

MAG – “Season 5 Q&A, Part 3”

Content Warnings

- Spoilers for show to date
- Innuendo
- Explicit language
- Discussions of: thalassophobia, claustrophobia, canon-typical apocalypse & trauma, food, religion, death (inc mass death), murder
- Mentions of: addiction & mind control, violence, homelessness, explosions

Transcriber’s note: For ease of reading, most small speech noises, stumbled phrases and the frequent laughs/chuckles have been omitted from this text.

ALEX

Hello, listener. And welcome to Q & A 3. The year is 6057. All is death.

JONNY

Except for me! Alex won’t let me die!

ALEX

Bitterness. Wasteland. And Jonny. As Jonny stays—

JONNY

To answer more questions.

ALEX

—answering Q & As, in a dark and bitter future of only Q & As. In the future, there are only questions and Jonny has all the answers. Hello.

JONNY

Hello.

ALEX

Are you ready for some more Q & As, Jonny?

JONNY

No.

ALEX

Cool. So I'm going to go ahead and just jump straight in then.

JONNY

Yep. Great. Let's do it.

ALEX

I got a question here— Oh, as always, we're not going to get through all of them because there's too many. Jonny will burn out like a very, very tiny stick of dynamite.

JONNY

Like a guttering star, flickering it's last and then just supernova-ing, taking out most of Walthamstow.

ALEX

Well, thankfully we'll have a bit of warning as you slowly expand to fill the entire solar system. We'll at least know that's coming.

First question is from Lauren: How did your own relationship to fear change over the course of the show?

JONNY

I think it deepened in some ways, like, it was quite an interesting one, because right from the start creating the Entities was, in many ways, the closest examination of fear and my own fear that I had to do in the whole journey. It was very sort of front-loaded in that sense, because I really had to, sort of, dig down and be like, ‘Well, what am I afraid of? And what lines would I draw between them? And what fears are like just mine and what fears do I feel can be expanded into a slightly more sort of primal space.’

I think as I went on my relationship to horror changed more than my relationship to actually fear, and how I feel horror, and the horror that I write, interacts with fear in both, sort of, an entertainment and an exploratory sort of sense. Like I think the later series are a lot more exploring certain ideas within fear. Whereas the earlier ones are much more like, ‘Hey, here's that scary thing. Pretty scary, right?’

ALEX

Mine's real simple. I'd love to say it did; it didn't really. When you make the machine, it just turns into a bunch of nuts and bolts. I learned the word ‘thalassophobia’. There was a word for a thing that I thought was just a me thing. But that's about it, I'm afraid. Sorry for an underwhelming answer there.

JONNY

Did you were the only one who was afraid of the sea?

ALEX

No, no, no, no, no. But I didn't have an explanation, and I'd never managed to explain it to anyone. The issue of – I'm a very, very strong swimmer, like used to lifeguard and stuff like that, yet I still don't like open sea because of the depth.

JONNY

Sorry. I don't know why that tickles me. You're like, 'Oh yeah, no, I'm scared of the ocean. I'm a very strong swimmer.' Like, it's great.

ALEX

Well, you've gotta be a strong swimmer otherwise how are you going to conquer the ocean, Jonny? No, open water weirds me out because there is clearly a whale the size of, you know, an oil tanker down there. But I never managed to explain it in a word before. And there you go. Thalassophobia, that's it for me, I'm afraid.

I'm going to bounce, then to a question from Zoombeam: Did you ever consider any of the other Fears as the patron for the Archivist when planning the whole story?

JONNY

No... just because the idea of what The Eye was did evolve and change slightly, but because of the nature of the podcast, like, it was always going to be a watching Fear or a listening Fear. Like, the whole idea of the collecting stories was so tied up in the idea of observation and recording that it was always going to have to be an Entity in that vein. And so, yeah, while details about The Eye kinda changed and got a little bit refined over the course of planning and early Season 1, it was always going to be The Eye, like, the others wouldn't have worked on a metatextual level.

ALEX

The only thing that really bounced around a little bit was how much The Web was interested in him. But even then it was more just a case of like, 'Is it a four or six in terms of how hard you push that?' and that's not really the same thing as the question.

JONNY

Yeah.

ALEX

Okay then, in that case, question from DC: I know that time was broken during the apocalypse, but did either of you have a sense of how long you thought the apocalypse actually lasted for?

JONNY

In my mind, probably about six months.

ALEX

Interesting... that's a little longer than mine, but yeah.

JONNY

I did some Google Mapping to figure out how long it would actually take to walk from John O'Groats down to London. John O'Groats being the most northerly point of Scotland. And like the conclusion I came to was, if you were walking at, like, a normal pace, rather than, like, absolutely booking it—

ALEX

And not along highways and stuff.

JONNY

Yeah. It would be a few months. With breaks and all that sort of stuff, to my mind... yeah, about six months probably.

ALEX

I think some of it as well is, it depends on versions of the story. There was a version of the story where we had a mid-season break where they chilled out at Salesa's for a bit longer I think. So as a result that would have extended and shortened it. I always kind of had it in my head around the four month mark, but yeah.

JONNY

But you're absolutely right that time doesn't really work during the apocalypse period, so that's very much a ballpark figure.

ALEX

So the answer is somewhere between one hour and a billion years.

JONNY

I mean, yeah.

ALEX

Next question is Drowsy Salamander: Jonny, *The Magnus Archives* has a huge amount of unique minor characters. Did you find it difficult balancing all of them and ensuring that the audience knew what their deal was while only having a limited amount of episodes?

