

THE DEATH OF ARTHUR MAGNUS

INT, SEBASTIAN'S OFFICE - DAY

ARTHUR MAGNUS is a white, tall, fifty-year old man with a thin comb over and a fat chest. He is wearing a dull faded grey suit and is continuously trying to straighten his tie and tidy his remaining hair.

He is standing in a tidy bright office. There is a clear desk at the far end of the room with only an inkwell in one corner; out of which sticks a long feather quill. Behind the desk is a window, which looks out to an unrealistically picturesque sky with fluffy white clouds.

Arthur's is staring at a portrait of the virgin Mary, hung above the fireplace.

The door opens and in walks SEBASTIAN. He is tall and slim; dressed in flowing white robes and with a halo above his head.

SEBASTIAN

Sorry to have kept you.

Sebastian tries to walk past him but Arthur intercepts him and extends his hand.

ARTHUR

Arthur Magnus, pleased to meet you.

Sebastian stares at him, and then takes hold of his hand and carefully shakes it.

SEBASTIAN

(Hesitant)

Pleased to meet you.

(Let's go of his hand)

I am Saint Sebastian. Do take a seat.

A chair appears from nowhere. Arthur pulls it toward him and sits down straight. Sebastian's slumps down in his chair and reclines. He pulls open a draw and picks out a cigar and lights it with a touch of his finger.

SEBASTIAN

Would you like one?

ARTHUR

(Shaking his head)

No thank you.

SEBASTIAN

Are you sure? They can't hurt you now.

ARTHUR

No thanks, I think I'll do without thank you.

Sebastian leans back, takes a long drag and then blows smoke across the room. A rather thin file appears on his desk as if from thin air. Sebastian flicks it open.

The file contains one sheet of paper. He picks it up, looks at both sides of the sheet, double check that the file is empty, then puts the page down and leans back again.

There is an awkward silence as Sebastian enjoys the cigar. Arthur coughs quietly to draw his attention but Sebastian ignores him.

ARTHUR

Well then Mr Seb..

SEBASTIAN

(Interrupting)

There's no reason to feel nervous Mr Magnus.

ARTHUR

Oh no, I'm not nerve..

SEBASTIAN

(Interrupting again)

This is just a casual chat, you know, a chance to have a bit of talk to assess what position you would be most comfortable occupying in the afterlife; or even the possibility of having a new life.

ARTHUR

Well please fire away Mr Sebastian I'll be happy to answer any questions you might have.

Sebastian sits back again and puts his cigar out in an ashtray, which is there one moment and then gone.

SEBASTIAN

Perhaps it would be a good idea if you could.. Describe yourself to me, as your were, when you ceased.

ARTHUR

Well I was forty-nine years old.  
I'm a bank manager in Surrey on the  
high street; on about forty  
thousand a year. I've got about  
thirty people working for me and I  
might be up for regional management  
next year. I'm even thinking of  
running for the council.

Sebastian nods, looking bored.

ARTHUR

I have wife called Eva, she's forty-  
six. We have a daughter called  
Ally. We have a budgie called  
Eric.

Sebastian raises his hand.

SEBASTIAN

Okay, enough, enough.  
(Lowers his hand)  
But what are your hobbies Mr  
Magnus, what do you do during your  
spare time. What do when your not  
Bank managerring.

ARTHUR

Well me and Jerry sometimes enjoy a  
round of golf, I play dominoes for  
the club team, do a spot of  
gardening. Just got involved with  
the local Conservative group.

SEBASTIAN

And did you always want to be a  
manager of banks.

ARTHUR

Well it's a steady job.

The door bursts open. A robed figure walks in. He is  
pushing a trolley with a projector of some kind. There does  
not appear to be any film loaded.

ANGEL

Sorry to interrupt. I won't be a  
moment.

SEBASTIAN

Not at all, not at all, come in.

The man pushes the trolley toward Arthur, bumping against his chair making Arthur very agitated. The Angel stops next to the desk unravels the projector plug from the projector. A plug socket appears in the wall.

SEBASTIAN  
Do go on Mr Magnet.

ARTHUR  
Magnus.

SEBASTIAN  
So sorry.

