

## Interlude From Another Reality: Peacock's-Eye

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## Interlude From Another Reality: Peacock's-Eye

by [Sixteenthdays](#)

### Summary

"My assistant," announced Scar Goodtimes, newly-promoted Head Archivist of the Peacock's-Eye Institute, to nobody in particular except maybe the paused audio recording software on his laptop, or perhaps the small pile of tape recorders his predecessor'd left piled on a shelf in the corner, or arguably the little peacock-feather eye logo that dotted the office as haphazardly as it did the entire Institute, "is weird."

(In which Scar is Grian's Archivist, and Grian is Scar's assistant.)

### Notes

**MASSIVE SPOILERS FOR THE MAGNUS ARCHIVES THROUGH MAG 160.** it will not make sense without having listened to the podcast through that point!!

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

"My assistant," announced Scar Goodtimes, newly-promoted Head Archivist of the Peacock's-Eye Institute, to nobody in particular except maybe the paused audio recording software on his laptop, or perhaps the small pile of tape recorders his predecessor'd left piled on a shelf in the corner, or arguably the little peacock-feather eye logo that dotted the office as haphazardly as it did the entire

Institute, "is weird."

He hadn't even known he *had* an assistant until today, when Grian had come wandering vaguely out from behind some shelves, unaccountably dirty, and then, noticing Scar noticing him, fixed a sudden piercing gaze like a hawk's on Scar's startled face.

Which was weird, honestly, because a Head Archivist position kind of implied other body parts of archivists, and Scar was half a mind to pilfer, uh, Scott and Jimmy from the Library, or *someone* at least, to fix his status as a metaphorical disembodied head. It was lonely down here. He'd never actually come down to the Archives before his promotion, never really figured they'd bothered making it wheelchair accessible if he was being honest (lo and behold, there had been a small elevator hidden in a dusty hallway corner off Research), but now that he *was* down here for entire workdays at a time he was finding it cold, and dusty, and entirely empty of people to talk to. And entirely *full* of work to do. Full enough he kind of had no idea where to start, and had already wasted an entire day just trying to figure out what sort of sorting system was even *applicable* here. It's not like he knew what he was doing! He hadn't thought through the promotion! He'd assumed Ren *had*, because why else would you promote a guy from *Finance* to *Head Archivist*, but now he was really reconsidering that stance.

So he'd already been hatching plans to steal at *least* an extra hand from some other department (look, the Library was *so* overstaffed, okay, and he needed someone to help him reach the upper shelves, and that's all they did over there right) when Grian had made himself known.

He was a strange little figure, emerging from neat and entirely unlabeled boxes like a ghost in his threadbare red sweater and his peacock-feather lapel pin, and Scar wasn't ashamed to say he almost fell out of his chair in shock when he saw him. He'd just grinned, sharp but a little uncertain around the edges. And then he'd said, "Hi! I think I work here?" and Scar had almost fallen out of his chair a second time.

"You do?" Scar had said, because, *What*.

Honestly, his first assumption was ghost. Of course the Archives would be haunted by a weird jagged memory who could sneak *right* up on you without you noticing. But, obligingly, he'd gone and checked the employee records, and there he was, Grian, employed as an archival assistant since the day before, no last name or identifying details listed. Weird, but not too weird for the Institute. Scar'd worked in Finance. He knew all about the inexplicable gaps in their records that really should have gotten the Peacock's-Eye Institute audited, like, five hundred times in the past decade.

"Yep, that's me!" Grian'd said, peering over his shoulder, the flaring edge of his lapel pin brushing against Scar's cheek. His voice was bright and confident, which was good, because otherwise Scar might have accused him of deciding Grian was his name now right then and there. "Grian, archival assistant." He turned the name around in his mouth and then turned his head and stared at Scar, unblinking. "Sounds like me!"

His eyes, Scar had found himself noting, were a perfect beady black, unreflective and nearly matte. They stood out sharply against the bright blue of the feathered eye on his lapel pin.

Scar swallowed, and then smiled, and held out his hand for a shake. "Welcome to the team."

And then he'd sent Grian off to see if *he* could figure out what sort of system the Archives actually *used*, and stared after him as he left the office for *way* too long. And now he was talking to himself. That couldn't possibly be healthy.

Well, Scar decided, nodding firmly, weird and spooky and possibly a ghost or not, at least he had

someone to reach the upper shelves for him now.