JONNY

Yes.

It is one of those things where a lot of the early episodes act as, in some ways, auditions for the rogue's gallery.

ALEX

That's a good way of putting it.

JONNY

And weirdly a lot of it, when I say ‘auditions’, is not really for the audience, but for **me**, in the sense of, is this a character that lodges well enough in my own mind, and hangs around and, like, just lingers and drops some little things. It's like, ‘Hey, this is something new you can do with me.’ And if that happens, then I'll bring them back. And once they've come back two or three times— Various points I had different spreadsheets of the threads and the different characters, that I'd sort of just drop them in. But yeah, if you listen to some of the Season 1 and Season 2, there's quite a lot of like hinted characters that might or might not have grown into something bigger.

One point I had an idea for, like, a Buried avatar and there was echoes of them in the workhouse episode with Kempthorne and the London Underground episode. But in the end, I just didn't get a strong enough sense of who they were going to be. They never really fully materialised as a character. Like, in universe, they're still there. They still exist.

So yeah, a lot of those early episodes were me seeing which members of the rogues gallery were going to hang around, because they tended to be the ones that I did find myself able to keep track of.

ALEX

Next question's from a lot of people: Were there any horror domains that didn't make the final cut?

I have a few, but that's because I was just keeping them in reserve, in case at some point you turned up and went 'Alex I've got nothing!' and it didn't happen. So...

JONNY

Yeah, I feel like I went through a big list, but enough that none of the discarded ones really stick in my mind. Like, I know that the ladder in 198 was actually a replacement for another domain that I'd written into the plan and then realised didn't particularly excite me, so I swapped it out for a big ladder. But because it didn't particularly excite me, I've completely blanked on what it actually was.

ALEX

That scans though, doesn't it? I mean, ultimately when everyone's, like, 'Are there any things that didn't make the final cut?', 90% of the time as well the answer will be, 'Well, yes. And it's hard to explain and that's why it didn't make the final cut.'

Like 'What if, like, inside a shark' and things. It's like the reason that it doesn't make a good answer is because it never came together as an idea in the first place. If it did, it would be there.

JONNY

I had some idea of, like, a weird rusted old clock tower, I think.

ALEX

Oh, that would have been nice. Aesthetically.

JONNY

Yeah. Well, the thing is, a lot of my discarded ideas were really nice aesthetically, but I couldn't get to work thematically.

ALEX

Yeah, isn't that always the way? I'm the same where, like, aesthetically that will work, but when you try and dig into the meat and bones of it, it's just you're trapped in a weird space and that's pretty much the entire thing.

JONNY

Yeah. When we were planning out Season 5, there were quite a few of those because I was like, 'Oh, that sounds like a really interesting, like, horror environment.' But as soon as I started writing it and I was like, 'Oh, these are all about things', I'd be going back to the list and being like, 'Well, I have no idea what this one's about.'

ALEX

There was one that's always interested me, which is the shrinking endless library. You know, the endless library is a trope.

JONNY

Yes.

ALEX

And it's like, if you keep walking long enough, you get back to the middle of the library? That, except, so the person knows it's an endless library. And then that library is shrinking. So it's endless and shrinking as a combination. I find that very, very interesting, but again, ultimately it's 'person trapped in room'.

Similarly, I think there's stuff to be done in, you know those big, massive, old Victorian orangeariums? Orangeums? [NOTE: he means 'orangeries']

JONNY

I mean, greenhouses does work.

ALEX

Unnecessarily massive greenhouse.

JONNY

Ah, with, like, gross plants and, like, getting everything rotting and like, yeah.

ALEX

Or you can do the thing where it's like, you know, 'I'm trapped in a space that's bad'. It's not got that meat.

JONNY

Great little hellscapes, but I've no idea what I'd do with them thematically.

ALEX

Next question's from Blues: There has been a lot of talk about how much agency John had during the series. How much was he able to decide for himself in the end?

JONNY

In your real life, how much are you able to actually decide? What you have asked there is fundamentally one of the core questions of the series. Where you land is very much to do with your own reaction to the text. Sorry to be a bit, like, '[INCOHERENT MUMBLING]'.

I mean, cos the question is his decisions are all his decisions. He is not at any point being actively mind-controlled, but at the same time, his decisions are taking place

within an extremely oppressive framework. His options are deeply limited, and usually an array of different, bad things. And while he's not technically being mind-controlled, he does have externally-influenced desires and pulls.

You know, because of my background, my parallel to me is always of addiction. You know? Your addiction isn't in *control* of you but it is still a factor. It is still an external pull on you. So how much you see John as having agency, how much you see as his actions being a hundred percent his own responsibility, how much is the situation he's in? That is very much to me, something that is a personal response to the text. Because fundamentally that's not a question that has an answer. That's a question the text is asking.

ALEX

Yeah, pretty much. And I know that there'll be some people who are like, 'No, but tell me the answer.' And it's like, 'It doesn't work like that. Sorry.'

I warned people there would be some answers that are just, that's a question that is a question, yes.

JONNY

It is one of those things where a lot of the time you'll be asked questions and you're like, 'Yes, you have successfully identified the question that the text is asking. But if I had an answer, I wouldn't have asked the question over the course of five seasons in a podcast.'

ALEX

Dear blues, whoever asked this question, I would suggest if you have not already, do an examination of chaos theory versus hardcore determinism. That will be a fun, deep dive but I suspect you've already done that.

