

MAG 187 — Checking Out

Content Warnings

- Sudden, loud SFX
- Emotional manipulation
- Bullying / Taunting
- Gaslighting
- Disorientation (spatial & temporal)
- Pleading
- Arguing
- Second person POV
- Perceived child neglect (including SFX)
- Character death

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

Rusty Quill presents... *The Magnus Archives*. Episode one hundred and eighty-seven: "Checking Out."

[Theme finishes]

[Tape clicks on]

[Swirling wasteland wind blows]

[Some gritty foot-movements at the Archivist ponders his location]

(The Archivist sighs)

**[A tannoy crackles into life playing hotel muzak; Helen's words
come over the speaker]**

HELEN

So are you gonna knock or what?

ARCHIVIST

Perhaps I was just enjoying a quiet moment before you arrived.

HELEN

Yeah... Bit rude to do it on my doorstep, though, isn't it?

ARCHIVIST

Perhaps. My apologies.

HELEN

So, where's the old ball and chain? Surely you're not paying me a visit on your lonesome?

ARCHIVIST

I am.

(Intake of breath)

You gambled right.

HELEN

I'm sure I don't know *what* you mean.

ARCHIVIST

You hoped that by nudging us past his domain, Martin would still be there when I arrived... so I would have to pass through on my own. Apparently, you were right.

HELEN

I thought you said you **weren't** going to look inside people's heads?

ARCHIVIST

I thought you said you weren't people.

HELEN

Touché.

ARCHIVIST

Well for what it's worth, I have tried not to look inside you.

HELEN

Oh yes?

ARCHIVIST

I maybe glimpse a motive, sometimes, but I try not to stare.

HELEN

I'm touched. Any particular reason for this monumental restraint?

ARCHIVIST

The same reason you don't want Martin here. I wasn't sure I wanted to kill you, and... you don't want to die.

(Beat)

HELEN

He's still so new to all of this, caught up in ideas of justice and 'solving' things. Sure he can wave away the theoretical idea of people suffering...

ARCHIVIST

But if he sees it up close he might try to get his boyfriend to smite you?

HELEN

Something like that. We've built up such a rapport, he and I. I'd hate to strain it over such a *temporary* disagreement. I'm just concerned for his happiness, you understand.

ARCHIVIST

Completely.

HELEN

I am a little bit surprised you didn't follow him.

ARCHIVIST

He didn't want me to.

I didn't need special powers to know that. When he crossed the threshold I had to make a choice and—

HELEN

—and you chose me.

ARCHIVIST

Let's say you were something of a branching path.

HELEN

Hm. Always the flatterer.

So, when *is* he coming out the other side?

ARCHIVIST

It might take a while.

HELEN

Mmm, yeah, these quiet reflective domains sometimes do. Ah well, more time for us to hang out, I suppose. Shoot the breeze, share some hot goss...

ARCHIVIST

Excuse me while I try to contain my joy.

HELEN

You are excused. So...

(A door creaks open)

HELEN (CONT'D)

...are you coming?

ARCHIVIST

I thought we agreed I'm far too all-powerful to cross your threshold.

HELEN

Don't flatter yourself. This isn't some extension, some limb reaching out to snatch the wayward or the trusting. This domain, this magnificent building is me.

[Helen stretches and sighs contentedly as her building form does likewise]

HELEN (CONT'D)

You're welcome here. We'll be quite safe with you travelling through me. As long as neither of us does anything *silly*.

[Hissing static starts]

Or you could just stand there glowering, that's fine too.

ARCHIVIST

I'm trying to 'know' if there's another route I can take.

HELEN

And?

ARCHIVIST

Turns out there is, actually. But it is rather full of spiders.

[Hissing static ends]

[Footsteps start walking away]

HELEN

Oh don't be such a sourpuss!

[Footsteps stop]

(Small sigh from the Archivist)

HELEN (CONT'D)

It'll be fun. I promise.

(A heavy sigh from the Archivist)

ARCHIVIST

Alright.

**[Footsteps on gravel until the Archivist crosses Helen's threshold,
and the door creaks shut eerily; it sounds the same as Helen's door
in the Institute]**

**[The piano muzak continues as he enters a hotel foyer; people
dining nearby chatter; a reception bell sometimes dings]**

[The Archivist stops walking]

[Helen's voice comes from all around]

HELEN

Oooh! **(shudders)** It feels different... to last time.

ARCHIVIST

Different how?

HELEN

The tape recorder feels more, um... awake.

ARCHIVIST

Oh. Oh joy. Come on.

[Footsteps as he begins walking]

[Hissing static starts]

HELEN

(As if having eaten someone foul) Ooh... Eeeeeeurgh!

