

Arizal, Recordkeeping, and the World of Maktaba

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Note: Some spoilers for the show *Recorded by Arizal*

What if I told you that an Austin, Texas, animation studio is currently streaming a show about a 16-year-old Filipina who wants to be a record keeper? You might scoff and laugh, declaring that no such show exists. In fact, the show is real and is named *Recorded by Arizal*. Originally named *Record Keeper*, before the name was changed to avoid copyright issues,¹ all four of the show's prelude episodes were posted on YouTube² and on the studio's website in July and August of this year.³ The show's creator, Yssa Badiola, has posted three additional videos to give a behind-the-scenes look at the show itself⁴ and [a panel](#) on September 21, 2020, with Badiola and others working on the show. The studio is Rooster Teeth, a subsidiary of WarnerMedia's Otter Media, which has produced animations such as *RWBY*, *gen:LOCK*, and *Red vs. Blue*.⁵ Although *Recorded by Arizal* does not feature archives as institutions or physical spaces like in [Tom Clancy's The Division 2](#) or [Star Wars: Episode VIII The Last Jedi](#), the show has archival themes. If the show gets a proper season, as Badiola hopes, then these themes can be expanded upon.

The show's overachieving protagonist Arizal, who is [voiced by Filipina-American actress Christine Marie Cabanos](#), lives in the far-flung futuristic city of Maktaba with her aunt, uncle, and cousin (a college student), away from her homeland in Yaman. She has a dream to be a record keeper (known as "keeper" for short). In this role, she will travel across the world, trying to document it for those within the city of Maktaba with the records she collects and creates. In all of the prelude episodes, she composes a series of vlogs during summer vacation as an extra credit assignment and as part of her formal application to become a keeper. She learns more about

¹ Yssa Badiola (@dearbassy), "Went thru a name change! It is now considered "Recorded By Arizal" :)," Twitter post, July 1, 2020, <https://twitter.com/dearbassy/status/1278452904588914690>.

² "Recorded by Arizal," Rooster Teeth Animation, YouTube, last modified July 31, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL2vBnPCQT4WLwauEGe--oESZusgQNjPge>.

³ "Recorded by Arizal," Rooster Teeth, accessed September 27, 2020, <https://roosterteeth.com/series/recorded-by-arizal>.

⁴ "Recorded by Yssa," Rooster Teeth Animation, YouTube, last modified August 31, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL2vBnPCQT4WJFhi5IJKMillt5TQQbRgvG>.

⁵ "About," Rooster Teeth, accessed September 27, 2020, <https://roosterteeth.com/about>; David Bloom, "Rooster Teeth, New GM Levin Take Bite Out Of Pandemic With 10th-Year, 10-Day RTX At Home," *Forbes*, September 23, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/dbloom/2020/09/23/rooster-teeth-takes-bite-out-of-pandemic-with-10th-year-10-day-rtx-virtual-gathering/#6b919dcf31a1>.

herself as she attempts to pursue this career, a lifelong dream for her, even if she hasn't figured out why she wants to be a keeper in the first place.⁶ While *Recorded by Arizal* is mainly a coming-of-age story, Badiola noted on Reddit that one of the main driving themes is “the discussion of record keeping and learning.”⁷

In the first episode of the show's prelude, , [Log i](#), Arizal explains that keepers are citizens of Maktaba who “add to the global archive by exploring the world,” go to new places, meet new people, and record their progress along the way for “the history of humanity.” At the same time, she struggles to explain why she wants to be a keeper, saying she became interested when her childhood friends Rizella and Lia joined her by having the same dream. She also says she is most proud of her room and calls it a “nice representation” of herself. This episode supplies the clearest definition of a keeper in the show. Keepers are curators, guardians, protectors, custodians, caretakers, or guards who visually lay hold onto something, like records, similar to roles that archivists have.⁸ This is why the [International Council on Archives](#) and archival scholars like Alan Bell, Caroline Brown, Terry Eastwood, and Terry Cook have stated that the words recordkeeper and archivist are synonyms.⁹ After all, archivists are more than what *Webster's New World College Dictionary* defines describes: people in charge of archives where public records and documents are kept.¹⁰ Additionally, the word “maktaba” means library or place of study in Arabic,¹¹ showing the attention to detail in the show to historical and cultural concepts.