JONNY

But also, like, fiction is not to me about providing answers or pointing you towards particular philosophical research. Like, I think there is a lot of value in sitting with questions that don't really have answers and just, you know, having fiction and stories that explore these spaces that fundamentally you can't say for certain one way or the other.

ALEX

Next question's from Flamango: Which part of the show do you think is most misunderstood? And could you explain it now?

I have one I could start with. So this is one that comes up a lot, and it isn't necessarily a *Magnus*-specific thing, but it comes up all the time which is: Podcasts **aren't** novels.

JONNY

Mmm.

ALEX

And people consume long-form audio drama very often like it is a novel, and you will get a lot of, 'Well, why didn't you redraft this? Why did you do that?' And a lot of the time, it's like, 'Well, you have to remember in a lot of ways, what effectively you're listening to is draft one.'

JONNY

Yeah.

ALEX

And, like, in a novel it's, like, 'Of course I'd go back and I'd tighten this. I'd change that. Oh, that arc didn't go anywhere. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.' But one of the things that I keep having to say more and more, especially on anything that has an improvisational bent, which doubles down on that, is: This is effectively you're listening to a hot off the press, very first draft of a thing.

So a lot of the time it'd be like, 'Ah, you know, for certain shows, this didn't land how I'd have thought you'd have wanted it to', and you'll get the writer going, 'You are correct.' That's not because they're bad, it's because it's a completely different medium. It doesn't work like that. And I think that that to me is probably one of the things that I think is most misunderstood, is people conflating 'having a plan for 200 episodes' as 'that was the first draft written and we have then gone back and redrafted and revised', and it doesn't work like that. It couldn't, it's impossible. It's too dense.

JONNY

I've previously used the analogy of just trying to direct a boulder as it's rolling downhill.

ALEX

And that's exactly what it's like. And yeah, I think that's probably the thing that people most either misunderstand or underestimate as a factor.

JONNY

And on top of that, you have the thing where you need to try and balance it so that the pacing works, both as a week-to-week thing—

ALEX

And a binge. Yeah.

JONNY

And I think it's interesting that the reaction to 198, it was broadly positive, but quite a few people were like, 'Why are you having a filler episode two before the finale?'

And it's like, well, a) it's not fully a filler episode. It's not actually a filler episode, it's doing a lot of specific emotional work with the characters. But also because pacing-wise, the big reveal and the big confrontation in 197 needs a beat to rest afterwards before going into the final two episodes.

And the thing is the week-on-week listeners already had that. The week-on-week listeners had a whole week to digest it and mull it over and decompress. So, when they come back for the next one, they're like, 'Oh okay. So we're just having this now.' But the thing is, you've still got to have that episode for the pacing to work.

ALEX

Yeah.

JONNY

For any other context, other than the week-on-week live listeners.

ALEX

Yeah, it wouldn't land.

JONNY

With a show this size and this scale, stuff gets misunderstood all the time. Like a detail will be overlooked, and people will build huge theories on stuff and I'll – I don't know – stumble across them and be like, 'Oh, actually there was something in, like, episode, like, 16, that completely invalidates all of that. You just obviously didn't catch it.'

I think in a wider scope, a lot of it actually does kind of reflect on the previous question. I think the biggest misunderstanding is that *The Magnus Archives* and, in a lot of cases fiction more generally, is able or looking to provide concrete answers or specific moral lessons.

What is the moral of *The Magnus Archives*? I mean, there isn't one. There are a lot of questions, a lot of themes, a lot of subjects and thoughts that I'm keen to explore, but in a lot of cases, it's like, well, if I had an answer for these questions, I would be writing a philosophical treatise, not a horror podcast that is trying to grapple with these subjects.

ALEX

The Jonathan Manifesto.

JONNY

I mean, to a certain degree, a lot of these things are ambiguous because I don't have answers in myself to them. There's a reason that there are so many arguments between characters. It's because often I don't know what the answer is.

ALEX

Next question, a bit more specific, is from basically everyone: Could you talk some more about Agnes Montague and her connection to Gertrude? Were you intending to do more with her character?

JONNY

“Intending” is a tricky word, in this sense, because the short answer is no.

Again, it sort of speaks to this first draft thing, that you mentioned. Agnes Montague is very much a character that I think if I did a second draft of *The Magnus Archives* as a whole— Which I'm not going to do!

ALEX

Yeah. Don't lay that seed, Jonny, please don't open that door.

JONNY

Just to be clear, I'm not going to do that!

But if it was something that had been wholly written and then gone over, I think Agnes is a character I would have done something a bit more with.

ALEX

Well you've said it in a previous Q & A, she was meant to be, you know, the messiah-in-absentia.

JONNY

Yeah, exactly.

ALEX

It wasn't received as such. And so the benefit of the redraft would have been, you can tweak it a bit.

JONNY

It was received as such, but I think, in retrospect, it was not a *satisfying* character study in that way.

And I think, yeah, she is a character that could have had more done with her, especially that connection with Gertrude, which is something that, to be honest, I don't know if it's something I ever fully figured out enough to hang any significant plot on it.

ALEX

We always discussed it as an allusion, not a thing that had to hold up the whole series or anything like that.

JONNY

Yeah. It was one of those things that, like, I think if I'd gotten a better sense of it earlier in the series, it might have taken greater prominence, but as it was I don't know if I ever properly figured it out more than an aspect of Gertrude and, like, drawing this sort of connection and parallel, but not really paying off on it, I guess.

