

MAG – 080 – The Librarian

Content warnings

- Character death
- Murder
- Graphic injury

Discussions of: being hunted, death, altered reality

Mentions of: body mutilation, threats of violence & death, physical violence, disappearances, human sacrifices, smoking, insects

SFX: low drone, high pitched tone, dripping, vocalised suffering, violence

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

Rusty Quill presents: The Magnus Archives. Episode eighty. The Librarian.

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro – Continues]

[Tape clicks on.]

LEITNER

Please! I don't know how much time we have.

ARCHIVIST

So you said.

[The clang of the metal pipe being placed on the table]

LEITNER

Is that necessary? You think I pose a danger to you?

ARCHIVIST

Yes. Yes I do.

LEITNER

Then take it with you, but I can't afford to just sit here.

ARCHIVIST

So talk fast.

LEITNER

Could we at least have this conversation in the tunnels?

ARCHIVIST

I'm not going back down there. That thing... Is it dead?

LEITNER

Unlikely. Whether something like that can actually be destroyed... It is trapped.
I, I hope for a very long time.

ARCHIVIST

And Sasha... The real one?

LEITNER

Was that her name? I'm afraid she's gone. Whatever it does to those it takes,
they don't come back. She's dead. Do you need a moment?

ARCHIVIST

No. No, I'm... You're not what I expected.

LEITNER

I suppose not. My family emigrated when I was very young. English was always my first language. I used to adopt an accent sometimes when meeting people, a sort of personal joke, but truth be told, my Norwegian is terrible. Now, are you going to help me or not?

ARCHIVIST

You first. You want my help, you answer my questions. Agreed?

LEITNER

Agreed.

ARCHIVIST

Good. Good.

Statement of Jurgen Leitner. February 16th, 2017. Statement begins.

LEITNER

You're quite like her, you know. I suppose that's no surprise. Anyway, your questions?

ARCHIVIST

Right. Let's start with what you did down there. How you... trapped it.

[The sound of books being placed on the table.]

LEITNER

An unexpurgated copy of Ruskin's The Seven Lamps of Architecture, published in 1845. Of course, Ruskin didn't even begin writing the book until 1846, and the text of this one varies markedly from the version that was distributed. It gives an acute sense of the walls pressing in around you, and if consumed recklessly, will physically entomb the reader.

Over the years, I have found that it interacts with Smirke's architecture, and those tunnels specifically, in a more predictable way. By carefully reading specific passages in certain locations, I am able to exercise... a degree of control over the substance of the tunnels.

ARCHIVIST

I didn't hear you say anything down there.

LEITNER

I said reading. It doesn't need to be spoken aloud.

ARCHIVIST

Right. So you can change the tunnels?

LEITNER

I can. Though even setting aside the obvious dangers, it's a time-consuming and imprecise process. That said, I will admit that when you began to explore again, I... closed off certain passages, and remade others. I, I wanted to keep you contained while deciding whether to make contact.

ARCHIVIST

You moved the tunnels for me?

LEITNER

The upper levels, yes. Made them more rational, actually. It didn't strike you as odd that you were able to map them in a matter of weeks?

ARCHIVIST

I thought I was just getting a sense of the place. I suppose you left the rubbish around for me as well, giving me hints? And the arrow?

LEITNER

No. I thought I was being very careful cleaning up after myself, but you have keener eyes than I gave you credit for. I should have expected that, I suppose.

The arrow, however, was not mine. The 'Not-Sasha' had come down several times. I suspect it was almost as curious about me as you were.

Perhaps it thought you might have better luck flushing me out. I suppose, in a way, it was right. In retrospect, using The Seven Lamps so much was perhaps unwise. It is possible I unbalanced Smirke's architecture somewhat, however cautious I might have tried to be.

ARCHIVIST

And the other book?

LEITNER

Hardly a book. Barely twelve pages. It is entitled A Disappearance. If read cover to cover, it removes one from the world. I cannot say precisely what that means, only that the assistant I assigned to it, Jacob Feng, was never seen again.

I have found, however, that reading only one or two words is sufficient to hide me from the prying eyes of your master. It allowed me to talk with Gertrude in relative safety, and occasionally come above ground for my own ends.

ARCHIVIST

My master? We'll get to that. How long have you been down there?

LEITNER

Hard to say. I've been in hiding for over twenty years now, ever since my library was destroyed.