ARTHUR  
Like I said it's a steady job.  
It's respectable, responsible. A  
lot of people rely on you.

SEBASTIAN  
Ah well we all dream of being  
respectable Mr Magnus.

The Angel, having plugged the cable in, pulls a screen down next to the window. He turns on the projector. There is no picture.

ANGEL  
All done.

SEBASTIAN  
Thank you.

Sebastian picks up the pages from Arthur's file and holds them in front of his face and examines them briefly.

SEBASTIAN  
You know I think I may have the  
wrong file. Magnus, first name  
Arthur, son of Eileen and Robert  
Magnus, born on the nineteenth of  
December, only child grew up in  
Cardiff Wales.

The screen lights up. It shows a film of a baby being cradled by his mother. She seems to be singing but there is no sound. Arthur tries not to be distracted by it.

ARTHUR  
Well that certainly sounds like me.

SEBASTIAN

Oh, I see. It's just that well it says here that you used to do... cross-country running.

ARTHUR

Well... Yes but that was a long time ago. I've not done any of that sort of thing for years.

SEBASTIAN

(Looks at Arthur's rounded chest)

Evidently. Won a number of medals I believe.

ARTHUR

Well, just one.

Sebastian turns to the screen, it shows a young and athletic Arthur running fast, ahead of several other boys.

SEBASTIAN

Why did you give it up?

ARTHUR

I had just started University, I didn't want it to get in the way of my studies

SEBASTIAN

And also were also in a band, 'The Smashed Banjo's' I believe

ARTHUR

Ah yes, I remember those days.

Arthur begins to relax and gradually leans back in his chair. Sebastian smiles falsely.

ARTHUR

It was a bit of fun, but we never took it seriously. It was just something to pass the time.

SEBASTIAN

You were rather good weren't you?

ARTHUR

We played down at the Red Lion and went down well but that was just a favour for Charlie's Uncle.

Cut to screen, which shows a film of Arthur playing guitar. He strides across the stage in tight leather, going way over the top.

SEBASTIAN

Why didn't you keep it up?

ARTHUR

It's just a bit of fun. We were kids. There were more important things to be getting on with.

SEBASTIAN

(Insincerely)

And of course, most bands never even get off the ground.

ARTHUR

Exactly we knew that, we didn't take it seriously.

SEBASTIAN

Except for...

ARTHUR

..Charlie, but he was always a bit immature it was just a bit of fun that's all. Didn't really have his head screwed on poor Charlie. I mean my Dad he was happy for me to be in a band but he was pretty strict about my work and he was right. I have a lot to thank him for.

Cut back to the screen where Charlie is dancing next to Arthur. They are having a wonderful time.

Cut to Arthur who watches with a faint smile on his face.

SEBASTIAN

You wanted to concentrate on your academic studies.

ARTHUR

(Still watching the screen)

The band was getting in the way of my schoolwork and I couldn't afford to let that down.

(He turns back to Sebastian)

You'll never have trouble finding work with a good education.

SEBASTIAN  
Of course, why it's like insurance.

ARTHUR  
You know that's just what my father used to say.

SEBASTIAN  
(False surprise)  
Really!

ARTHUR  
Yes, he did. A great man my father.

Sebastian quickly takes his gaze off Arthur first onto the floor and then to his left side, fidgeting slightly.

SEBASTIAN  
Your father... I remember him.

ARTHUR  
Really!

SEBASTIAN  
But moving on...

Sebastian pulls open the top desk draw and pulls out a note pad. He picks up the quill from the ink well.

SEBASTIAN  
What I often find useful is to talk to people with reference to the Ten Commandments. See if they've stayed on the straight and narrow.

Arthur sits up very straight and looks confident.

ARTHUR  
Fire away.

Sebastian stands up and begins to pace up and down from the desk to Arthur and then back again. Arthur tries to keep looking ahead.

SEBASTIAN  
Now the first two, Worship no other God, and not to reproduce his image.

ARTHUR

Well no problems there. I've certainly worshipped no other God.

SEBASTIAN

Well you've not actually worshipped any God have you?

ARTHUR

I don't think that's true. I've always believed in God most strongly

SEBASTIAN

When was the last time you went to Church?