ARCHIVIST

What?

[He stops and presses a button]

[Hissing static ends]

HELEN

Eurgh. You just— blergh... You just *knew* the way through, well, me. And, eurgh **(sniffs)** it's not a pleasant feeling. No. I do not like that. Not at all.

[Elevator doors open, and the Archivist steps in]

ARCHIVIST

Well tough, I'm not going to trust you to be my guide.

HELEN

(Exasperated) Would it kill you?

ARCHIVIST

It's killed plenty of others.

[The doors close; he selects a floor; the elevator starts moving]

[Helen's voice sounds as if through tinny elevator speakers]

(Beat)

HELEN

You really don't like me, do you?

ARCHIVIST

No.

HELEN

And you never have.

ARCHIVIST

Not really.

HELEN

Even though I saved you from Michael.

ARCHIVIST

You *were* Michael.

HELEN

Argh. I'm The Distortion, as was Michael, but I am not him, and never have been. Surely you know all this by now, what with your shiny new eye powers?

ARCHIVIST

It's not about what I know. It's about what I feel.

HELEN

(Disparagingly) Oh, what do you feel?

ARCHIVIST

I *liked* Helen.

[The elevator stops]

HELEN

I **am** Helen.

ARCHIVIST

The *real* one.

[The doors open and the Archivist enters a carpeted corridor]

[Helen's voice changes resonance again]

HELEN

...Helen-Classic.

ARCHIVIST

Sure.

[As the elevator doors close the musak finishes]

[As the Archivist walks, he passes cheap buzzing lighting and faint muffled hotel room activity; the Helen-building creaks every so often]

HELEN

That doesn't make any sense! You barely met her — you had half an hour together, and she spent most of that time ranting about mazes! She was positively *delirious* with paranoia!

ARCHIVIST

True. But as you'll recall, I was pretty paranoid myself at that point.

HELEN

So what? You *saw* yourself in her? A sad reflection? A possible future?

ARCHIVIST

Maybe.

HELEN

Oh John! This existence can be wonderful, if you just let it.

ARCHIVIST

(Sadly) I know.

[He continues to walk]

HELEN

For what it's worth, I really don't think you would have liked her, if you'd known her better, I mean.

ARCHIVIST

No?

HELEN

You haven't looked into Helen-Classic's past yet? You should try it. I don't think you'll like what you find.

ARCHIVIST

What? Lying to real estate clients? Bit of a prick at parties? Secret Tory?

HELEN

Yes.

To all of them, actually.

ARCHIVIST

And that's the problem.

[The Archivist pauses walking]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

I could have grown to dislike her, but... you made sure that sort of thing could never happen. Now you use her form, see her mind, but they're just... tools. Michael had nothing you could use but a razor-straight desire for vengeance, but you saw something in Helen that would work on me much more subtly. So you took her. And I'll never get to dislike her.

I'm stuck disliking you instead.

HELEN

At least I care enough to bother.

ARCHIVIST

That's true I suppose.

[The Archivist restarts walking]

[Hissing static starts]

HELEN

Oh. Blergh. Please stop doing that.

ARCHIVIST

I'll stop doing it when I'm confident you're taking me the right way.

HELEN

I am!

ARCHIVIST

The quickest way.

[Hissing static ends]

HELEN

Eurgh. Fine.

**[The Archivist halts as the corridors shift in crunching wood, metal
and brick]**

[A door creaks open; the Archivist restarts walking]

[Hissing static starts]

ARCHIVIST

So tell me. Why *are* we going the long way? You just trying to keep me from meeting any victims?

[Hissing static ends]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Or are you trying to figure out if there's still a way you can destroy me?

HELEN

...Bit of both, to be honest.

ARCHIVIST

I see. How long have you been working with Elias?

HELEN

I'm not.

[The Archivist pauses walking]

ARCHIVIST

(Faux-shocked) Helen! Is that... a lie?

HELEN

No. No! It's not. I don't know him. I've never even— Look, I'm happy here alright? The world is fabulous, and I don't want you to end it all because you've got a chip on your shoulder.

ARCHIVIST

So you think I can turn the world back?

HELEN

I think you're bloody minded and stubborn, and I won't underestimate you.

[The Archivist restarts walking]

ARCHIVIST

Thank you.

HELEN

And for all his bleeding heart, Martin's just as bad. Worse, even, in some ways.

ARCHIVIST

(Fondly) Yes, he is.

(Beat)

HELEN

You are so difficult to like sometimes. I've been nothing but nice to you.

ARCHIVIST

Maybe that's why I never trusted you.

HELEN

See? So rude.