Obviously I have not spent all that time below your Institute. The old Millbank prison tunnels stretch out a very long way, and there are other entrances than the one below the Archives. I have a small number of... secure locations, though since Gertrude's death I have been reluctant to leave the tunnels. I dislike spending too much time in the open.

I am always being hunted. Both by creatures like the ones you have encountered, and by certain human individuals who believe I am to blame for the books that destroyed their loved ones. Three years ago, I made the mistake of spending a full night outside my safehouses. I was almost beaten to death by an angry goth.

ARCHIVIST

(Laughs) That'll be our Gerard.

LEITNER

I don't follow.

ARCHIVIST

I wouldn't worry about him. He passed away a couple of years ago.

LEITNER

That is hardly my point.

ARCHIVIST

So are you to blame?

LEITNER

For what?

ARCHIVIST

For the books. Or did you just stick your name on them by accident? Why the "Library of Jurgen Leitner"?

LEITNER

I... thought that I could control them; that I alone had the knowledge to contain them. Back then, I believed they were simply books. Horrifying, powerful, yes, but with rules, limits that could be charted. I was a fool. I had no idea what forces lay behind them, or that they had other servants that might come searching.

I was ruthless, I will admit that. I don't know how many assistants I sacrificed to learn the secrets of the volumes I collected. Dozens, at least. Only a few escaped with their life and mind intact, and even then they were deeply marked. But I was relentless. I saw myself as a guardian, a reverse Pandora, gathering the evils of the world and locking them away.

And so I branded them with my seal. I told myself that if any should escape, such a mark could help me retrieve them. But I think, in my heart, I dreamed of my work becoming known. That “The Library of Jurgen Leitner” would stand as a symbol of courage and protection. Hubris. I suppose it is fitting punishment that my name has become a watchword for evil, spoken by those who only know it as marking the darkest, most terrible of secrets.

My name has become a curse.

ARCHIVIST

Tell me from the beginning.

LEITNER

I was born the heir to great wealth. My family used to deal in manufacture: steel, textiles, all sorts. But, by my time, it was largely a matter of extensive property holdings and carefully managed investments. Money making money.

There was never the need for me to learn anything of worth. I suppose in another life I might have been another rich wastrel, content to squander my inheritance on indulgence and comfort, but I always felt a calling to make something of myself. To matter. I had no interest in politics and, while I was certainly no fool, my attempts at academia were ultimately unsatisfying. Business bored me to tears. The only thing I was ever truly talented at was acquiring things. I suppose you could say I was skilled at shopping.

I don't say that to be glib, nor as a comment on my wealth. I don't mean I gained any satisfaction from wasting money on vulgar Bond Street trinkets. I mean, I had a genuine and pronounced talent for finding items of worth and convincing their owners to part with them. The most valuable things always

need to be hunted, and that was where I excelled. It started by simply cross-referencing auction catalogues with local records and slightly obscure books of art history, but soon I had a network of contacts and took dinner with some of the most eccentric curio dealers in the world.

It was Desmond Lorell that first told me of the books. They were a rumour, as these things always are, and he had no idea of the dangers. “Magic books” he called them. He had believed them to be coded spell books derived, of all things, from the writings of Merlin!

Poor Desmond. When he finally found one, an old leather-bound thing titled *The Stalwart Hunters’ Almanac*, he had no idea what to do with it. I suppose, looking back, his death was a very good thing for me. The extent of the mutilation, and how closely it correlated with the passages he had described to me, left little doubt as to the connection. So when I acquired the book myself I took exceptional precautions.

The thing that surprises me most, I think, is how readily I accepted the existence of the supernatural. I had occasionally made purchases before that that had caused... anomalies, but nothing like those books. Yet as soon as their nature became apparent, I simply accepted it and began to factor it into my dealings with them. It was shortly afterwards I hired my first assistant. A dour man, by the name of Albert Stross. He barely lasted a fortnight.

It didn’t take me long to track down other books like Lorell’s, and it seemed like almost overnight I had found my purpose. I was to be the keeper of evil tomes. To begin with, I never gave much thought to their origins; I simply concerned myself with acquiring them, and making sure I had staff I could spare to study them. It was easier than I expected, and I’m always surprised

nobody attempted such a thing before me. I suppose few walk away from their first encounter with any desire to look for more, if they walk away at all. And of those that do, none would have had my skill at finding them, or my extensive resources.

