

MAG – 140 – The Movement of the Heavens

Content Warnings:

- Murder
- Darkness
- Ritual acts

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

Rusty Quill presents: The Magnus Archives. Episode one hundred and forty.
The Movement of the Heavens.

[Tape clicks on. There's the sound of ceramic on wood.]

BASIRA

Coffee.

ARCHIVIST

(Weakly) What?

BASIRA

Coffee. Drink it.

ARCHIVIST

I don't really... Fine.

BASIRA

You look awful. You try drinking with Daisy again last night?

ARCHIVIST

She was here last night, as you know.

BASIRA

Drinking alone, then?

ARCHIVIST

It's not a hangover.

Well, not... I wasn't drinking.

BASIRA

Drugs then? You sick? Got some weird monster disease?

ARCHIVIST

Seriously?

BASIRA

We've been over this. You need to tell me stuff. Communication works both ways, you know.

(Heavy sigh from the Archivist.)

ARCHIVIST

Yesterday, I tried something and I— I, I deliberately tried to Know something. Like I did in the coffin, but there was a lot. Too much. And—

BASRIA

What did you find out?

ARCHIVIST

(Scoffs) Nothing. There was too much.

BASIRA

You don't remember any of it?

ARCHIVIST

You drink the whole contents of a bar in three seconds, you don't remember what the merlot tastes like. It just hurt.

BASIRA

Sure.

[Paper rustles]

ARCHIVIST

What's that?

BASIRA

Statement. You in a condition for it?

ARCHIVIST

Yes. Yes. What's this one about?

BASIRA

Took me a while to hunt it down again, but you remember Maxwell Rayner?

ARCHIVIST

Yes, of course. Your warehouse showdown.

BASIRA

Yeah, well, whole thing kind of stayed with me.

ARCHIVIST

Mmm, I can imagine.

BASIRA

Well there's more history there than we thought. Capital 'H' history

ARCHIVIST

"John Flamsteed"? Basira, this is from way before the Institute.

BASIRA

The first Astronomer Royal. Had the post until his death in 1720.

ARCHIVIST

1719. He died on New Year's Eve.

Sorry, I didn't— Can't really help it.

BASIRA

Well, either way, he really hated the man who succeeded him. His former assistant, Edmond Halley.

ARCHIVIST

As in Halley's comet?

BASIRA

Yep. And Flamsteed had a... What's the opposite of a pet name? Like a nickname for someone you hate?

ARCHIVIST

Uh...

BASIRA

Well, he had one of them for Halley. Called him "Raymer".

ARCHIVIST

"Raymer"? A-And you think?

BASIRA

Names shift over the years, especially if you're not keen on keeping the same body.

ARCHIVIST

Right.

BASIRA

Just... have a read. Let me know when you're done.

ARCHIVIST

You're not staying?

BASIRA

Watching you do your thing? No.

ARCHIVIST

I... I suppose I understand.

(The Archivist clears his throat.)

[The door opens and closes.]

ARCHIVIST

Right...

Statement of John Flamsteed, taken from a partial unsent letter to Abraham Sharp, 1715. Audio recording by Jonathan Sims, the Archivist.

Statement begins.

ARCHIVIST (STATEMENT)

Um... er... But my affliction in writing to you is of a wholly different character, and were I not well sure of your firm alliance and counsel I should under no extremity impose it upon you. For I have killed a man, and barely do I have the covering of great passion for it, as I was well within my senses at the time.

You are familiar of course with my persecutor and tormentor Edmond Halley. The one so oft descending upon me as Nemesis with her sword to avenge upon my hubris. It was he who with the President of the Royal Society, Sir Isaac

Newton, printed my catalogue of stars without my knowledge, robbing me of the fruits of my labour, turning my triumph to naught but ashes.

