

MAG – 016 – Arachnophobia

Content Warnings

- Spiders
- Arachnophobia
- Animal death
- Crushing
- **Discussions of:** compulsion (supernatural), death, choking, infestation
- **Mentions of:** Worms, maggots, medication, ghosts
- **SFX:** Brief Static

[The Magnus Archives Theme - Intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

Rusty Quill Presents The Magnus Archives Episode Sixteen Arachnophobia

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro - Continues]

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Statement of Carlos Vittery, regarding his arachnophobia and its manifestations. Original statement given April 9th, 2015. Audio recording by Jonathan Sims, Head Archivist of the Magnus Institute, London.

Statement begins.

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(Read aloud from the archived witness statement of Carlos Vittery)

I hate spiders. I know, I know, everyone hates spiders. Any time there's any list of the top however many fears, they're always up there, and whole horror franchises have been built on the basic premise that people hate spiders. But not like me. Not like this. It's not the sight of a spider that gets me, not the legs

or the eyes or even the webs they leave behind with only the drained corpse of their insect victims still inside. It's the presence of a spider. The knowledge of its being, somewhere near, waiting to crawl on you, and all the warning you get that gentle tickle of its legs as it climbs upon you.

I'm not explaining myself very well. Let me try and phrase it in a different way: I can watch any number of films about the things. Documentary or horror, it doesn't matter. I can read books on them. I can stare at close-up pictures of their weird spider faces all day long, and there's hardly a shudder from me. But I had to move from my last house after discovering how many spiders made a home in my garden. I walked out there one day with the intention of smoking a cigarette, sat on the rusty garden furniture that had come with the place, and looked up. There it was – stretched between two large branches, silhouetted against the sky it sat. Objectively speaking the thing was tiny, couldn't have been more than half an inch leg-to-leg, but up there, suspended high above me, its body black against the slate grey sky, it filled me with a sickening dread. I leapt up, and started to head back inside, but as I did my eyes flicked wildly around the rest of the garden, and everywhere they came to rest I saw more lurking spiders, more webs. There were dozens that I could see, which meant there must be hundreds more I could not.

There was no way I could live there after that. How could I sleep knowing how many crawling horrors moved and twitched and spun their filth just a wall away? I'm not a fool; I know that all gardens contain spiders. Every single one is filled with them, nestled in any crevice or hiding spot they can find. But now I knew. I had seen them in their spindly multitudes and I could not unknow how many were there. And I could not stop thinking of when winter would come,

and they would seek to find a way into the warmth of my home. So I had to move.

Renting in London moves very quickly, which is a pain if you're looking to find exactly the right place to live, but if you just need to get out and into a place as far away from a garden as possible and you aren't choosy, it can be sorted out very fast indeed. I found a place in Boothby Road in Archway. While nearby Elthorne Road was full of houses and gardens – no doubt infested with spiders – my building was surrounded by concrete driveways and parking spaces, and the only vegetation were a few window boxes the other residents kept. The place was old, but had been kept clean enough that I didn't need to worry about hidden webs, and the rooms, though small, were open enough that I could keep an eye on all corners. I was on the second floor, so any eight-legged intruder would have something of a climb to access it; although I was acutely aware of the distance a spider can shoot its web when it wants to get somewhere. The building was also quite happy with pets, so I got a cat. I had heard from a friend who had a pair of them that they have a habit of catching spiders and eating them – slowly and torturously. This sounded good to me, so I invested in an older tabby, from a local shelter called Major Tom

This is all a lot of superfluous information, I know, but you have to understand the lengths I went to; how little I would tolerate a spider to live in my presence, to fully grasp how unnatural it was, what happened to me. What still is happening to me.

I saw a spider about three months ago. Not unusual. Certainly not as unusual as I would like – even with all my precautions they still manage to get into my home once a month or so. My normal course of action is to immediately flee the room and leave Major Tom inside to deal with it, returning after a few

hours. In all previous cases this had worked fine – I believe Major Tom definitely ate the majority of them, and those spiders that had simply fled back into the shadows, well, I can trick myself into believing they also suffered such a fate. It may be that my grey feline companion never actually ate any of them, but he was a fine enough placebo that such a thought didn't concern me as much as it might.