Or, er- he caught sight of Grian's silhouette, drifting past outside his door, and reconsidered. He had someone to reach the *middle* shelves for him now.

He... probably still needed to try and steal Scott and Jimmy for the tall ones.

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Grian was... confused.

That was probably the best way to put it, he decided. He wasn't *lost* (he knew exactly where he was), he wasn't *disoriented* (again, he knew exactly where he was), he wasn't even *worried* (probably he should have been, but *really*, he knew exactly where he was). He was just confused.

And, maybe, a little bit amnesiac. That might also have been relevant.

The earliest he could remember, which was about half an hour ago, he'd been wandering around somewhere dirty, and musty, and underground. (*The tunnels*, the singular one of his braincells that wasn't busy being amnesiac had supplied. *Great*, he thought back at it. *That tells me nothing*.) He'd then stumbled into a much more pleasant room full of air conditioning and old files, which that same braincell had informed him was the Archives, and that it was where he...

Well, he hadn't gotten that far, because he'd spotted his new Archivist.

That was a thought he hadn't managed to untangle yet. Archivist made sense; apparently that *was* the man's job title, or close enough. New, was, well, Scar *was* new, although how Grian had known that he had no idea.

*His*, though. That was the interesting bit.

When he'd caught sight of Scar wheeling between the shelves, distant-eyed and off in his own world, a quick and wicked jolt of possessiveness had darted through Grian's system, down beneath his ill-fitting flesh and into the cool, ancient air around them.

"Hi!" he'd said, struck by that sudden unassailable certainty that he was supposed to be here, that he had *intended* to be here, that he *needed* to be here. For— well, for *something*, probably. *Presumably*. "I think I work here?"

That didn't seem quite right to him, but really, what else would he need to be here for? The singular one of his brain cells that wasn't busy with amnesia had apparently decided this was more of a priority than remembering his name, and it was now informing him that he absolutely was impulsive enough to listen to one singular very insistent brain cell.

So he did listen, of course, and there he was, in the records, named Grian. Which was a name that seemed right for him! Fit him better than his skin currently did, at any rate. It was getting more tempting by the minute to try peeling it off just to see what was underneath.

(Probably he would have known what was underneath, but he was busy having amnesia.)

And now he was poking around the Archives, checking corners he didn't know existed until he checked them and slowly working his way towards the stairs. Towards the rest of this building,

with its little peacock's-eye decals that matched the pin on his sweater.

Towards the reason, hopefully, that it was so important he be here, although, as he stepped further and further away from his Archivist's office, he was beginning to suspect that he was headed in entirely the wrong direction.

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"You know," Grian said absently, "it *is* nice to have an Archivist again. Don't really know what to do with myself without one."

Scar raised his eyebrows. "Is that so?"

Grian, as it was turning out, had *layers* to his weirdness.

His demeanor, for one. He treated both the Archives and Scar himself with a level of casual ownership that seemed... rather at odds with both the fact that he was *Scar's* employee and the fact that, so far as Scar could tell, Grian was... *probably* younger than him? Like, if this had been an old retainer who'd been working down in the Archives for decades, Scar would totally get it! But instead it was Grian, who walked like a cat and who Scar had never seen blink and who seemed to gravitate towards Scar like a magnet every minute of the day.

For instance, just now, Scar had come across an overstuffed and slightly moldy-smelling old couch tucked behind two shelves and levered himself out of his wheelchair to relax for a spell, and not five minutes later, like clockwork, Grian had come wandering over and sprawled himself across Scar's lap without so much as a by-your-leave.

Grian sighed, rolling over onto his back and lacing his hands behind his head. "Yeah. The last guy... I'm pretty sure I did like him! We had a lot of fun! But he was just the sort who wasn't willing to go the distance, you know? Just wasn't cut out for the job. I think, anyways."

"He quit, then?" Scar guessed. "Or was he fired?"

"Oh, no, the Archivist can't be fired," Grian said promptly, and then made a face like he wasn't sure why he'd said it.

