

INTRO

The Magnus Archives' theme plays.

JONNY

Rusty Quill presents... *The Magnus Archives*.

Episode one hundred and
seventy-five: "Epoch."

EXT. A DOMAIN OF THE EXTINCTION

TAPE CLICKS ON.

There's a low, musical tone in the background. The constant movement of what sounds like metal or metal scraps, overlain with the buzzing of night insects.

Also in the background: a distant air raid siren. Multiple, actually, overlapping only at the edges, each setting off a higher pitch as the previous one ends.

A quick static in, and:

ARCHIVIST (STATEMENT)

Item: A stubborn lamp.

Approximately a foot and a half long, stand made of discoloured brass with a crude fleur-de-lis pattern and slightly melted at the base.

Shade constructed from satin, original colour impossible to discern due to assorted stains, likely blood, oil, and paraffin wax.

The bulb is imprinted with the words "Long life" despite appearing to contain a standard tungsten filament. There is a long, thin crack that runs the length of the bulb, and it is remarkably easy to cut yourself on the thin glass.

With the vacuum compromised, it should be impossible for the light to turn on. The power cable is severed about three inches from the base of the stand and writhes like a beheaded snake.

There is nothing in this place to power it.

Despite all of this, a thin and sickly glow can be seen from underneath the lampshade, an irregular, pulsing light that casts rotten shadows on the piles of detritus and clusters of ash and bone that surround it.

Where its sputtering illumination falls, the color drains from

everything, leaving nothing but a faded grey. It cannot survive, but still it clings to its existence, destroying everything around it.
It smells like death.

Another light clattering of metal from the pile- is someone looking around?

ARCHIVIST (STATEMENT)(CONT'D)

Leah's fingers are worn and dry, their color painfully faded, save for a streak of scarlet that drip-drops from her cut fingers as she furiously scribbles her findings into the notebook. The pages tear with the frenzy of her writing as she desperately tries to keep her thoughts alive.

More clattering.

ARCHIVIST (STATEMENT)(CONT'D)

Fauna: A mouldering seagull.

Larger than any related specimen to be found before the Anthropocene age, this bird has been rendered flightless by the tightly woven plastic netting that winds around and around its torso, digging into the skin beneath the feathers and bulging over the strange lumps and tumors that cover it.

Its feathers have turned an oily black, and its vestigial eyes are pale and sightless, relying instead on the sounds its prey makes as they traverse the noisy junkpiles of

discarded landscape.

Its beak has become hard and its edges are serrated, allowing it to tear apart the tin cans and hard plastics that shield its food with ease.

Its legs are long and many-jointed, allowing it to move across the uneven ground, and its throat is blocked with concrete, preventing it from crying and letting it move among the ruins in complete silence.

It nests in the rusted-out hollows of fleeing cars, constructing intricate shelters for its young out of corpse-hair and wiring. Its eggs are rusty, covered in slime, and its

chicks are born with plastic rings
around their necks.

They smell like ammonia and salt,
and their name is meaningless, as
there is no longer such a thing as
the sea.

Clatter.

ARCHIVIST (STATEMENT)(CONT'D)

Leah hides behind a cracked
vending machine, waiting for the
thing to pass. She knows it can hear
the rapid scratch of her broken
pencil, but it is all she can do to get
it down, get it all down on paper-
another futile warning of a future that
is already here.

Item: A history book.

Hardback. Eight-point-five by eleven inches and approximately an inch and a half thick, although the number of pages is impossible to discern.

Its dust jacket has long since been lost, and what remains is wrinkled maroon cloth over soggy book-board.

The faded letters of a partial title can be seen embossed into the spine. The words *A Brief History of-* can be made out clearly, but the rest has been burned away.

The spine is cracked and broken,

but the volume itself cannot be opened. The book has clearly been submerged into some sort of fat or binding agent, and the paper within it has fused together into a single, indistinguishable lump of pulp.

The wet mass within it retains sufficient moisture that if the covers are pressed upon, a thin rivulet of clear liquid will run like tears down the book's cover.

If you do this, the book will scream.