ARCHIVIST

Or maybe it's because you're an embodiment of the fear of lies and delusion.

HELEN

Also rude.

(The Archivist makes a small noise of discomfort)

[The Archivist pauses walking]

ARCHIVIST

Could you, uh... sorry, could you manifest a room for me? Please.

HELEN

Why?

ARCHIVIST

...So I can make a statement.

HELEN

You do realise it's all me, right? If I make a room, I'll still hear you. Because I'd **be** the room?

ARCHIVIST

Fine, I just thought— never mind.

[Hissing static starts]

(Deep breath)

**[The muffled hotel rooms are louder: people unpleasantly laughing,
television sets]**

**[There is the underlying sounds of ragged, hurried breaths and a
person moving through the corridor]**

[Hissing static ends]

ARCHIVIST

I wander through the corridors, quickly, footsteps hurrying, spurred on by the worries that chase me. What were the directions she'd said, that smiling, friendly woman in reception? Left, right, right, right, left, straight ahead, then down the stairs. No, no, no, that can't be it because I just went left and it's a dead end. Well, not a dead end. it's a door that says 'Honeymoon Suite'.

HELEN

(Saucy) Currently unoccupied...

ARCHIVIST

I turn to retrace my steps. I-I must have taken a wrong turn.

HELEN

Just in case you and Martin were looking for a room.

[Door knocking and rattling sounds now intersperse the statement]

ARCHIVIST

How long... How long has Alex been alone now? On his own? Hours at least. And he's only... Four? Five? It doesn't matter, all that matters is I can picture

his face, and he's alone and scared without me. How could I leave my son alone in a place like this? How could I do it?

HELEN

Deadbeat mum. Classic.

ARCHIVIST

None of the doors have numbers on them, no way to know if they're mine, even if I hadn't lost my keys. I, I bang on each in turn and shout his name. I try the handles even though my palms ache from the blisters. Wait, blisters? How many doors have I tried?

HELEN

(Faux concern) Oh, I'm sure it'll be the next one.

[Door knocking and rattling sounds finish]

ARCHIVIST

A flash of movement up ahead. It's a woman. Do I... recognise her? She looks so friendly, with her wide, happy smile and her cheery voice. I tell her I need to find my son, I... I need to check out. Of course, of course, she tells me. She can help. She'd love nothing more than to help me, although she does hate to see me check out, it's always so hard on her when guests leave.

HELEN

I like her!

[A door closes and the buzz of fluorescent lighting; the hotel room sounds have stopped, but the scared breathing continues]

ARCHIVIST

She takes me by the arm and leads me down a narrow service staircase. As we near the bottom I hear a distant cry.

[A faint distorted screaming sound]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Alex! I start to run but she says no need to rush. Check-out lasts all day. That's good to know. My arm is bleeding... When did I cut it? It's okay, she has some bandages. I'm so lucky she's here.

[Bandaging sounds]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

She bandages my arm, and it starts to bleed even more. Something's wrong here. There's something behind her smile. I look away.

[Buzzing stops; hotel room sounds resume]

ARCHIVIST

The dull blue paint of the staircase is gone but... I recognise the wallpaper... Where have I seen this wallpaper before?

HELEN

Nowhere special.

ARCHIVIST

The corridor? I'm— No, we were on the stairs. Did we leave? No this isn't right, it isn't fair. I've got to— Wait, where is she? She was lying. Was she? She led me here, but now she's gone and I'm... I'm so tired. When did I sleep last? No,

I-I can't sleep, I've got to find my son. Just keep moving, there's only so many rooms.

[Door knocking and rattling restarts]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

He has to be in one of them. Just push on, even if you have to check them all. Ignore the blood you're dripping on the carpet. Ignore the mirrors that try to tell you how haggard you're growing. Ignore the laughter and the smiling and the chatter that has followed you since the reception. When did you go to reception? You can't picture it.

HELEN

Shame, it's very tasteful. There's *ferns*.

[Hissing static starts]

ARCHIVIST

Wait. What is that? That sound. It's... It's not her, not just her. There's someone else. A man's voice, you think. Droning on, and rising and falling as he talks and talks and talks...

HELEN

Ah... Ah.

ARCHIVIST

Up there, just around the corner. I can hear them. I can hear them. There!

GUEST

Oh, oh thank god! Pl-please, do you know where room 288 is? I... My son, he's I don't know how long he's been in there on his own, and I need to find him—

[Hissing static ends]

ARCHIVIST

Look, I'm so sorry. But... there is no room 288.

GUEST

But my son!

