatons Pier.

It was almost dark by this point, and the cool salt air of St Ives harbour blew a fine spray of sand against my cheeks. It stung slightly, but not in an unpleasant way. Bracing, I think the word is. It was peaceful, quiet, and I was lost in my own thoughts, staring out over the darkening ocean, when the metal detector interrupted, breaking my trance.

I pulled out my little torch and shone it at the spot, looking for the telltale glint. But there was nothing but sand. Whatever it was must have been buried. I was debating with myself whether to leave it be when the detector barked again, more insistently. I hadn't found anything else that day, so I sighed, pulled out my small, metal spade out of my bag, and started to dig.

It was only a minute or two before I saw it, a hint of gold-plated metal amid the coarser gold of the sand. A watch. The face was cracked down the middle, and the hands were frozen at four nineteen, but other than that it seemed to be in rather good condition. Not a bad little find, I remember thinking, as I started to clean the sand from around it. And uncovered the wrist it was still attached to.

I think I screamed. I must have cried out in some way, but nobody heard me, as there was no-one to hear but me. I cleared away a bit more sand, just to be sure of what I was seeing, and quickly revealed a stiff, unmoving hand. The flesh was icy cold and discoloured, so I was certain its owner must be dead, but it didn't appear to have begun decomposing. I lowered myself slowly to the ground, trying to collect my thoughts, considering the thing I had just discovered with my clumsy, reckless digging.

I wanted to call the police immediately, but I don't *have* a mobile phone, and it was a little bit of a walk to the nearest phonebox. My legs wouldn't stop shaking when I tried to stand up, so I sat there for a while, my torch shining on that lifeless hand, trying to compose myself enough to go get help. It was an odd thing, that hand. The fingers were bent and bloody, and the nails had been chipped and broken. From the looks of it, the damage had happened before its owner had passed away.

Then I noticed something else in the sand next to it. Something protruding ever so slightly from the sand I'd already disturbed. It didn't seem like part of the body, and I found myself reaching over to try and pull it up. It slipped out of the sand easily, eagerly even, and I didn't even need to dig.

It was a book. The cloth of the cover had worn away, and it was still wet from the seawater that covered the area at high tide. I expected it to be a useless lump of wet paper mush, fused together and unreadable, but when I pulled it open the pages came apart easily. There was a label at the very front, but the ink had run and I have no idea what it might have said. So I turned to the first page.

It was very strange. It was just the one word, solid capital letters in a small, neat typeface at the very centre of the page. It said 'DIG'. I took that to be the title, and turned to the next page. 'DIG'. Exactly the same. The third page. 'DIG'. The fourth page. 'DIG'. Dig, dig, dig, dig.

Holding it hurt my hands. You know the way that if you say or read a word over and over again, it starts to lose all its meaning? To just sound like a jumble of noises or unrelated letters? Well this was the opposite. Every time I read it, it was like the meaning of the word became more solid in my mind. I knew what it was to find your meaning buried in the earth, to claw your sense from under the sand and mud and soil, to dig.

I had almost completely unearthed the body when the police arrived. Apparently a late-night jogger had spotted the scene, and called them. They believed me when I explained to them how I had found it, though they were none too pleased that I had so thoroughly ruined what may well have been a crime scene. I don't think it was, and one of the friendlier officers later told me

the man had probably dug himself too deep a hole in the beach, and it had collapsed on him when the tide had come in. A tragedy, but not unheard of. They still weren't pleased with me, though, and once they had my statement I was sent on my way. The book was in my bag, and they didn't ask to look inside, so... I kept it. I probably should have mentioned it to the police, but they were very rude. I understand now, of course, that they were simply irritated that I had robbed them of their opportunity to dig.

Perhaps they sensed it, that *need* inside of us. Above us, you see, there's only the sky, the infinite, a void of space and emptiness so incredible that to think of it in detail is to overwhelm the mind. But down, down into the earth. Through the many layers of this globe, this sphere built and crusted upon a single, beating point. The centre of the universe for each and every one of us, that glorious convergence from which everything, everywhere, is 'up'. To reach it, to approach that source, that rolling, molten centre of it all, the only thing you have to do is dig.