It is at this point you notice the cacophony in the background: a strange hissing, the wretched cries of their modern seagull, and another, more indistinguishable sound. Perhaps it is the book.

ARCHIVIST (STATEMENT)(CONT'D)

It is a stupid thing, a long-dead trinket that was of no use to anyone even when it puffed itself up with the factuous intellectual dribblings of those who believed the past was any defense against the future, bloated as it was with the hagiographies of war criminals and smugly grinning murderers.

Now it serves as a suffering reminder of everything that has been lost- which is to say, nothing of value.

Leah hates the book. She cannot shake the feeling that once, long ago, she read it, seeing within its pages the stark importance of taking action, of trying to change the world

for the better and avoiding the dead,
nightmare future that kept her awake
at night.

But it was doomed from the start,
and those who salivated at the
thought of a place in history had
secured nothing but its end.

More crumbling, more squeaking.

ARCHIVIST (STATEMENT)(CONT'D)

Item: A laughable umbrella.

Look at it. What does it think it's
doing here? Lying there, broken,
skeletal.

There hasn't been rain in fifty years.
The soil is cracked and parched.
Any vegetation that claws its

agonized way up out of it
maggot-white and dry as dust.

The only moisture is from the wet rot
of the junkpiles that stretch thirty feet
above the ground in all directions,
spilling out into the sandy, sloping
basin that was once a sea bed.

Stupid umbrella. Does it think there
is a monsoon coming? Does it even
remember what a cloud of water
vapor looks like?

The clouds that pass now are oily
and stink of sulfur, waiting for you to
stop paying attention before they
climb down your throat and settle in
your lungs.

Perhaps this idiot apparatus thinks it can protect from the relentless heat of the sun, but its fabric is torn and ruined, hanging from the snapped metal limbs, desperate for a breeze to stir it from its- complete stillness.

Take a moment to sneer at this corpse of an umbrella, and wish for a moment you had water enough within you to *spit on it*.

Leah can barely tell what she's writing anymore. The catalog of horrors she's compiling, this report on everything for nobody, but what else is she to do? What else can even come close to quelling the fear that suffuses her existence?

Fauna: The thing that lives.

Something lives in the Anthropocene age. Not a twisted reflection of the world, not a parasite or a scavenger or a cockroach, but a native.

Something born in the sloping shells of sagging concrete towers, that tastes the tang of rusted iron in the air and knows that it is home.

Something that does not know or care what a human is, any more than mankind thought of the creatures that once lived in the shells they found on the beach.

It moves through the stacks of garbage like a beetle through filth,

and its smile is all-too familiar,
though its eyes are dark and empty.

It cannot be seen in its entirety, for it
keeps itself covered, but its long,
unfurling tongue may be seen
emerging, pink and bristling with
long, hairlike tastebuds, hunting for
something old enough to eat.

It whispers to itself in the dark, and
sounds like old snippets of
toothpaste commercials and adverts
to join the army.

A strange, low moaning sound- but layered as if
through a filter, as if through one of those plastic
microphones that layer your voice until your voice
sounds alien and you're not quite sure how many of

you there were to start with.

ARCHIVIST (STATEMENT)(CONT'D)

It is hard to tell if there is more than one, but either there are several of them of different sizes, or there is just the one, and it is getting bigger.

It is our replacement, and it is welcome to the world.

Even if Leah had known, if she had had time to warn them, who would have believed her? Who would not have laughed her out of her life if she described the horrors that were to come in their true and vivid detail?

Another multiphonic groan. Is it getting closer?

ARCHIVIST (STATEMENT)(CONT'D)

But there is no one left to warn,
though that does not slow her hand
even a moment. She ignores the
burning pain in her forearm, where
the thing's rough tongue has torn a
section of her skin clean off.

More groans, one after the other. Is there more than
one? Are they calling out to each other?

ARCHIVIST (STATEMENT)(CONT'D)

Item: A forgotten bone.

..*Whose* is this? Pale white and
stained with thick black tar.

A human bone, that much is clear;
too big to be a child's, at least- Can
a bone seem familiar? The shape of
it echoing through your mind, like a

face seen only in dreams?