[A door opens and Helen manifests as a person]

[A high-pitched tone starts]

(Disgusted sigh from the Archivist)

HELEN

(Smilingly) —Is around here somewhere. Come on, let's have a look together.

GUEST

Oh brilliant, oh thank you, thank you so much!

HELEN

Now, where did you see him last?

GUEST

Uh, okay. It was... it was room... wait, wait hang on.

ARCHIVIST

She's lying to you, she isn't your friend.

GUEST

I... wait. I, I know you. You're that woman from reception.

HELEN

John, this isn't your business.

GUEST

You were laughing! You were laughing when I got lost.

HELEN

Listen John, I don't come up and tell you how to pull horror from people's brains, do I?

[The Guest is talked over as Helen and the Archivist argue]

GUEST

Please, please, I need... I need some directions.

ARCHIVIST

You *do* a bit, actually, yes.

GUEST

This place, it's such a maze...

HELEN

Well, okay, that's... that's fair.

GUEST

I don't know how long I've been here.

ARCHIVIST

(Crosstalk) (sympathetically to the guest) Look. I'm so sorry, but—

GUEST

(Crosstalk) You've got to help me!

ARCHIVIST

(Angrily) Don't touch me!

**[The Archivist pushes the Guest away; there is a bang as she falls
to the floor, crying]**

HELEN

Oopsie. Not so easy, is it? Keeping up your humanity?

GUEST

(Pleadingly) I'm sorry... It's just my son...

ARCHIVIST

I could make her an avatar.

HELEN

Huh... Hmm.

[Wood creaks as the building rearranges herself]

HELEN (CONT'D)

Best not.

(Crying from the Guest, then a last exhalation)

[A door slams; both manifested Helen and the Guest have gone]

[The high-pitched tone ends]

ARCHIVIST

Sending her away? I must have hit a nerve.

[Helen's voice returns to being part of the building]

HELEN

Got *on* my nerves. Not the same thing.

ARCHIVIST

If you say so.

(Beat)

HELEN

So, what happens now?

ARCHIVIST

You mean, did the sight of a poor, innocent wretch suffering by your hand convince me that you need to be destroyed?

HELEN

Pretty much.

ARCHIVIST

No.

You were right — it probably was something that would have convinced Martin it needed to be done.

HELEN

But..?

ARCHIVIST

But I already knew what I would see in here. I already knew what I had to do.

HELEN

Because you've grown so fond of your old pal Helen. Or because... you were already going to destroy me.

...I see.

ARCHIVIST

I was hoping I was wrong about you.

HELEN

You've **always** known what I am.

ARCHIVIST

Yes. But I'm only recently realising just how dangerous you are.

HELEN

Of course I'm dangerous, John. I'm a monster, just like you. and you can't kill all of us.

ARCHIVIST

No. You're dangerous because for all the torture and cruelty, you still somehow got us to think you're our friend.

HELEN

I am your friend.

ARCHIVIST

No. You're not. That's just what you distort. It's why you spin but you never quite lie. The corridors, the warped body, it's all just set dressing, isn't it? It's not the reality of what you actually are.

HELEN

And what, actually, am I?

ARCHIVIST

You're a question.

HELEN

What lurks behind the door?

ARCHIVIST

To some. But that would be The Stranger or The Dark — no, you are the question of what lurks behind a smile? Is a friendship true, or is it reaching out with hands that cut you?

HELEN

Oh I see, very good.

ARCHIVIST

Even I didn't see it properly, not at first. Not until the tunnels, when you wouldn't help. When you laughed.

HELEN

Oh, come on. That wasn't a deception, that was barely a betrayal!

ARCHIVIST

You worked to hurt us and help us, all with the same smile, until we can barely tell one from the other. Keeping us off-balance, constantly second-guessing our own opinions of you. Never quite crossing a line we could never forgive, but never putting yourself on the line either. And when one face finally stopped smiling, you just changed the face.

HELEN

Fine. So if that's all true... why? Why would I do any of that? What's my actual motive?

ARCHIVIST

I don't think you even have one. It's just what you are.

HELEN

Oh well done. Very poetic.

ARCHIVIST

But none of that actually matters. What matters is that you want the world to stay as it is. And I don't know if we can change it back, but if there is *any* possibility, you will try and stop us. And when you do, I can't think of anyone more dangerous.

HELEN

Oh give over! You're the most powerful thing in the world. **(Placatingly)** What could I possibly do?

ARCHIVIST

It's not me I'm worried about.

[Hissing static starts]

HELEN

Eurgh, fine. I thought this might happen.

[Static builds, alongside unpleasant electronic high tones and glitching — the 'smite static' from the Not-Sasha encounter]

ARCHIVIST

Ceaseless Watch—aargh!