ALEX

Next question is from, again, a bunch of people unsurprisingly: There's been a lot of debates on social media about the different options discussed in 199. Which option would you *personally* have gone for or preferred in that situation?

JONNY

I mean, the morally correct decision... -ish, in as much as there is one, is to, like, contain the Fears.

ALEX

You are incorrect! You have no guarantee of multiple worlds beyond the statement of a single person. Known fact versus potential fact; in that risk assessment, you let them go.

JONNY

The thing is, it is that choice about, like, villain or victim and, like, I think that is the dichotomy that the whole series is ultimately concerned with. By the end of Season 5, literally every character in the series has been rendered either villain or victim. And of the early ones it's looking at the interplay, where does the crossover come? Where's— What's the overlap? How do you draw up these categories in a system which hurts people, but also gives them the opportunity to offset that pain onto others and, like, this relationship with fear?

And so that is all very distilled into this final choice. In many ways it's one where it's like, 'Yeah, okay. But if you do strip off all nuance, what do you do?' I think most people would choose the villain side rather than the victim side in this dichotomy. But I mean, that may just be an indication of my own cowardice or my view of people in general.

ALEX

I do very enjoy our new dynamic:

<Question?>

Jonny: <Carefully considered a nuanced answer that considers all angles>

Alex: <Hot take! Next question!>

JONNY

Well, I mean, to be honest, a lot of these are things that I myself have been mulling over for however long. And so someone's like: '<Question?>' I'm like, 'Okay, here is me just vomiting up the answer that's been, sort of, churning over inside me for however many months.'

ALEX

This one is a little less involved, little easier to answer, I think. From Sazandorable: What are your best memories related to the fanbase or favourite fandom moment or anecdote?

JONNY

They're all from early seasons. Once the fandom blew up to a certain size, I had no real way to constructively engage. I really enjoyed back when there was the forum. Do you remember when there was a forum, Alex?

ALEX

Oh yeah. I was so proud of my, like, 1980s-esque forum. It was so very retro. I made that.

JONNY

There were maybe, like, a couple of hundred people at most, and a few of them posted up observations about, like, some stuff that didn't add up in Season 1. And so we included those as— like, when Tim is, like, just going through all the ways that the Archivist has screwed up. Those were, like, legitimate things raised.

ALEX

Yeah. I remember that.

JONNY

I think we may have used some of their, like, actual names. We got their permission and they were like, 'Yeah, great!'

That felt like a really fun back and forth between, what was at that point, a very small podcast and, like, a fun little fanbase. Also like weirdly, the strangest thing about the expansion of the fanbase is how almost homogenous it makes certain things. I'll be honest, I miss the fanart of the early days.

ALEX

Oh yeah. Where everyone was still just— yeah.

JONNY

Yeah. Because, like, you used to get so many variant, different designs in the early days. Like, every character, every time you saw art of them, they'd look entirely different. And it would be fascinating to see how everybody, sort of, saw these characters. Whereas at this point, because, with a large fanbase, generally people come into something having already seen a bunch of fanart, it's this recursive loop where you end up getting, like, characters kind of settle into standardised looks.

I'll be honest, I really like the sort of broad fandom idea of what the Archivist looks like, what Martin looks like, what Michael and Helen look like. But I miss the days when there was just this huge variety of all sorts of different character interpretations.

ALEX

I think I have two. I haven't done much in the way of live events by virtue of just frankly, I'm too busy. Like I tend to end up doing other stuff cos I'm like, 'Would

you rather a new episode or a new show? Or would you rather this one event? So I tend to lean a bit harder to the former.

But it was at an event and I overheard some fans having a conversation. And it was just the takeaway of:

- That's Martin.
- That can't be Martin!
- No, it is. That's Martin.
- He looks wrong!
- What do you mean 'he looks wrong'?
- He's wearing a belt.

and that just stuck with me, as someone caught a glimpse of me-as-person and went:

- That can't— No. Urgh. No. Eww. No.

Again, it was a genuinely lovely experience and everyone was lovely, but that just tickled me. 'That can't be Martin, he's wearing a belt.'

JONNY

Martin, famous elasticated pant-wearer.

ALEX

Yeah, it was just— it was an interesting little glimpse into someone's specific take.

JONNY

Martin only wears dungarees. I don't— like, it's pretty much canon.

ALEX

The other one was answering my door to a delivery from a very, very bemused looking delivery driver who had, like, enough baked goods to feed a small country. And I had no context for it. And I found out after the fact that, long story short, as a sort of thing, the mods sort of, like, clumped together and just— 'The idea was to send like a cake our way to just be like, 'Ah, here's a cake. Well done.'

However, because there was a little bit of a miscommunication as to, like, stuff, it had spiralled wildly out of control. So there were, like, three full-sized cakes plus, like, 30 scones and an entire thing and an entire thing. And after the fact, it was like, it over-scoped very quickly, but it was just the look on someone's face as they thought I had ordered – to what is clearly a house of just two people – four cakes, 50 scones, blah, blah, blah, to just sit there and eat on my own.

Did. Enjoyed it. Have no regrets, but it was just a very funny moment. And it just ties into that thing I keep saying of, like, the fanbase is terrifyingly organised when it wants to be, just scary sometimes.

Okay. Next one is onto a technical question. This one's from 'TheThoughtfulNinja: Jonny, do you re-record 'The Rusty Quill presents *The Magnus Archives*' beginning sometimes? Or have you used the same one since Season 1?

JONNY

I don't remember. Alex, have we used the same one since Season 1?