I have had many a contest with the President, but I harbour little true bitterness toward him. He is a blockish creature of vanity concerned with his appearance only, and like to fly into an indecent heat and knavish talk at any dispute. He has no reverence for God and I pity him the fire that awaits, but in life my thoughts of him are simply those of disdain and hold no corner for true hatred.

I put no such chain upon my spirit when I make my considerations of Halley, who I have long called Raymer to you in my letters, for as the odious Nicolaus Raymer persecuted the great Tycho and ran his noble genius to exile, so too has my own Raymer pushed me toward ruin. I have detailed much of his offences in my letters to you, but as much again I have concealed within my soul and given no voice. Simply know the robbery of my celestial catalogue was but the least of it.

I will admit that in my heart I nurtured such dreams of revenge that when they came to me the name of God felt hollow upon my lips. Another dignity stripped from me by mine enemy. Such were the depths of the hatred that I found within myself, that whereupon I would spy Raymer at the Royal Society, if I were unobserved in turn, I would to no deliberate end begin to follow him. Oft it was I would follow his path until my better humours overtook me, or I was seen by my quarry, who would smile and offer his insufferable greeting. So it has been this past year, though I have never had he might know my intentions.

Yet this month past it has been much changed. Raymer's wanderings, hitherto aimless or meandering through the gardens and pathways of the Royal Society or the coffee shops of Fleet Street, have of late drawn him almost out of London entirely, to a strange and shrouded wood not a league from what might draw the interest of the pompous fool with whose whims I was now so well acquainted. And in that quiet seclusion, while I looked on in silence and astonishment, he would meet with figures, both man and woman alike, with dull clothing and eyes that in the darkness of that wooded place seemed wholly black and empty. Their words were soft and impenetrable to me from the spot wherein I was concealed, but they had much impact upon Raymer, who oft would stagger backwards as though struck.

They led him further through trees of gnarled and twisted woods, where the thick roof of leaves permitted not the light of moon or stars, and there they knelt around a pool so black if it had been India ink it could scarce have been darker. I held back a cry that threatened to force itself from my lips, for I am not so ignorant as to be blind to the practice of vile pagan exaltation, and I can describe what I saw around that pool as nothing less. And dismiss as you will my words as the shaken memory of a man appalled, but at that awful moment, their cries of worship seemed to form shapes that stirred in the water such as I have never seen in my time upon this earth.

I fled, of course, and considered the courses such as I might pursue to relieve myself of this dreadful burden of knowledge. No longer was my concern purely for revenge upon Raymer, but a quite acute terror of the savage rites the practice of which were clearly amongst my peers. I had not seen with clarity those compatriots alongside whom Raymer had joined in awful raptures, and could not state with confidence that any among the faculty to whom I might

make report of his debauchery would not in turn make it known that I was telling such things of Halley, an astronomer of note whose conduct to all others has been unimpeachable. No, if there was to be a confrontation or action taken against Raymer, it would be I and I alone that would have to take it.

I know it was the second of May when this took place, for it was no doubt the crowning glory that he had stolen from me that occupied his mind that eve, and caused his steps to quicken and grow careless. Again he traced his path unto that dark and hidden wood, and again I followed, quiet in my manner, keen in my observance. I cast around for other figures, but in that moment Raymer was alone. He proceeded then as before to the pool of blackest water, and the clear skies of night were lost amongst the leaves. All was quiet as he gazed into that smoothed and liquid darkness. This I knew was to be my chance.

I stepped from my place of concealment and began to decry him, casting my censure upon Raymer and naming before him the vile acts of pagan villainy which I had myself observed. His mute shock was but that of a moment before he let out a noise the likes of which I can scarce describe and charged towards me, his fingers curled to claws that sought my face and eyes. I wasted no time and drew my smallsword, and praise to God who gifted to me foresight to carry it. I struck Raymer a fierce blow to the leg. He fell, still clutching at me, and in a moment cast my sword away into the trees and grabbed at my coat. With a fierce strength never before awakened within me, I gripped the head of my foul adversary and forced it down, into the dark pool before us. There I held it, the water so cold upon my skin the marks have yet to fade, and Raymer thrashed and kicked and made such sounds as I have never before heard of the

dying. And he was still. I drew him up with the black water still thickly flowing from him. He was dead at my hand, and though I well knew it to be an act of defence and retribution, I felt within me a sudden terror of discovery.