Luck played a significant role as well. It was shortly after I had begun to have problems storing them that I discovered the work of the architect Robert Smirke. There were several volumes in my possession that, if kept them close to each other reacted... very badly. But Smirke's writings, his principles of balance between opposing forces, gave me some inkling as to a solution. Today was not the first time my life has been saved by his architecture. I commissioned a house to be built, based on some of his designs, and spent a good deal of time and money gaining access to existing buildings he had worked on, with the aim of storing the books safely. I believe at about that time I commissioned my bookplates and began to label them.

And then the house was complete, and I had my library. A vast, lopsided structure, by turns cavernous or maze-like, depending on the needs of the inmates. By the end, I had nine hundred and seventy-eight volumes in my library. Some innocuous, some unsettling and some utterly murderous. In the end, I didn't have much time to enjoy my achievement. It was only a few years after the house was complete that the attack came.

You must understand, I had only ever encountered these dark powers in the form of books or the occasional antique. I had no idea that there were people or creatures out there that served them. So I was not prepared. All my defences were inward facing, to prevent the contents of my library getting out. I suppose getting in must have seemed a trifle.

It started with the visitors. Almost every day, some stranger would turn up at my door and ask to see my collection. Now, whatever my secret ambitions might have been, I was very careful not to let word get out about what I was doing. And these people, they were... wrong somehow. They didn't move as people should move, and their cadence was very strange when they spoke. They almost always forgot to blink.

Even then I didn't realise what was coming, and simply sent them away with a firm refusal. When it actually happened, it was so all fast I barely had time to register it. One moment, I was typing a new catalogue entry for A Journal of a Plague Year, and the next... everything was screaming. My assistants, the books, even me.

Thomas McMann was stabbed through the throat by something with too many teeth and limbs like knives. Mary Johnson was pulled into a cavernous maw that opened beneath her. Gregory Todd ran into a door that shouldn't have been there. A great hand reached down through the roof and plucked away Leandra Toulouse. And there was one other assistant, whose... whose name I don't recall, but the last I saw of him, he was being pulled into a great, pulsating pile of meat.

I don't know how I escaped. Perhaps because I designed the house, I knew how to best move through it. Perhaps I was sensible enough to steer clear of the rooms that had fallen into darkness, or burned with a fire that seemed to leave the books untouched. Perhaps they let me go. Or perhaps, once again, it was simply luck.

I didn't look back as I fled. Nothing seemed to chase me, at least not then. I had none of the books with me, and that was what they were after. Of course,

by the time I realised that, there were many others who were hunting me. Mostly vengeance-minded folk who had lost someone to the books, plastered with my name, that were now free once again. It was easier to let the world think I was dead and, to one degree or another, I've been in hiding ever since.

ARCHIVIST

Huh. You're right.

LEITNER

About which part?

ARCHIVIST

You were a fool.

LEITNER

Hmm.

ARCHIVIST

Why didn't you burn them?

LEITNER

Pride. If they were destroyed, what was I to guard? Even so, I don't believe that would have solved as many problems as you think. Many of them wouldn't have burned, and some even liked the flames. And those that did, I now believe, would have been released to take a different form.

ARCHIVIST

But you didn't know any of this when you had almost a thousand of them in your care?

LEITNER

I've spent twenty years trying to learn from my mistakes.

ARCHIVIST

You said you didn't take any of them with you, so where did you get these?

LEITNER

When I started working with Gertrude, she hunted down some editions I thought might help.

ARCHIVIST

And why was Gertrude helping you?

LEITNER

Aside from my knowledge about the books? I think she was lonely. I didn't meet her until about six years ago, after she'd lost the last of her own assistants. She would mention them sometimes. I believe she missed having someone to talk to on occasion.

ARCHIVIST

I... I didn't know Gertrude had assistants.

LEITNER

Of course. Three of them, each meeting an unpleasant end. So, when she found me, it seemed natural that we help each other. In this instance, that meant finding certain useful books.

ARCHIVIST

Like The Key of Solomon?

LEITNER

That one was a mistake. I thought that, in the tunnels, there might be the stability to examine it properly, learn something of the forces arrayed against us. But it went wrong. We had to destroy it. I should have known, really. It was one of the few volumes that contained elements of several different powers.

ARCHIVIST

You keep talking about these... powers? These forces arrayed against you. What are they?

LEITNER

(Sighs) I'd hoped you would at least know that much by now. But I suppose you are simply the observer, and making these connections is not your role. Gertrude could be much the same at times.

ARCHIVIST

Just tell me!

LEITNER

There are... entities in this world. Beings of vast, dark power. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say they are 'next to the world', rather than in it. Their true existence could not function in the universe we live in, at least not as it is now. They have nothing in their pure state that could be present in the physical world so they sit in...