ALEX

We've recorded it three times. We used one in Season 1. I think we then did a better one in Season 2, that saw us over to about Season 4. And then we did one more in Season 4, but bear in mind that Jonny obviously had to record the titles

for each one. And because the way we did it, we always got him to read it three or four times per title. So...

JONNY

Yeah, like, I've read it many, many times in various scenarios. I have zero idea which of those were used and at what point they were.

ALEX

Next question's from Elizabeth Wynn, kind of touches on stuff we've covered before: How did you decide which characters would become regulars? Were they all decided from their introductions? Were there any who were written into future episodes after their first appearances?

JONNY

If they were fun to write and I kept thinking about them after I wrote them the first time, they were probably going to come back. At least that was for Season 1 and 2. By, like, Season 3 and 4, it was very much like we had our basic rogues gallery and we were adding people in, shifting them around, to actually set things up in motion for the last seasons.

ALEX

There was no major character who was introduced either, where we were like, 'Well, I guess you can't be in any further because you didn't work as a character', which is useful.

It was all either 'these are your core characters' or 'these are ones that are fun to keep around'. I don't think there was one that we had to bail on. But that's the problem, is that audition thing that you talk about where you kind of— For Nikola Orsinov, it's not like we had an entire Orsinov thing, to then introduce a single

episode and go, ‘Oh, that didn't work. We have to rewrite all of, you know, all of Season 3 or whatever.’ It didn't really work like that.

JONNY

Michael, for instance, then later when Michael died, Helen, the Distortion, became, I think, a bigger character than it was originally conceived of, largely because in Season 2, Alex was like, ‘The Distortion has to turn up. We have to actually meet this monster.’ That actual in-person appearance wasn't in my original Season 2 plan. And like, we actually had a bit of an argument about it, because I was saying like, ‘Alex, if we meet it at this stage, then this monster is going to become, like, a character.’

ALEX

Yeah, I did give you that as a rule.

JONNY

Which is not, like I say, like this difference between, like, the monster and the character and, like, the naming and all this sort of thing. I was like, ‘It will— It is going to become, like, a character and I'm not sure that's what I want to do with it.’

ALEX

Mmm.

JONNY

And Alex, you very much like, ‘No, I think it will work best in the narrative as a character and as this foil for John's own journey’ and you were right, you were absolutely right, I think.

ALEX

I forgot about that. That is one of the few times where I was, like, pushing on something quite hard in a way that I don't normally do. Yeah, I forgot about that, good point.

Next question's from Alice: What happened in the rest of the world? Did Paris turn into the Inheritors domain as 134 predicted, for example?

JONNY

The apocalypse was global. I don't know enough about most other countries to speak to what the specific domains and fears that they would have. I mean, I think a lot of them would be similar. Like, I think France would probably have their equivalent of a lot of the domains that we travel through in the UK, probably with their own avatars.

ALEX

Yeah.

Next question's from Pamplemousse-rose: What are you most proud of in this podcast?

JONNY

Finishing it.

ALEX

Finishing it.

JONNY

I wrote 200 episodes. Basically every week. Well, no, as in— No. I wrote an episode a week for, like, 200 episodes over the course of five years. That's, like, 600,000 words. It was a lot and... I did them all and they just about work.

They function. As a cohesive story, they don't collapse, the ending isn't a complete cop-out. The themes broadly come out as they're intended to. I did it.

ALEX

We started with whatever we could, and stuck to it. There's a lot of alternate versions out there where we went, 'Nah, we're not going to be able to start well' and then never got around to starting it, or there's versions where we got bogged down, trying to get things changed in Season 2, or— There's a lot of versions where this never... finished. And I think probably that one.

I mean, god knows, it almost nearly never launched.

JONNY

Did it?

ALEX

Yeah. Remember I was made homeless, because of all of the stuff. I launched *Magnus* from a temporary hotel room that was being paid for on debt I hoped an insurer would pay. They did.

JONNY

Oh god, yeah!

ALEX

Yeah. That was a whole... whole thing. So...

JONNY

To be fair, some early episodes were recorded in James Ross' flat, some were in your asbestos flat before it asbestos-ed.

ALEX

I think if you look at the multiverse there's more versions where it didn't work, than it did. So that's the thing I'm proud of.

JONNY

Yeah.

ALEX

This next one's from Azrael. I think we've mentioned this similar before, but worth readdressing: If Lottie Broomhall could have continued playing Sasha, what would Sasha's arc have been or was her story not yet written?

JONNY

Her story wasn't solidly written. Hmm. That's a good question. Cos, like, fundamentally we knew the situation with Lottie by like—

ALEX

Very, very early.

JONNY

Pretty much by half-way through Season 1. So it was established by the time we were, like, properly planning out Season 2 and beyond. I have a suspicion that if

Lottie'd been able to keep going and Sasha had remained as a character and we'd, you know, [MAKES QUICK DEATH SOUND] got rid of Tim—

ALEX

As quickly as possible.

JONNY

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, I wanted to have the Not!Them take someone at the end.

ALEX

So assuming it took Tim instead of Sasha.

JONNY

Yeah, I think in Season 2 as it is, the Archivist is very much the paranoia and the investigation and Tim is dealing with his trauma. I think the theoretical 'Sasha Season 2', I think Sasha would have been a lot more involved with the investigation side of things. And it probably would have doubled down a bit on the Archivist's paranoia, because we had Sasha as a character to do a bit more of the digging.

ALEX

Fan the flames of it.