"Is that *so*," Scar repeated, drawing the word out thoughtfully before clapping his hands. "Well! That's *fantastic* news for me. You know, I've always felt it was a bit stuffy down here. Why don't I just--"

Grian's eyes widened, and he immediately shoved himself up off of Scar's lap to slap his hands away from where he'd started undoing his shirt buttons. "*Scar!* What are you *doing?*"

"Taking my shirt off," Scar explained helpfully. "I mean, if I can't be fired--"

"Well, *stop* that! *Right now!*" Grian shrieked, face impressively red. "It's not *decent!*"

"Actually, could you give me a hand? Some of these buttons are sort of tricky."

"*Absolutely not!*"

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“Ren’s complete lack of caution and nonexistent sense of cybersecurity,” said Grian to the Archives, smug and entirely satisfied, “is exactly why I hired him.”

His Institute Head (and he was getting used to the *his-es*, now, letting them settle comfortable in his chest and his throat, even if he still hadn’t quite located their source) had taken his personal assistant on a weekend trip to Scotland. Therefore, he’d left his work laptop behind in his office, like the reliable dog he was.

So Grian had, of course, unlocked the door that night, snatched up the laptop and a pile of miscellaneous receipts, and slunk off with his haul down to the Archives to snoop.

The password was easy: “diggitydog,” all lowercase, no numbers or symbols. He let his non-amnesiac braincell, which had been accumulating friends named things like “locations of secret passages in the Institute” and “intimate details of his staff’s personal lives” over the past few months, guide his fingers to the files he wanted. It was easy. It was, like so many things, familiar.

He was, slowly, piecing his backstory together.

He knew: He had been here before, even though nobody really seemed to recognize him. He had been up to something, while he was here, something that had him sticking his fingers into every little working of the Institute. He knew: He *really* did not want to go back to the tunnels, once burned twice shy, except that he did.

And most importantly: Everyone who worked in the Peacock’s-Eye Institute was his. The Institute itself, the stone and knowledge of it, was his. The persistent gaze that clung to him and flattened feathers he didn’t have *wasn’t* his, but it *knew* him, and he welcomed it.

And: He had an Archivist.

“Grian?” shouted the Archivist in question, voice echoing faintly among the shelves.

Grian startled. He barely caught Ren’s laptop before it hit the floor as he stood, and shoved it hastily under his sweater. “It’s three in the morning!”

“Next time I’ll tell the spooky fellow with the knife to attack me before it gets dark,” answered Scar, as his wheelchair drifted into hearing range. “I *knew* you’d be here,” he added. He sounded very pleased with himself.

So was Grian, some obscure knowledge unfurling pleased in his chest at Scar’s certainty-

That is, until Scar got close enough for Grian to notice the myriad lines cut across his chest and neck and face, bleeding thick and sticky onto his legs and his chair. Scar clicked the lights on.

“You’re bl- Where is your *shirt*?” said Grian, scandalized.

Scar grinned at him, like he didn’t have a gash across his cheek. “The spooky stabby fellow. I had an odd encounter with them.” He drove his wheelchair right up next to Grian. “Help me up?”

“That explains nothing,” grumbled Grian, slipping Ren’s laptop out from inside his sweater and under a couch cushion. He helped Scar to the couch and then stood there and stared at him for a moment as he bled all over the cushions.

“Hey, got a first aid kit around here?” asked Scar after a moment. He wasn’t squirming under

Grian's gaze, though. Grian always appreciated that about him. "I could use some aid, Archival Assistant."

Grian rolled his eyes, reached under the couch for the small kit someone had stashed there, crouched by the side of the couch to get a better angle on the mess the "spooky stabby fellow" had made of Scar's chest, and set to work.

Scar watched him, a small, unreadable smile playing at the corner of his mouth.

"You get attacked a lot," noted Grian, some time later.

*(Seven of fourteen, supplied the brain cell without amnesia, pleased pleased pleased.)*

"Sure do!" said Scar, fussing with one of the completed bandages. Grian smacked his hands away. "I'm irresistible."

"Keep your clothes on, then," said Grian. "Maybe that'll help."

Scar snorted a laugh, and reached over to pick through the pile of receipts Grian had taken from Ren's office and left on the arm of the couch. Grian let him.

*Don't discourage his curiosity, the brain cell without amnesia told him. Don't let him die, but don't make him careful. You need him. You need him.*

"Be careful," Grian said, wiping dried blood away from a gash above Scar's left eye. "It'll be a huge pain if I have to replace my Archivist again so soon."

"Oh, you know me," said Scar. "Carefullest guy around!"