[Creaking as the corridors flex and constrict and doors slam and echo]

[The Archivist is unbalanced]

HELEN

Want to try that again?

ARCHIVIST

Ceasel—

[The smite statics waver as Helen flexes]

HELEN

(Darkly) You are inside my domain now, Archivist.

(Unbalanced noise from Archivist)

I can shift any part of myself to any corner of this wonderful hell **you** have built for us. By the time the Eye focuses on me I'm already somewhere new—

[A door creaks open with multiple echoes]

HELEN (CONT'D)

—something new.

ARCHIVIST

Ceaseless— ooh—

**[Another shift in the building happens; the smite statics are still
struggling to rise]**

HELEN

Whoopsie!

(The Archivist is catches his breath)

ARCHIVIST

You can't do this forever!

HELEN

In this brave new world? I'm afraid I **very** much can.

ARCHIVIST

You can't kill me though. You're just stalling.

HELEN

True. But hopefully I can stall long enough that any of your little gang that can die, have done so. By the time I let you out you'll have nobody else.

[Smite statics dims]

ARCHIVIST

(Beat)

I **will** end you.

(Beat)

[Some creaking]

[Smite statics starts growing]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

What nothing? No smirk? A laugh? I've got you rattled.

[Building creaks]

HELEN

I'm not scared of you.

[Strong building creaks]

ARCHIVIST

Helen... Was that... a lie?

HELEN

(Too quickly) No!

ARCHIVIST

A lie. A genuine untruth. Like a little bit of loose thread, flitting in the breeze.

[Building creaks]

HELEN

Fine. You can go.

[A door that sounds exactly like the Archivist's office door opens]

There's the door. Just go!

ARCHIVIST

Ceaseless Watcher!

HELEN

No!

**[Through the incantation, the smite static mingles with creaking
woodwork and crumbling brick]**

ARCHIVIST

(Crosstalk) See this lie, this golden strand of falsehood. Take it in your gaze and pull it, follow through its curves and twists and knots as it unravels all before you.

HELEN

(Crosstalk) No. No! No! No, Archivist! Stop! John, it's me, it's Helen. It's me. I've *always* been your friend. Don't do this to me. I have always helped you. I have *always* helped you and lent you doors. Think of all that I have done for you. If you do this, everyone inside me is dead!

ARCHIVIST

(Crosstalk) Unweave it now, its fear and its falsehood, its hidden teeth and the ones it wears so proudly.

HELEN

(Crosstalk) You're no different— You are **no** different from me! You can't save anyone!

ARCHIVIST

(Crosstalk) Take all that it is and all that it has. It is yours!

[Statics crescendo to the smite glitch sound]

HELEN

(Crosstalk) No! NOOOOOO!

[Helen's voice is stretches, echoes, vanishes]

[Extended sounds of distorted folding demolition; statics end]

ARCHIVIST

Urgh!

**[A strange sound rings out as demolition ends and the Archivist
reappears in the wasteland]**

MARTIN

Christ, John!

ARCHIVIST

(Groggy) Oh, Martin! Good.

MARTIN

Wh— Wh-Wh-What... What happened? Th-Th-There was the hotel and then...

ARCHIVIST

I, um... I killed Helen.

MARTIN

Oh.

Why?

ARCHIVIST

Long story. Ish. I'll explain later.

MARTIN

...Alright. And you couldn't wait until you were outside?

ARCHIVIST

Not really.

MARTIN

...Fair enough.

ARCHIVIST

Um-yeah h-how are you? How was... your domain?

MARTIN

Oh, ah, well. I mean, it feels sort of underwhelming now, to be honest. Ah, more of a journey of gentle self-discovery, really. I-I didn't realise I'm quite so... argumentative.

ARCHIVIST

I mean...

MARTIN

Y-Y-You don't need to comment.

ARCHIVIST

Alright.

MARTIN

...So...

Helen's gone, then?

ARCHIVIST

Yeah.

[A footstep on debris as Martin considers]

MARTIN

Damn.

ARCHIVIST

Yeah.

MARTIN

Time to mourn?

ARCHIVIST

You can if you want.

(Beat)

Do you? Want to mourn?

MARTIN

...A bit, I guess. I-I mean, she was our friend. Sort of. A bit. Until you killed her.

Which I'm sure you had to do.

ARCHIVIST

Take some time if you need. But not too long.

[A few footsteps on debris]

MARTIN

Why the sudden rush?

ARCHIVIST

You see that over there?

[Footstep]

MARTIN

Yeah?

ARCHIVIST

That's London.

[Tape clicks off]

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Outro]

JONATHAN SIMS

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