JONNY

Yeah.

ALEX

That could have worked.

JONNY

That also might have sent the Archivist on a slightly different path.

ALEX

I don't necessarily believe that. I think you'd have ended up homing in on more or less the same point.

I think that's what you start out with, and you'd get a little different flavour in Season 3, but I think ultimately Tim and Sasha would have just, kind of, inverted each other's story roles a lot.

JONNY

Yeah. I think they would have ended up in the same place. But I think they would've got there very different ways.

ALEX

Mmm.

JONNY

It probably worked out for the best, in a lot of ways, because I'll be honest, I think that we probably would have ended up killing Sasha at the Season 3 finale, just because, pacing-wise, where that escalation death needs to happen. But I think it ended up in quite a satisfying place with Tim.

ALEX

Nah, hot take: Archives would have blown up in... start of Season 2 and then the series would have ended. That's my hot take. That's what would've happened.

JONNY

I mean, that would have been a comparatively happy ending.

ALEX

I mean, once you start looking at the total scope, I think that's a very happy ending, unfortunately.

JONNY

Mmhmm.

ALEX

Next question is from ricey: Was there any aspect of John and Martin's relationship that was especially important to get right? Or was there any aspect that was especially difficult?

JONNY

I wanted them to communicate well, but I also wanted them to be— I mean, fundamentally, I never wanted to lose sight of the fact that they were essentially having their first date in a global apocalypse, for however long. Nailing that balance between, like, good communication and, like, a broadly healthy relationship, but also representing that stress. And I think I just wanted it to feel real.

ALEX

You see that's very interesting to me. Cos I found the Season 5 dynamic quite an easy one to tread. Admittedly, I am a married man in a high stress environment for extended periods.

So it might have—

JONNY

Yeah. Like, I'll be honest, I didn't feel that the writing of Season 5 was actually difficult because yeah, actually, a healthy relationship and an incredibly high stress environment is something that I too have been navigating over that year. It certainly was the most important to me, I think.

ALEX

Season 4, for me, was the one that was difficult. That was a really fine balancing act of keeping them away from one another, without it being full-blown hostility, without it deteriorating into just pointless pining either way. I think that Season 4 was a more difficult balancing act because there was so little time of the two characters together, it had to work. And then so much of their time apart was being defined by that absence in a way they were both being surprised by and blah, blah, blah.

Like, I think that was probably the most difficult one to write.

JONNY

I guess if you've got forty episodes of them being together, any given individual interaction has less pressure on it, is going to be less definitional for the relationship as a whole, cos in Season 4, there were only like a handful of scenes they're in together.

ALEX

And if you misplay it then the big reunion is, 'Oh, well that feels kind of, like, harsh or whatever.' I found Season 4, much more difficult to make sure we had it right.

JONNY

I think you're right, there.

ALEX

The next question's from SophiaSoap: What do you think are the most important things that distinguish tragedies from cautionary tales? And how did you incorporate this into *The Magnus Archives*?

JONNY

A cautionary tale is intended to deliver a specific lesson. And honestly, I feel that the majority of lessons simple enough that you can properly deliver them through a story? Those are your childhood lessons, those are your, like, your fairy tales. To me, a tragedy is about people failing.

It's like in your classical sense, it's that core flaw in a character that leads to their ultimate failure. But what is the lesson of *The Magnus Archives*? Don't go to work for the Magnus Institute, but you don't know because, like, the majority of the choices you make in life, you don't have all the information necessary.

ALEX

I think it comes down to the fact that a cautionary tale has a right answer.

JONNY

Yeah. That is it.

ALEX

The cautionary tale, even if you want to go broader with it and consider something like *1984* a cautionary tale. What's that? Don't embrace fascism. You know? I'm

oversimplifying, but my point is, is there is a right answer that you're meant to take away from that.

JONNY

I don't know if that's even true in a sense, cos like *1984* is a dystopia. Like it is illustrating a bad end, but, like, there's nothing within it that could be easily interpreted as, like, 'And this is how you don't get there.'

ALEX

But I'd still say it was a cautionary tale. I'm stretching it a little bit, but: Here's the destination that you want to try to avoid. The right answer is avoid this destination.

JONNY

Yeah, no, okay. Fair enough. Fair enough.

ALEX

A tragedy is far more personal and inevitable. You can't look at a tragedy and go: You shouldn't do this. I mean, there is an overlap to a degree, but the point is there is, it's like, a tragedy, once the pieces are in play, off it goes. You know what I mean?

JONNY

Yeah.

ALEX

And a cautionary tale is meant to be a thing where you see it off. And I realise there is some overlap, the whole, like, argument— Let's go real classic with it, you know, *Romeo and Juliet*. You could argue, well, there's a cautionary tale of, you know, don't create these divides between people, blah, blah, blah.

JONNY

Cautionary tale is: Don't be teens!

ALEX

My point is, I think it comes down to that there is a clearer right answer in a cautionary tale, and god knows the whole point of *Magnus Archives* is there couldn't be. That was something we dictated at the start is, we always wanted 199 to be that big, heavy discussion. And it was really, really important that there was not a right answer for that heavy discussion, because if there was, it ceased to work.

JONNY

Yeah. Or rather, it's the sort of thing where, like, I think maybe 30% of the audience absolutely, as soon as they heard the proposition were, like, there is a right answer. And another 30%, as soon as they heard the proposition, absolutely said there is a right answer. And those two 30% had the exact opposite, because, like, a lot of it is to do with your own personal philosophy and how you view the world and value— And like that 40% in the middle that's, like, 'Oh no, this is a, ooh, difficult choice.'