ARTHUR

(Slight Pause)

Oh errm, now let me think, it was

SEBASTIAN

A yes six years ago when your predecessor died.

Arthur shuffles in his chair as Sebastian starts to pace again. The room has got slightly darker.

ARTHUR

Well I, I rarely have the time you see, such a busy schedule.

SEBASTIAN

But time to go golfing on the Sabbath

Arthur opens his mouth to protest but he has nothing to say. He closes his mouth.

SEBASTIAN

So you don't go to Church, and you don't pray, the last time you did apparently was in a betting shop when 'Crazy Blue' was lagging behind in the Derby.

The screen lights up again and we see Arthur jumping up and down, then putting his hands together praying in a betting shop. Arthur looks away. The room gets darker.

ARTHUR

Well... I maybe I didn't pray every day but I still believed.

SEBASTIAN

It's an interesting theory this belief, it means you believe in worshipping God but don't actually do any of it. What an interesting contradiction.

ARTHUR

But nobody goes to Church anymore  
(Realises what he has just said)  
Oh well what I mean is..

SEBASTIAN

(Sharply interrupting)  
Lots of people go to Church, and they go often and they pray often!  
(Arthur opens his mouth but isn't quick enough to speak)  
But I suppose to a certain extent you are a victim of your times.

ARTHUR

(Sternly)  
What are you getting at here Mr Sebastian?

SEBASTIAN

Now as for using the lords name in vein...

ARTHUR

Well I have occasionally...

SEBASTIAN

Seven thousand, three hundred and sixty four blasphemers.

The room is now much darker and is beginning to resemble an interrogation room. The walls start to fade away into darkness. The only light comes from the window and that is getting dimmer slowly.

ARTHUR

Now hang on that cannot be...

SEBASTIAN

(Angry)

Mr Magnus, you said 'Oh my god' three times during your fatal heart attack and 'Jesus Christ' six times. Again, this is very much a symptom of the times you live in. This however, is not much of an excuse. Now what else have we got.

Sebastian walks back to the desk and sits down. He takes the quill and crosses through some of his notes on the note pad.

ARTHUR

Excuse me but...

SEBASTIAN

(Ignoring him)

You do respect your mother and Father, for better or worse. No adultery. Not that anyone would want to.

ARTHUR

(shouts)

How dare you! I've had enough of this

Arthur suddenly stands up

ARTHUR

(Outraged)

How dare you stand there and, and insult and criticise me.

SEBASTIAN

I'm sitting Mr Magnus

ARTHUR

How dare you. I'm sorry, I'm not just going to sit here and take this.

Sebastian looks fierce.

SEBASTIAN

(Loud and echoing)

Sit down Mr Magnus!

Arthur sits down quickly as if he had no choice in the matter. He starts to shake.

SEBASTIAN

You've not done too badly on the others; you've not really desired what other men have. However there are a few technical queries here on the 'thou shalt not kill' line.

ARTHUR

(Shaking with fear and anger)

And what exactly do you mean by that?

SEBASTIAN

Does the name Robert Janney mean anything to you?

ARTHUR

No. No it doesn't.

SEBASTIAN

He came into your bank three weeks ago to apply for a loan. Tall, very thin, slight Scottish accent. You refused.

ARTHUR

(Pause for thought)

I don't remember. But if I refused I must have had a reason. He probably had no collateral or something.

SEBASTIAN

Well this man who you can't remember, will be dead in a week. He needed that money, he was in deep debt and to pay it off he sets fire to his bankrupt factory to get the insurance. He doesn't get out in time. He burns to death.

Cut to the screen, which this time is in colour. There is just a picture of fire in which there suddenly appears a man.

Arthur is horrified

ARTHUR

(Shouting)

That's not my fault.

Janney's face appears momentarily close-up in the fire. It's mouth is wide open screaming. There is still no sound.

ARTHUR

(Stands up)

It's not my fault, if he managed  
his life better, been more  
responsible

SEBASTIAN

(Bangs his fist on the  
table and shouts back)

Do you know what the bible says  
about moneylenders Mr Magnus?

Arthur drops back down on the seat.

SEBASTIAN

Of course not, you don't go to  
Church do you Mr Magnus? But why  
worship God when you can play it  
yourself; play with peoples lives;  
be the boss of the thirty people  
under you.