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"Scar!" hissed Grian, following him out of the Archives' elevator. "You can't just compel our major donors into giving you their outerwear!"

Scar stopped in front of his closed office door and glanced behind himself to watch Grian fume and make interesting faces.

"What if they *withdraw funding*?" wailed Grian.

"Can you get the door?" asked Scar, turning his newly-acquired gloves over in his hands. "I'm a bit occupied."

Grian scowled at him, but pulled the door open anyway. That was an interesting thing about him: he wailed and complained and gossiped behind Scar's back with Scott and Jimmy, but he *did* always do what Scar said, eventually. He could just *not*. Scar wouldn't notice. Everyone knew Scott and Jimmy did all the actual work in the Archives.

But, for whatever reason, he did.

"If there's no funding," wondered Scar, "d'you think I'll get fired after all?"

"Like I'd let that happen," scoffed Grian. He crossed to Scar's desk and started shuffling through the pile of paper statements that had accumulated there. "You're my Archivist."

“Possessive as ever,” muttered Scar. He shut the door behind him.

Grian emerged from his snooping holding three yellowed sheets of paper. “Try this one next. You’ll like it.”

A statement. Grian’s eye for the real ones was always unbelievably good, almost perfect, so Scar snatched it out of his grip and peered at it, curious.

It looked like one of the early ones. In which case maybe it would tell him whether the Peacock’s-Eye Institute had *actually* spontaneously sprouted out of the ground like a mushroom two hundred years ago? You could never tell whether Cleo was lying to you about things like that. He’d been meaning to check.

“Peacocks are birds, not fungi,” said Grian, hovering over his shoulder.

Scar swatted at him. “Nobody *asked*. Go scam the donors yourself, if you’re that worried. I’m sure there’s a couple still around.”

“*Scar*,” complained Grian. But, for whatever reason, he did.

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“Scar,” Grian said, and watched as Scar startled, clapping a hand to his chest.

“*Goodness*, Grian, scare the pants right off a man, why don’t you?” he complained, fumbling for the light switch in the dimness with his other hand. Despite his surprise, feigned or not, his eyes fell directly on Grian straight through the darkness of the room, and a thrill ran up Grian’s spine.

“Please keep your pants *on*, thank you,” Grian said, as Scar finally found the light switch and flicked it on.

“In my own *home*,” Scar said, wheeling himself the rest of the way into the room, wearing a picture-perfect expression of faux offense. And then, almost as an afterthought: “Speaking of which... what *are* you doing here, anyways?”

“Right,” Grian said, and leaned forward, grinning, eager, and said, “I’ve finally figured out something *very* important. I just need your help.”

“Oh?” Scar tilted his head slightly, and Grian watched hungrily as the green in his eyes pooled and flashed. “Well, you know I do love to be helpful.”

“If you ask me what I’ve forgotten,” Grian said, slowly, savoring the words, treasuring the certainty that had finally seeped, like water, back into his mind, “I’ll *have* to answer, right? Which means I’ll have to *know*.”

“Oh!” Scar said. His cat, wandering in from the kitchen, jumped up onto his lap, and he absently lowered a hand to pet her. “To be honest, I sort of figured it wouldn’t work on you. Do you think I’m handsome?”

“Yes,” Grian said, and then, immediately after, “*SCAR!*”

Scar was giggling. “Sorry, sorry, couldn’t resist.” And then, something more serious in his eyes: “You know, this *is* convenient. I’ve had some questions I’ve been wanting answered, too.”

Something was poking and tickling under Grian's skin, closer to the surface than it had been yet, excited and apprehensive all at once. *Finally*. "Ask away, then."

Scar propped his chin in a free hand, a half smile tracing over his face, the green in his eyes brightening. "Who *are* you, really?"

And his Archivist asked, and so he knew.

"Oh," Grian said, the knowledge settling comfortably into his chest, where it always should have been. "I'm the founder."

And with that shattering crack in the Spiral's dam- and oh, he was going to *fill those tunnels with cement*- came more certainties, in trickles and floods. Chief among them: why his skin had been feeling so persistently *itchy*.

So he took a deep breath, and shrugged it off.

His poor stifled feathers, crushed for far too long beneath the lamination of a glamour he'd forgotten he was even wearing, wriggled eagerly back up through his skin. He watched through Scar's eyes with a certain detached curiosity as iridescent blue crawled up past his collar, as his lower back folded open into a fan studded with eyes that blinked open one by one.