ALEX

Then there's that 1% who are like me, who see the trolley problem and go, 'Yes. How **do** you hit **all** the people? Hmmm.'

JONNY

I've said it before, like, I don't feel like I have lessons to impart in the cautionary tale sense. And I am much more interested in exploring tragedies and, like, the anatomy of a tragedy. And if through the anatomy of a tragedy, you as an audience can, like, hone in on something and, sort of, see it and say, 'Oh, well, this could have been avoided if X or Y', and, like, take that away as a personal insight.

Brilliant. That's something that fiction is very good for, helping you work through your own thoughts on something, help you, sort of, figure out where you stand on different things. But yeah, I'm not interested in writing cautionary tales in the sense of, like, 'And here is the lesson to be taken.'

ALEX

We now have, lined up here, a series of quickfire questions. Now, the reason that these are quickfires are, a lot of them, the answer might just be 'the text is the text'. Okay? So we've gone through and we've picked out ones that I think you should be able to answer.

JONNY

Okay.

ALEX

But I will apologise now that there were a lot of questions where, if there isn't an answer, a lot of it might be just, well, you're kind of not meant to know, necessarily.

@elleielle: What exactly did the apocalypse survivors do to Simon Fairchild?

JONNY

I mean, what do you think they did? They threw him off something high!

ALEX

Next question: In Oliver's first statement he mentions an ex-boyfriend named Graham. Is this the same Graham from 'Across the Street' or is it a coincidence?

JONNY

Yes.

ALEX

Next ques— I know I've got to ask now. “Yes” to which? Or, is that the point?

JONNY

Yes, it is the same.

ALEX

Right.

JONNY

It is actually one of the very first connections I wrote in this thing. I did nothing with it, but it is deliberate.

ALEX

Okay. Next question. From a bunch of people: What happened to Monster Pig? Did it have its own domain?

JONNY

Yeah, sure. Why not.

ALEX

A bunch of people: Where is / what happened to Joshua Gillespie?

JONNY

I dunno, he was probably fine, like— I don't know!

ALEX

That's fine.

JONNY

I don't care.

ALEX

No, you do, you do. Next question—

JONNY

I do care. I do care.

ALEX

What did Martin say was his middle name?

JONNY

That's the joke! That is the joke! The joke is you don't know! The joke is you never find out!

ALEX

Next question. CricketSaysNo says: What was the creature that killed Robert Montauk?

JONNY

Oh, that was one of the monsters that I never ended up really doing anything with. It was, like, a Dark-summoned thing. Yeah, killed Robert Montauk, hassled Julia. In the end, I got more interested in the cult that summoned it than the actual creature itself.

I have this sort of vague image of, like, a creature made of darkness that like stagnates water and, like, was very ice cold to the touch, was kind of like a negative space thing, but I never really did much further with it.

ALEX

Next question. *dilf_elias* asks: What skin care routine did Nikola use on John? And did he stick with it afterwards?

JONNY

He probably didn't because it was probably very traumatic to apply any sort of lotion or toner after a month of that. And like, I think it was probably just a very standard cleanser, toner, moisturiser routine. It would have taken a while to get the right products for his skin. Cos I don't think he was going to be very helpful with that.

ALEX

Dr Brainbox asks: Is the dog barking in the background of 'The Sick Village', Agape from 'Love Bombing'?

JONNY

Yeah, sure. Why not.

ALEX

Next question from a bunch: Is Rosie's last name, Zampano, a reference to *House of Leaves*?

JONNY

Yes. That one I will say is just, like, I really enjoyed taking characters that were specifically supernaturally investigation-y characters all connected to the Institute,

and just giving them the surnames of horror writers or horror characters I like. But in some ways I regretted it because I was never consistent with who I actually did that for and didn't. It was just whenever the fancy took me.

But when I was doing Rosie, I was like, 'You know what, for old time's sake, I'm going to throw in a horror reference name.'

ALEX

Fair play. Next one is from James: Was there a reason Elias always referred to Basira as "Detective"?

JONNY

Sounds good. Literally, it is a trope that I really love when, like, a smug villain says the word "Detective". It's just something I like.

ALEX

kyandicane asks: Was the house in MAG170, Moorland House, the home of the Lukases?

JONNY

Yeah, sure. Could be. I mean that wasn't in my mind when I wrote it, but it makes sense.

Actually, wait, no, it doesn't make sense. The locations don't match up, because in 170 they would still have been quite far north and Moorland House, I believe, I located somewhere in the arse of Britain, down the south-east.

ALEX

Lulu Solier asks: Where was Toby Carlisle getting all the meat from?

JONNY

Meatsend.com.

ALEX

Oh no. Don't...

JONNY

Meatsend.com.

ALEX

Don't give people websites.

JONNY

Is that a real website?

ALEX

Well, it probably is now!

JONNY

Alex quickly google meatsend.com for me.

ALEX

I'm not googling that! No way. I'm on a work computer, not a chance.

JONNY

Google it!

A lot of it came from the meat dimension and the stuff he mail ordered came from a website that sends you meat. I will call it meatsend.com. If that is a real website, please don't sue us meatsend.com.

ALEX

OllyTheCrab asks: What really happened to Michael? Is he dead or just somewhere else?