I took my sword and returned to hiding in the dense growth of the forest, fearing that should I return upon the path my passing may be met and marked. Better to wait until I had the surety of unseen passage. And as I waited there, the enormity of my action settled upon me like lead, and Raymer's dark-eyed compatriots arrived to attend him. Seeing him prostrate and lifeless upon the ground was clearly a shock and their distress was marked upon them. And yet there seemed no sadness or horror within their passion, but surprise and confusion, and the question they cast between them was that of what was to be done, for it seemed Raymer was vital to a task as yet left unfinished. His body was borne up by them and taken away, at time I believed for burial. And when I was certain I was once again alone I fled, leaving those infernal waters for good and all.

And were that the end of my poor story you may well imagine my confession of such to you, for laying it in writing is an unburdening beyond what I could have foreseen. And yet it was not this that inspired in me the need to write you an account. It was what occurred but two days past, for I was in my observatory making my notes and adjustments as my position requires, when I was called upon, not unusually, by the President of the Royal Society. I was astonished at how cordial his conduct seemed, his temper even and his heat steady, but it was not the attitude of the President that robbed my tongue of speech. It was that in his visit he was accompanied by Edmond Halley. My dear Raymer whose body had gone cold and still in my own cruel hands. He had little to say, it seemed, as the President went over once again some detail of

my equipment, and Raymer, who was and is dead, simply watched me in solemn silence. Were it not for his handing books to the President I should have thought him a shade or a haunt, but his substance was far more than such could ever achieve.

At length Mr Newton took his leave, and Raymer went to follow. Before his departure, an exit that could not come too soon for my nerves, he turned towards me and grasped me firmly by the shoulders. In my shock and fear I offered no fight and returned his gaze as he began to thank me. His gratitude was so plain and sincere that I could scarce understand it as he spoke, but he repeated it again and again. Thanking me for his life, for his freedom. I stared into his eyes, and though they met mine, I saw spreading inside them the darkness and mist. Whether he be blind now I know not, but those were not the eyes of Edmond Halley, though they were the eyes of my Raymer, the one I couldn't destroy.

It is with this at the forefront of my thoughts that I write to you Abraham. I know you have some small acquaintance with him and I must warn you: Halley is no longer Halley. He may appear as such and ape those previous observations of his own and those more skilled, but it is not him. Look into his eyes and you will know.

You will know.

ARCHIVIST

Statement ends

Right.

[Tape clicks off. Tape clicks on.]

BASIRA

So?

ARCHIVIST

So Edmond Halley was Rayner. Or, at least, whatever was inside him. You said it was dead, though.

BASIRA

I thought it was. We shot him to hell before he could, uh, pour himself into that kid.

(The Archivist grunts in acknowledgement.)

BASIRA (Cont.)

But I mean, didn't you say he got blown up in World War I as well?

ARCHIVIST

(Bubbles) Possibly. The... uh, the details are... It's not exactly clear.

BASIRA

You don't... Know?

ARCHIVIST

No. And I'm not about to push my luck and try to force it. Besides I, I rarely get anything when The Dark is involved. I-It's a bit of blind spot.

BASIRA

Hmm. Point is, we can't be sure.

ARCHIVIST

Agreed.

BASIRA

You don't Know what the ritual for The Dark is, right?

ARCHIVIST

Not really, no. Um, based on this and everything— Something to do with the Sun. I would guess. An eclipse, maybe?

BASIRA

I don't think so. There's not one due for a while, and I've been wondering for ages, why Ny-Ålesund? I mean, sure, that far north it gets dark for a long time, but there's also really long days in the summer.