Arthur looks away disgusted. He is sweating. Sebastian  
drops his quill on the table and stares at Mr Magnus for a  
few moments. The room is now very dark.

SEBASTIAN

I don't think there's really any  
point discussing this anymore. I'm  
sorry you're just not what we're  
looking for.

ARTHUR

What?

SEBASTIAN

I can't offer you a place in  
Heaven. I cannot.

ARTHUR

Does that mean that?

Sebastian looks passive. The Full horror of what this means  
suddenly hits Arthur. He is shocked.

ARTHUR

Oh no, no no no no no no! I'm not  
an evil man you can't do this to  
me!

(Arthur stands suddenly  
and shouts)

You can't send me there. You can't  
send me to hell.

SEBASTIAN

No?

Sebastian stands. This triggers an unseen force, which pushes Arthur over the back of his chair and across the room. He slams against the far wall. Sebastian marches from behind the desk toward him. The window shines a bright light behind him. Arthur watches terrified. Huge wings spread out from Sebastian's back and he rises off the ground.

SEBASTIAN

No Mr Magnus, you're not evil.  
 You're worse. At least evil people  
 have some ideas, some kind of lust  
 for life, even if destructive.  
 Some kind of basic drive. But what  
 have you ever done? You've wasted  
 your life; you let yourself get fat  
 whilst getting a kick out  
 controlling people's lives, 'thirty  
 people under me' indeed.  
 Life is Gods gift to man. So what  
 if something was a bit of fun.  
 What if just started as bit of  
 messing around?

The screen lights up behind Sebastian. It shows a young Arthur sitting behind a desk. Time is speeded up around him. People and the world move around him but he stays sat at the desk, working alone.

SEBASTIAN

Something fun could've become  
 something better, something that  
 just might have enriched your life.  
 A risk worth taking but you...  
 (Points at Arthur)  
 You didn't have the courage.  
 You've never had the courage. And  
 you never worshipped the God you  
 apparently believed in and you  
 wasted his gift.

The on-screen Arthur is in a blank office, which looks more like a cell. He now appears as he does now. Then slowly he grows old and his head drops dead on the desk.

SEBASTIAN

(Stops pointing at him)

And not just that you've wasted your life you've imposed it onto to others. You were quite happy to let you wife stay at home and look after you at the expense of her life. You've always manipulated her into doing what you wanted. Gone out with your friends while she stayed at home cooking your meals and taking care of you. And now you're gone and she has nobody. She'll be put on antidepressants and made to see the Council therapist twice a month. She'll die lonely and unhappy and it's all because her husband is a bank manager. A useless flesh coloured spot of nothing!

CUT TO...

INT, SEBASTIAN'S OFFICE - DAY

The room is as it was at the beginning of the interview. The office is bright, Arthur is sat in a chair close to the desk and Sebastian is relaxing with a cigar. Arthur has his head in his hands and is sobbing.

ARTHUR

(Slight murmur)

I'm so sorry, so sorry.

SEBASTIAN

Mr Magnus there really isn't any point in apologising. You can just try again in a decade or so.

Arthur is still sobbing to himself.

SEBASTIAN

Did you hear what I said Mr Magnus? You don't need to cry you can try again in a decade or so.

Arthur looks up. There are tears in his eyes and down his face.

ARTHUR

(Quietly)

What did you say?

SEBASTIAN

This isn't your time Mr Magnus. Go on, get out. When I see you again I hope that I lay my eyes on something far more worthy.

The office door opens and in an animated way Arthur, with tears in his eyes, he stands up and slowly begins to walk out.

SEBASTIAN

Goodbye Mr Magnus. God bless you.

FADE TO WHITE.

INT, HOSPITAL, DAY

Arthur is laid on a hospital trolley in an operating theatre. A great many people are gathered around him but their faces are unseen. Arthur's eyes blink open and shut.

DOCTOR

He's coming round

EVA

(Off Screen)

Arthur, Arthur.

Arthur's eyes open wide. Then suddenly he tries to launch himself off the trolley. All the doctors and nurses suddenly gather round in a desperate attempt to hold him down.

THE END