It may be followed up to a ribcage,
still sticky in places with soapy
cadaver fat, and closing around a
crumpled beer can where the heart
should be.

There's a skull as well, yellowing in
the thick dust of the open air.

Strange. Everything here is either
bone-dry from relentless heat, or
damp through from decomposition
and stagnant decay. Lifeless yet
decaying. The world we have left
behind.

Leah considers the bones for some
time.

Does she know them? Are they
hers? If she had been quicker, more
forceful in her warnings, might they
still be alive?

Her pencil is broken, but her notes,
her warnings from this new world
are far from complete.

She snaps off another rib and
continues writing.

Static increasing.

A soft sigh from the Archivist.

ARCHIVIST

Right.

TAPE CLICKS OFF.

EXT. A DOMAIN OF THE EXTINCTION

TAPE CLICKS ON.

Crunching of footsteps, with the occasional clatter of glass or metal from the junkpiles.

MARTIN

You know what? I am sitting down.

ARCHIVIST

Are.. you sure? That thing is.. that's not in great shape.

MARTIN

(don't care! nothing matters!)

Neither am I. I have been on my feet for a *literally* uncountable amount of time.

A step, some groaning, the jangle of bags, and

creaking of what is presumably a couch as Martin sits.

ARCHIVIST

How is it?

MARTIN

Great!

(creak from the couch)

It's great. Lovely couch.

ARCHIVIST

Right. Well, rest up, I suppose!

MARTIN

It's two-seater!

ARCHIVIST

(you are *not* getting me on that
thing)

Yes it is!

Brief pause, in which there is a slight amused exhale and another creak of the couch.

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Hard pass, thank you.

An exhale, and shift from Martin, with some sloshing, followed by a lovely little moment of silence but for the gull sounds and sirens in the far background.

MARTIN

What's it's like?

ARCHIVIST

What?

MARTIN

This place's-

(inhale)

its statement.

ARCHIVIST

Not too surprising. It's a domain
designed to eke fear out of those
afraid of a world-

(inhale)

-destroyed by human hands. It, uh-

(exhale)

It dwells on it.

An understanding *hm* from Martin.

Another brief moment of silence, then:

MARTIN

(creak as he shifts)

So it was real then, the Extinction?

ARCHIVIST

Of course it was *real*- A-At least in
the sense that- it was a thing people

feared.

Whether it was strong enough in its own right to be considered at a level with Smirke's Fourteen, or- whether it was on its way to getting there, I- maybe. This sort of thing is always muddy.

MARTIN

So Peter was lying.

The Archivist lets out his "it's not that simple" sigh.

ARCHIVIST

To a degree. But- mostly he was just like anyone else who tried to take the scope of human terror and-
(small inhale)
package it neatly into little theories.

All this talk of Emergence and-
birthing a new power- it's just people
being scared.

Creak as Martin shifts.

MARTIN

What, so no one had any idea?

ARCHIVIST

Martin, I have the whole scope of
human knowledge available to me,
and-

(small inhale, sharp exhale)

I'd struggle to give you a simple
answer to most of this stuff.

And even if I am omniscient, I'm
starting to realize that.. doesn't
mean objective.

Creak. Martin *hms*.

MARTIN

(sigh)

I guess it's hard not to bring your own baggage to this sort of thing.

ARCHIVIST

I don't know if it could even *exist* without the baggage. You want to talk about psychological projection, try viewing the world through the lense of the being that is, by its very nature, a reflection of your own obsessions and fears.

MARTIN

(sigh)

Yeah, alright. I get it.

But what about the- real world, were they right?

ARCHIVIST

I- I'm not sure I follow.

MARTIN

M- Right, if none of this had happened, if the world had just- carried on?

(creak)

What would have happened? Was- Was all that fear justified?

ARCHIVIST

(exhale, moving closer)

I can't know the future, Martin, not even a hypothetical one.

MARTIN

But- you know what was going on,
what was happening. O-Out of
everyone, you're the best place-
(squeak)

You, you, you've got the info to make
a pretty *damn* educated guess!