ARCHIVIST

Different dimensions.

LEITNER

No, I don't think so. If there are such things, then these beings are linked inexorably to ours. They are not within our world, but they can... affect it in certain ways: reaching out with their will to change things. I don't know where they come from or how they came to exist, but they are, from what I can determine, effectively eternal.

ARCHIVIST

Are you... are you trying to tell me all of this is at the behest of... evil gods?

LEITNER

Oh, there are certainly those who see them as gods. A few even go so far as to try and worship them, but I don't find it helpful to think of them like that. Perhaps you could liken them to one of the old pantheons, each with its own rituals, agendas and spheres of influence, but I find simplifying them in such a way makes them harder to truly understand.

The "gods" were conceived of by humankind as a reflection of themselves, their motives and actions divinely powerful, but in essence purely human. These... "things"... I find them hard enough to understand without trying to force human frameworks onto them.

ARCHIVIST

So the creatures are, what, priests? These books, their holy texts?

LEITNER

I told you it was an unhelpful analogy. Let's try another one. Um... Imagine, you are an ant, and you have never before seen a human. Then one day, into your colony, a huge fingernail is thrust, scraping and digging. You flee to another entrance, only to be confronted by a staring eye gazing at you. You climb to the top, trying to find escape and, above you, can see the vast dark shadow of a boot falling upon you. Would that ant be able to construct these things into the form of a single human being? Or would it believe itself to be under attack by three different, equally terrible, but very distinct assailants?

ARCHIVIST

So the books, the monsters, they're part of these beings? Just extensions of them? Fingers being pushed into our world?

LEITNER

The books are, I think, their essences in a purer form. The other things that stalk us, from what I know of them, they have varying wills of their own. All in service of the thing they're a part of, but not directly controlled by the mind beneath them. At least, inasmuch as these entities have something we could recognise as a mind.

ARCHIVIST

Like a... a, a muscle, spasming on reflex?

LEITNER

Yes, that's actually rather good.

ARCHIVIST

It would explain Michael's identity issues.

LEITNER

Michael? Oh... that, that's what the Distortion calls itself these days, isn't it? That one is part of a power that my assistant Domingo used to call "Esmentiaras", which I believe translates as 'it is lies' or 'it is lying'. At the time, of course, we just used it as a way to classify books. I call it the Spiral. It deals in fooling the senses, in making you see and hear things that are not there, in drawing you into mazes and making you doubt your own sanity.

ARCHIVIST

Fractals.

LEITNER

Yes. It seems to have a particular fondness for them.

ARCHIVIST

What about bones? Does one of them manifest with, with bones?

LEITNER

(Sigh) You're thinking too literally. Examining the physical categorisation, but ignoring the meaning of the thing. What are the bones? In the Distortion, your "Michael", the structure of a skeleton, an established reality in your mind, is twisted and warped into an impossible form. But in other cases? Are they a symbol of slaughter and butchery? Are they the familiar made wrong? Or are they simply part of the messy, physicality of flesh?

ARCHIVIST

I'm sorry, this is a lot to take in.

LEITNER

Well, do so quickly. We've wasted enough time on your questions.

ARCHIVIST

Fine. Then I'll make this one simple: did you kill Gertrude?

LEITNER

No. Don't be absurd.

ARCHIVIST

Then who did?

LEITNER

This is a distraction! You're in no danger –

ARCHIVIST

Who?

LEITNER

I believe it was Elias.

ARCHIVIST

What? Why?

LEITNER

I assume he discovered we were planning to destroy the Archives.

ARCHIVIST

Gertrude was going to destroy the Archives?

LEITNER

This is why I need those files. I searched this place thoroughly, and they're not here, so I assume Elias took them when he killed her. I need your help to get into his office.

ARCHIVIST

But the cameras? They showed him.

LEITNER

Simple mechanical eyes? In his place of power? You think he can't control everything they see? Assuming such interference wouldn't ruin them beyond recovery, of course.

ARCHIVIST

This place belongs to one of them, doesn't it?

LEITNER

You know the answer to that.

ARCHIVIST

The Eye.

LEITNER

I have also heard it called Beholding.

ARCHIVIST

And I...

LEITNER

You belong to it, too.

ARCHIVIST

I... Uh... I... I think I need some air.

LEITNER

We don't have time for you to have a breakdown, Archivist.

[A chair is pushed back.]

ARCHIVIST

I'm going to have a cigarette. Don't...

[The office door opens.]