ARCHIVIST

Okay.

BASIRA

But I think... Have you got a pen?

ARCHIVIST

Uh, yeah, i-in the drawer.

[Drawer opens]

BASIRA

Uh... John. What's this?

ARCHIVIST

Hmm? Oh!

That's... uh, th— uh, that's my rib.

BASIRA

...

Right.

ARCHIVIST

Yup.

BASIRA

And the jar of ashes?

ARCHIVIST

Not, not mine. I mean, it belongs to me, I-I guess, but it's not— Stationery is in the other drawer.

[Another drawer opens, pens rattle]

BASIRA

Right. Thanks.

Okay.

[Paper rustles]

Now, look here.

ARCHIVIST

Right. I— Yes, I, I know where it is.

BASIRA

I don't think Ny-Ålesund is the ritual location.

ARCHIVIST

Right.

BASIRA

I think it's a... a staging ground.

ARCHIVIST

For what?

BASIRA

The darkest place on the surface on the Earth - the North Pole during the winter solstice.

ARCHIVIST

I hope you're not suggesting that Santa works for the People's Church?

BASIRA

John. It's eleven weeks of pitch black night, as far from the sun as you can get on the planet.

ARCHIVIST

Alright. So why haven't they done it already?

BASIRA

I think they were waiting for Rayner to get his new body. But my sources tell me now that they're gearing up for something.

ARCHIVIST

These "sources", are they the same ones that sent you to the Australian outback while I was burying myself alive?

BASIRA

Their info is normally good.

ARCHIVIST

Hmmm.

BASIRA

There is one more thing that might convince you.

ARCHIVIST

They have an eldritch ball of some sort of manifested dark matter that's going to be the focus of the ritual?

BASIRA

I thought you said you couldn't know things about them?

ARCHIVIST

I can still read. Actually, you should probably see that statem— You know what. No, later.

(Sighs) So what's the plan?

BASIRA

I'm getting us passage on a boat heading up there.

ARCHIVIST

Right.

BASIRA

I bring all the guns from Daisy's old stash, you bring the spook you used to mess up that delivery guy.

ARCHIVIST

What? That's it? Christ, I thought **my** plans were half-arsed.

BASIRA

It's all about when we go.

ARCHIVIST

I don't follow.

BASIRA

Summer solstice is the 21st of June. So we leave in a fortnight. Should arrive about a week before. No danger of sunset or darkness for a long time. Stands to reason, that they'll be at their weakest.

ARCHIVIST

I don't know. Is Daisy coming?

BASIRA

No.

ARCHIVIST

Oh. I... I-I just thought—

BASIRA

We've talked about it. If The Hunt takes her again... we don't know if she's coming back, and neither of us want that.

ARCHIVIST

O-O-Of course. And I, I don't imagine Melanie would be keen to come.

BASIRA

She wasn't.

ARCHIVIST

Why am I always the last to know about these things?

BASIRA

By this point, I just assume the eyeball tells you.

ARCHIVIST

That would imply it tells me anything useful. But no, I'm stuck knowing how your year 8 PE teacher died.

BASIRA

Miss Peterson?

ARCHIVIST

Pancreatic cancer, if you're interested.

BASIRA

I... wasn't?

ARCHIVIST

No. No, o-o-of course not.

Alright, so just me and you, then? I don't suppose you could get some of the team that helped you take Rayner down last time?

BASIRA

(**Sarcastic**) Oh yeah, sure. I'll just drop them a message. You know, we've actually got a group chat going called "British cops who love to do extrajudicial spook killings on foreign soil." I'll just see if they're free Saturday.

ARCHIVIST

Yes, yes! Alright, alright.

You're sure about this?

BASIRA

No. But if I'm right, this is the best chance we're going to get.

And I can't do it alone.

ARCHIVIST

Okay then. Let's do it.

[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 and Frank Voss as Basira Hussain.