In the second episode of the show's prelude, [Log ii](#), she interviews Dante, a real keeper, who tells her the harsh reality of gathering information for the global archives, explaining that he is alone “all the time.” His words cause Arizal to have a personal crisis in the next episode, [Log iii](#). She laments that it may be impossible to

⁶ Yssa Badiola, “A Look at *Recorded by Arizal* with Creator Yssa Badiola,” interview by Sagebzzzzn, *Rooster Teeth*, July 10, 2020, <https://blog.roosterteeth.com/a-look-at-recorded-by-arizal/>.

⁷ “Recorded by Yssa: The Team -Vlog #1,” Reddit, accessed September 27, 2020, https://old.reddit.com/r/RecordedByArizal/comments/hse1wv/recorded_by_yssa_the_team_vlog_1/.

⁸ Glynnis Chantrell, *The Oxford Dictionary of Word Histories* (New York: Oxford University, 2002), 288; Michael Agnes, *Webster's New World College Dictionary* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007), 783.

⁹ Alan Bell and Caroline Brown, *The Recordkeeper's Bookshelf* (Dundee, UK: Centre of Archive and Information Studies, 2013), 8, 23, 37, 62, 65, 67, 77, 84, and 98; Terry Eastwood, “A Contested Realm: The Nature of Archives and the Orientation of Archival Science,” in *Currents of Archival Thinking*, ed. Terry Eastwood and Heather MacNeil (Santa Barbara, Calif: Libraries Unlimited, 2017), 21; Terry Cook, “Evidence, Memory, Identity, and Community: Four Shifting Archival Paradigms,” *Archival Science* 13 (June 2002): 12; Terry Cook, “Macro-Appraisal and Functional Analysis: Documenting Governance Rather Than Government,” *American Archivist* 25, no. 1 (2006): 7, 17.

¹⁰ Agnes, *Webster's New World College Dictionary*, 73–4.

¹¹ M. S. Asimov and Clifford Edmund Bosworth, *The Age of Achievement: Vol. 4* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999), 34–5; “Maktaba,” *Wiktionary*, Wikimedia Foundation, accessed September 27, 2020, <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/maktaba>.

be a keeper, worries about leaving her stuff behind, like her favorite (and precious) fiftieth anniversary edition of a book titled *The Littlest Royal*. This item holds special value to her above anything else and represents a turning point in the show. At the same time, she wants to discover more about the world and explore it with her friends. Her spirits are lifted when Rizella calls her an “adorable bookworm” after proving her obscure knowledge of an ancient settlement. Although these episodes contrast with [accepted definitions of an archivist](#) as a person who has “expertise in the management of records of enduring value” or the head of an archives program, by being a keeper, Arizal will be “responsible for records of enduring value.” This relates to Badiola’s assessment that vlogging and future record keeping, in other formats, by Arizal, is inherently archival.¹²

In the final episode of the show’s prelude, [Log iv](#), Arizal finally leaves her self-imposed isolation in her house. On a secretive mountain overlook, she reflects on her dream to be a keeper and how her friends helped her leave the house so she would not wallow in her sadness. Arizal declares that she wants to leave the city and is ready to visit places her mother (a former ambassador) visited, discover new parts of the world, and find something to love. In the last shots of the episode, the primary [atheneum](#) votes to accept her application. Since an atheneum is a scientific or literary association which tries to advance learning, Arizal will be in good company with fellow scholars who enjoy learning and knowledge, including those who read for fun, taking in information “with no thought of application,” to use Dante’s words to her in the second episode.

As Arizal explores the world, collecting records for world’s public archive, she will be, as a result of societal role as a keeper, bound to the records themselves, and their creation. Like Dante, the keeper she talked with in the second prelude episode, Arizal will undoubtedly be chronicling her adventures using her electronic devices, whether by vlogging or something else, as she “records her journey into adulthood” in Badiola’s words.¹³ Whatever Arizal collects on her journeys across the vast world will undoubtedly make the annals of history richer for all the people of Maktaba.

¹² Yssa Badiola, Christine Marie Cabanos, and Joshua Kazemi, “RTX – *Recorded by Arizal*,” interview by Kdin Jenze, Rooster Teeth, September 25, 2020, video, 41:54-42:56, <https://roosterteeth.com/watch/rtx-2020-arizal-panel>.

¹³ Yssa Badiola, “Hey gang, I’m Yssa 🍷 Creator & showrunner of Recorded By Arizal. And we have a panel for RTX!!! That’s wild!,” Rooster Teeth, August 29, 2020, <https://roosterteeth.com/g/post/1868d6c1-60b4-4b93-8e7b-0b7efea92c0d>.