I've dreamed of it, of course. Safe and happy below, wrapped on all sides by uncounted miles of crushing, loving, earth and stone. I see it, and watch the passing of history build upon it, layer after layer. To travel down into the ground is to travel through time, that's what I always used to say, before I found my book. And I still believe it, but time is the least of the things that waits for us down there, things I can barely think of without collapsing in fear. A thousand terrible things, trapped and alone, out of air and out of light, all contained within those three hideous letters: DIG.

In those dreams I hold a spade. It screams when I plunge it into the weeping soil, and the voice it cries out with is my own. The soft mud begs me to stop, trying in vain to save me. But I do not listen, and the pitted ruin of my shovel

moves lump after lump of it, tearing it free of itself, and piling it around me, sculpting my own grave. Bringing the ground up to meet me where I must be buried. It fills my lungs, and I am free. I am awake. The shovel is in my hand, and the book is open to its chapter and verse: DIG.

In the moments without the shovel, without the torn ground, I have tried to find out more about the book, maybe even get rid of it. A bookseller I asked about it pointed me towards you and yours, before I dug into him, and so here I came. To tell my story, of course, but another thing as well; cold, empty and calling. There's something here, you see. Something to be dug up, rooted out, buried within. A hollow space that all eyes point towards. And I intend to reach it, if my fingers don't give out first. I know where to dig.

MARTIN

Uh, um, the, uh, the statement ends rather abruptly there. Based on a few scattered notes and accounts from some of the older staff, it sounds like Mr. Macmillan got in a bit of a fight, which led to his arrest, and the replacement of quite a bit of the floor in John's office. There are still a couple of boards with marks on them that I'd always hoped weren't fingernail scratches, but I guess...

Anyway, Mr. Macmillan passed away while awaiting trial. Official cause of death is listed as "asphyxiation", but I can't find any details about exactly what happened. The book is currently held by Artefact Storage in a welded iron box, and placed on the top of the Do Not Access list, but since then it doesn't look like it's caused anything weird to happen.

[Someone knocks on the door.]

Er, yes?

[Melanie opens the door.]

MELANIE

Hi, have you got a moment?

MARTIN

Um, yeah, I think, um...

MELANIE

Are you alright?

MARTIN

Yeah... Sorry, just a lot of change recently, y'know. You and John and Sasha and... everything's gone a bit wrong.

It's the not knowing, you know? I mean, John's still alive. Not sure why, but I'm sure of that. But Sasha, I...

MELANIE

Yes, it's... it's probably, um...

MARTIN

Sorry, sorry, I'm – What do you need?

MELANIE

Oh, right, yes. Is there any sort of database, maybe?

(Martin snorts)

MELANIE

Statement givers or people referenced? I'm trying to get hold of a witness from a recent one.

MARTIN

Yeah, yeah, I wish. That would... I mean, that would make the job a lot easier.

MELANIE

No-one's even tried to make one?

MARTIN

Oh, you weren't here when we took the place over from Gertrude. It's been over a year just to get it like this. I mean, I think the database was on John's list, but...

MELANIE

So how do you track someone down?

MARTIN

Oh, oh well, y'know, we've a few contacts in various record offices around the place. Aside from that it's just... just a bit of detective work, really. Er, Tim used to do a great line in impersonating people to utility companies. Ah, the number of times he got them to give him 'his own' address...

MELANIE

Right, right... Um, this one, the name is "Jude Perry". Doesn't mean anything to you, does it?

MARTIN

Uh... no. Did she give a statement?

MELANIE

Not yet.

MARTIN

Well. Sorry I can't be more help.

MELANIE

Sure. Oh, er, one other thing. Who do I talk to about Artefact Storage?

MARTIN

Oh, er, depends what you need, probably Sonja. Why? Are you sure you're ready for it?

MELANIE

What's that supposed to mean?

MARTIN

No, no, I just, just... Y'know, it's... There's a lot of weird stuff in there.

MELANIE

I'm not an amateur, Martin. I know the sort of thing that's in there. I just need to know who I talk to about missing pieces.

MARTIN

Yeah, prob-probably Sonja.

Wait, why? What's gone missing?

MELANIE

An old calliope organ. It's there in the inventory, but no-one can find it when I ask.

MARTIN

Huh. I mean, that's not... great. Er, did you need it for something?

MELANIE

Just following up a statement. Trying to get a few answers, you know?

MARTIN

Huh. Well, if you find any, let me know.

[Tape clicks off.]

[The Magnus Archives Theme - Outro]

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