Brief pause.

ARCHIVIST

I, I don't know what you want me to
say, Martin. Yes, it was bad, worse
than most people thought, and
things were only going to
deteriorate. But was the end of
humanity actually imminent? I-
probably not?

But we were well on the way, and- it
would have been the end of an awful

lot of things.

Large creak.

MARTIN

So you don't think it would have
been the end of the world?

There's a bit of a laugh to the end of his sentence.

ARCHIVIST

The end of the world. Now there's a
concept. Everything ends, I
suppose.

(movement)

Even this place. Can't last forever.
Eventually.. it will die as well.

Movement.

MARTIN

You're starting to sound like Simon.

ARCHIVIST

No. He was always looking towards
the infinite, but I'm not sure there is
such a thing. If I try, I can-

(slight static)

-see the edges of reality, but- I can't
hold its full scope in my mind.

Static fades out.

MARTIN

And beyond it?

ARCHIVIST

Beyond what? Reality?

MARTIN

Yeah.

ARCHIVIST

I don't know. Maybe nothing.

Beat.

Then Martin creaks the couch again.

MARTIN

Jon.

ARCHIVIST

What?

MARTIN

D'you know if- like- gods, religion,
the afterlife, all that stuff. Do you
know if any of that was real?

ARCHIVIST

(exhale, a bit amused)

Really rolling out the big questions

today.

MARTIN

Sorry, it's just- this place just brings
it out in me, I guess.

Slight static kicks in again.

ARCHIVIST

If there is a god, or gods, or an
existence beyond this world, the Eye
can't see it. It sees the fear of it, but-
nothing of its truth.

Static fades.

MARTIN

..So... is that a no?...

ARCHIVIST

It's an 'I don't know,' although-

(heavy inhale)

People's faith- it hasn't saved them.

Not here.

MARTIN

(soft)

True.

ARCHIVIST

Why do you ask? Didn't think you
were at all religious.

Squeak.

MARTIN

Oh, I'm not. Mum was, but-

(squeak)

I, I don't know. With everything going
on, it-

(exhale)

certainly *feel/s* less far-fetched.

Besides, at this point, I'd take any help we can get.

ARCHIVIST

I don't know how kindly any god would look upon what we've done.

Pause.

MARTIN

Thanks for that.

ARCHIVIST

Sorry.

A shift and a creak.

MARTIN

Let's get out of here. This place is making me a bit too... existential.

He moves to get up, his clothing rustling and the bags squeaking and jangling.

ARCHIVIST

Wait.

Martin stops.

MARTIN

What?

ARCHIVIST

(sigh)

Where we're going, the, uh..

(finds it)

The next domain, I've been meaning to tell you, but it's- well.

MARTIN

Spit it out, Jon.

ARCHIVIST

Basira and Daisy. We're close.

MARTIN

Wait, what? Wait, *really?*!

(sudden energy)

B- Th- That's brilliant; what are we waiting for; let's go!

ARCHIVIST

I-, uh- yeah, it's- it's not going to be easy; things aren't.. Good.

MARTIN

(fast, high-pitched- he's going to take the mick but he's excited)

Oh my goodness, really? And here was me thinking the apocalypse was going oh, so *swimmingly*!

ARCHIVIST

(overlapping)

Yes, alright, I just meant-

MARTIN

(cutting him off)

I, I know what you meant! I can still
be keen to see our friends!

He is definitely grinning ear to ear now; we can hear it
in the laughter in his sentence.

ARCHIVIST

True.

MARTIN

Besides, we can *help* them now.

The Archivist sighs; they both start getting back on the

road.

ARCHIVIST

Yeah.

(pause)

Yeah.

Their footsteps crunch as they walk.

TAPE CLICKS OFF.

The Magnus Archives' theme comes in.

CREDITS

JONNY

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Today's episode was written by Jonathan Sims, produced by Lowrie Ann-Davis, and directed by Alexander J Newall.

It featured: Jonathan Sims as the Archivist and Alexander J Newall as Martin Blackwood.

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Thanks for listening.

Theme ends.

ALEX

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