JONNY

The nature of identity in the Distortion is a difficult one. I mean, like, what happened was Michael died in those corridors shortly after he was eaten by the Distortion. Then the Distortion became *a* Michael. Then that Michael died, was torn apart from the inside by the rest of the Distortion. Then the Distortion became Helen, who was also dead as a character. And then the Distortion as a whole died wearing Helen's face.

Sort of, I guess, is one interpretation. Like the questions of identity and existence within the Distortion are ambiguous and like, kind of, deliberately so.

ALEX

Next one is from a bunch of people: What was the significance of the Archivist calling Jonathan Fanshawe his "namesake" in "Remains to be Seen"?

JONNY

What do you mean? They were both called Jonathan.

ALEX

Yep.

JONNY

That's what “namesake” means. “Namesake” just means someone with the same name as you.

ALEX

Okay, onto the last ones. Hila Horizon asks: Was the Admiral happy in his domain?

JONNY

Yeah. He loved doing violence. Like all cats.

ALEX

From a bunch of people: Is Jurgen Leitner Martin's dad?

JONNY

If you want him to be, I guess. Like, I—

ALEX

I didn't have that in mind, but that doesn't mean anything.

JONNY

I've never thought of that as a connection. So, if you figured you've cracked a secret, sorry, but if it makes sense, like if you've constructed a big theory where it makes sense then, yeah, I guess it makes sense.

ALEX

Last one, Ian Lynam, the most important question arguably: Did Martin's poems survive the blast—

JONNY

No.

ALEX

—at the Archives?

JONNY

No. None of them. Destroyed. Utterly wiped out.

ALEX

So, that's your quickfire done. I've only got the last few proper questions. Fair play, we got through a bunch there. And I'm impressed with you. Some of those were actually proper answers. Hardly any of them were, 'I don't care'.

Last couple of questions, which will probably have unsatisfying answers. So just to round it out in a really nice way. From a lot of people: What's next for both of you and Rusty Quill? Is Jonny going to be working on Rusty Quill future projects?

JONNY

Yeah, that's a very good question actually, Alex. Is Jonny going to be working on Rusty Quill future projects?

ALEX

Can't wait to be shot of the man.

We can't talk about future stuff. I'll tell you now, don't expect “*The Magnus Archives* 2, coming in 2 mo—” That's not going to happen. We need to not make *Magnus Archives* for just a little bit.

JONNY

I will probably still be around, here and there, as a voice, but I personally am probably done with podcasts for a while. I'm really interested in different media. And, like, what any given medium can do. At the moment I'm leaning quite heavily into novels. Obviously *Thirteen Storeys* is the book that has— came out in November. That's my first horror novel, and I've got a second one that should be coming out later this year.

And there are a few other projects that I'm working on, tinkering with, but I feel like I've done everything I can do at the moment in the podcasts sphere.

ALEX

Do not expect us— a new show suddenly to just drop in out of the ether. It's— No.

JONNY

And personally, I'm also doing a lot of work in game design at the moment with mine and Sasha Sienna, my partner's company, MacGuffin and Co. I think by now the Kickstarter will have finished for our little micro-settings collection, but you can check out our work at macguffinandcompany.com.

ALEX

And in terms of what's next for Rusty Quill, I literally am not allowed to talk about any of it. Sorry. I'm not allowed to talk about any of it. You will find out soon, but I can't talk about any of it.

But I have a final question, potentially your final Q & A for *The Magnus Archives*.

JONNY

Right?

ALEX

I think it's from AMJT. I don't think that's an acronym meaning like All Magnus Junior Team or something, I think it's just AMJT: On behalf of the entire fanbase, Jonny, please could you say the following – that *The Magnus Archives* **was** a podcast distributed by Rusty Quill and licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial Sharealike 4.0 International license caveat, in **the** voice?

JONNY

No. Because it still exists.

ALEX

No!

JONNY

It still exists!

ALEX

You're a monster!

JONNY

It's still out there. You can still listen to it. It's still **is**.

ALEX

You're going to make so many people angry with that answer.

JONNY

Well... tough.

ALEX

Ohhhh, brutal! Twisting the knife to the very last. Wow! Okay.

JONNY

In many ways, I feel like the end of this Q & A is the real tragedy of *The Magnus Archives*.

ALEX

Oh my god, Jonny, why do you just want to pick fights with the world?

Brilliant. You know what? Okay. Okay, cool.

JONNY

Alright. Okay. Alright, alright, alright.

ALEX

Eh, you do you, Jonny!

JONNY

I'm not going to say it all. I will say:

<ARCHIVIST VOICE> *The Magnus Archives* was a podcast.

I'm not going to do all the rest of it.

ALEX

Okay, okay. Alright—

JONNY

You've all got the recordings. You can, like, I don't know, just pop in to Audacity, like, chop it up yourself.

ALEX

Right.

JONNY

But I don't believe it, because media doesn't stop existing just because it's not being actively produced anymore.

ALEX

Didn't you hear we're both deleted from public consciousness forever now?

JONNY

It's fine.

ALEX

If nothing else, thank you for your time. You know, for the last five years, and for the stuff we're still going to record today.

JONNY

Yeah.

ALEX

But thank you everyone. If we didn't get through to your question, I guarantee you there's limited hours in the day. And we did try. I promise you that. And I think after this one, we have a commentary episode so strap in for that.

Thank you everyone. I hope you've enjoyed it. And if you have any further questions, I'm sorry.

JONNY

If you have any further questions, good! Good! It means you've engaged with the story and you have reactions to it and thoughts.

ALEX

Goodbye, everyone.

JONNY

Bye!