Don't.

[The office door closes. There's silence.]

LEITNER

I'm not sure you would have liked him, you know. He's paranoid enough. But I don't think he's got the stomach for it.

[There's silence. The office door opens. Leitner gasps.]

ELIAS

Well. This is a surprise.

[Leitner stands up, the chair scraping against the floor.]

ELIAS

Reach for a book and I will kill you.

[Leitner sits again.]

ELIAS

How much have you told him?

LEITNER

Enough.

ELIAS

About Gertrude?

LEITNER

No. No, I didn't have time.

ELIAS

I've wondered for so long who it could be down there. Who was helping her. I honestly never would have guessed.

LEITNER

How did you know I was here?

ELIAS

I didn't. You're very well hidden. But John is not, and he failed to take the same precautions I'm sure you took for granted with Gertrude. I knew he was talking to someone. And it turns out to be Jurgen Leitner himself. **(Laughs)** What an honour.

LEITNER

Elias, please!

ELIAS

What did you want from him?

LEITNER

The files. The ones you took from Gertrude.

ELIAS

Planning a little light arson, are we, Jurgen?

LEITNER

It's not just the Institute and you know it. They had everything she had found on the Stranger.

ELIAS

I know. It's, um... what do they call it?

LEITNER

The Unknowing.

ELIAS

(Laughs) Creativity never was their forte.

LEITNER

You of all people should want to stop them.

ELIAS

And we will. But I don't think we'll need your help.

LEITNER

And what's he going to think when he gets back?

ELIAS

Well, he was always going to need to fly the nest at some point. Go out and see the world for himself.

LEITNER

He might die.

ELIAS

It's always a danger. Almost always.

LEITNER

Elias, it doesn't have to be like –

[Extended sounds of brutal pipe murder]

[The pipe is dropped on the floor, as Elias leaves the office, closing the door. There's a silence, except for the ominous sound of dripping. The office door opens again.]

ARCHIVIST

Sorry, I've been quit for five years now, but th–

(Silence) Oh.

Oh god... I need to... Uh... I need to, um...

[Tape clicks off. Tape clicks on.]

TIM

I think it's working again.

MARTIN

Tim, where were we?

TIM

...yeah, yeah it's recording.

MARTIN

Forget the bloody tapes, Tim! Are we sure this is... this is here?

TIM

Yes. Because the tape works now.

MARTIN

How long was it?

TIM

I don't know. And I don't care.

MARTIN

Sorry? Sorry, what? How can you not care!?

TIM

Because this is us now. Worms. Monsters. Corridors. They'll keep happening until one of them kills us, and we've just got to deal with it. **(Sigh)** Any sign of the woman?

MARTIN

I don't think so. We should have helped her.

TIM

No.

MARTIN

But we could have tried!

TIM

How? **(Pause)** Look. There's no point talking about it. It happened. I hope it doesn't happen again. Statement fucking ends. **(Pause)**

MARTIN

We... we should look for John. Maybe we can still help.

TIM

It's been days. At least.

MARTIN

We can't just sit here moping!

TIM

It's probably already killed him.

MARTIN

Don't joke about that, okay?

TIM

Fine.

MARTIN

Tim!

TIM

Try his office.

MARTIN

Yeah. Right.

[The office door opens.]

John? Oh. Oh no.

TIM

I told you he was going to do something like this.

MARTIN

Oh, no, no... Who is it?

TIM

I told you.

MARTIN

Oh John... What have you done?

[Tape clicks off.]

THE MAGNUS ARCHIVES WILL RETURN LATE 2017

Season 2 has featured:

Jonathan Sims as The Archivist

Alexander J. Newall as Martin Blackwood

Mike LeBeau as Tim Stoker

Ben Meredith as Elias Bouchard

Eve Hewitt as Not!Sasha

Frank Voss as PC Basira Khan

Lydia Nicholas as Melanie King

Sue Sims as Gertrude Robinson

Imogen Harris as Helen Richardson

Luke Booy as Michael

Harvey Kesselman as Sergeant Walter Heller

Tim Ledsam as Jordan Kennedy

Fay Roberts as Detective Alice “Daisy” Tonner

Carrie Cohen as Mary Keay

Fran Bushe as Tessa Winters

Perdita Stott as Karolina Górka

Paul Sims as Jurgen Leitner

The Magnus Archives is a podcast distributed by Rusty Quill and licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial Sharealike 4.0 International licence.

Today's episode was written by Jonathan Sims and directed by Alexander J Newall.