It was so nice to be able to *see* again.

"Oh, that is *much* better, thank you, Scar." He stretched, long and slow, luxuriating in the feeling of his skin fitting properly for the first time in months, and blinked the fog out of every neglected eye. "Did you have any other questions?"

"Just two, I think," Scar said. His eyes were bright with something unreadable, and he looked, given the situation, entirely unfazed. Grian wondered how much he'd figured out on his own already. "Have you always been a bird?"

"Well, not *always*," Grian said, only slightly miffed at the lack of reaction. "But when you spend two hundred years as an Avatar of the Eye, sometimes adjustments need to happen." His tailfeathers ruffled, blinking one by one.

"You're pretty spry for two hundred," Scar noted. "You'll have to tell me your secrets. And I'm *sure* you will. But first- my other question. What happens next?"

Grian grinned.

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Scar sat at his desk, deep in the Archives, deeper in the Peacock's-Eye Institute, hands folded together, anticipatory smile creeping its way up his cheek. Across from him stood Grian, leaning forward, elbows on the desk, chin in his palms, expression hungry. There was a tail fanning up behind him, hundreds of feathered eyes fixed on Scar, drinking him in. Scar stared back.

A recorder clicked on.

Scar leaned forward, and hooked a finger under Grian's chin, and ordered, all the thrill and power in him accenting the word into something undeniable: "Begin."



Grian said, iridescent blue throat-feathers shifting, shining like a million reflected gazes, “Repeat after me, Archivist.”

His feather-eyes bore down, inexorable. Scar stared back.

Grian smiled, and it was sharp, and it was wicked. “You who watch and know and understand none.”

*“You who watch and know and understand none,”* said Scar, Grian’s Archivist.

“You who listen and hear and will not comprehend.”

*“You who listen and hear and will not comprehend,”* said Scar, Grian’s Archive.

“You who wait and wait and drink in all that is not yours by right.”

*“You who wait and wait and drink in all that is not yours by right,”* said Scar, voice pulled out of his throat by a will not his own, in service of a god and an end entirely his own, inexorable.

Scar’s finger dropped from Grian’s chin, forgotten.

“Come to us in your wholeness.”

Not forgotten. Quicker than sound, Grian’s hands were reaching forward, snatching Scar’s, claws pressing through his glove, into his skin.

*“Come to us in your wholeness.”*

The peacock’s crest of blue eyes above his head stared. Scar stared back.

“Come to us in your perfection.”

The air conditioning hummed. The Archives breathed in.

*“Come to us in your perfection.”*

The recorder hummed. The Archives breathed out.

“Bring all that is fear and all that is terror.”

*“Bring all that is fear and all that is terror.”*

Grian’s smile sharpened. His eyes narrowed, dilated, stared:

“And all that is the awful dread that crawls and chokes and blinds and falls and twists and leaves and hides and weaves and burns and hunts and rips and bleeds and dies.”

Scar breathed in. And Scar breathed out. And Scar took his second hand and wrapped it around Grian’s two, around his own, around thick scaly skin and around claws and around thin worn silk.

And Scar opened his eyes, and repeated:

*“And all that is the awful dread that crawls and chokes and blinds and falls and twists and leaves and hides and weaves and burns and hunts and rips and bleeds and DIES!”*

“Come to us,” said Grian.

“*Come to us,*” said Scar.

“I,” said Grian.

“*I,*” said Scar, and it was Grian saying it, and it was Scar saying it, and it was the Archives saying it, dusty with anticipation.

“Open,” said Grian.

“*Open,*” said Scar, almost on top of him, in his voice, leaning forward, hands in hands in crushing desperate grip.

“The door,” whispered Grian.

“*The DOOR!*” answered Scar.

There was, between them, a breath. And then-

The world changed, and Scar laughed.

## End Notes

like [taxidermy](#), this is another of those delightful alternate versions of this au that my cowriter and i have been bouncing around between us, specifically inspired by the dynamic between grian and scar in 3rd life, of course. i hope you had as much fun reading it as we did writing it!

like, of course he's gotta be a peacock in at least one version of this au, right? eyes bird. it's too perfect.

the dialogue in the last scene, of course, is taken directly from mag 160.

## Works inspired by this one

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!