I remember that month there had been a few of them. Our building had acquired something of an infestation of some sort of insect I didn't recognise – small, silvery worms, almost like maggots but slightly longer – and I assume that they provided a good meal for the eight-legged little monsters.

This spider was different. I felt it the moment I laid eyes on the thing, standing in the middle of kitchen wall, displaying itself boldly, as though it wanted to be as visible as possible. I felt that familiar rushing fear, as though the floor had dropped away and a thousand tiny legs are crawling upon every inch of my skin. But there was something else there. I was aware of this spider in a way I had never had been of others that preceded it. It wasn't the biggest, maybe an inch wide, but its abdomen was swelled grotesquely. I could feel every one of its void-black eyes focused upon me, see each hair on its fat, bulbous body, and smell the venom I knew dripped from its fangs. I hate spiders, as I have said, but I would have sworn that this one hated me back.

None of this was enough to make me think twice about gingerly pushing Major Tom towards the thing with my foot and fleeing the room. I made my way into the living room and closed the door behind me, leaving cat and spider to deal with each other. I sat there, watching the TV, some panel show re-run, trying not to think about the thing on my kitchen wall. An hour passed, then two, and

finally I felt like I had enough stability of mind to open the door and confirm that the damned arachnid was gone.

The moment I opened the door I felt something furry brush against my leg. Choking down a sudden moment of panic, I looked and, sure enough, there was Major Tom, hurrying out of the room at a run. He didn't seem hurt or upset, so I assumed his job was done. Then I turned back to my kitchen, and froze. The spider sat in that same spot. It wasn't eaten, it hadn't fled, from what I could tell it hadn't even moved! The only way I was sure the thing was real and alive was that I swear to you I could see its mandibles twitching with anticipation. I stood there, unable to summon the will to close the kitchen door or enter into it fully and cursed Major Tom for a useless bag of fur.

It was another hour before I was finally able to move. The whole time I stood motionless in the doorway, watching the fat spider that paraded itself on my wall. Still it remained in place, and I couldn't help but feel that it was daring me to do something, to take action, to kill it. I began to move. Slowly, ever so slowly, I approached it, reaching a hand over the table and taking the half-drunk mug of coffee, now long cold, in my hand. I gripped the handle so tight I was sure it would snap off in my fingers. Finally, I stood before the spider, preparing myself to calmly crush it against the wall. Then it moved without warning and I hurled the mug against the wall with all my might.

It hit the spider dead on and exploded in a shower of coffee and china. I stood there for a minute, breathing hard, but all that remained was a large stain on the wall and mug shards littering the floor. I should have cleaned it up immediately, but I was so tired, as though killing the spider had taken every ounce of wakefulness that I had within me. I simply turned around and went to

bed. My dreams that night were many-legged but there's not much unusual in that.

I spent the next morning cleaning up the detritus from my battle with the spider. I wished that I had gotten the coffee cleaned before it had dried, but by lunchtime the place was looking very much as it had before. As I swept up the smashed mug, I noticed that the largest shard, emblazoned with the design of a stylized blue owl, had a vivid smear on it. Brown, red and green were crushed onto it where it had hit the spider. It disgusted me, but looking at it I couldn't help but feel a small surge of triumph, and I smiled as I threw it into the garbage bag. Major Tom watched, impassive as always.

The next few days passed without incident. Major Tom had never been much of an indoor cat, so I had installed a cat flap some time before to allow him to come and go as he pleased. After that first encounter he seemed to spend more time outside, and I saw him less and less as the week progressed. I didn't think much of it; we'd had a particularly mild Christmas, so it made sense that he'd be enjoying the outside as much as possible before winter really set in.⁷

It was the Friday after my first encounter that it happened. I came in from work, tired after a difficult week – I used to work as a data analyst at an online betting company – and decided to order takeout and relax in front of some TV. I eased myself back into my armchair and reached for the remote. I was aware that Major Tom wasn't anywhere to be seen, which was odd, since he usually got fed shortly after I arrived home and he was never one to miss a meal. Still, I didn't think of it, and turned on the television. I hadn't turned the satellite box, so what showed at first was an empty blue screen. I reached to the other remote to turn it on, when I realised the blue screen wasn't empty. There, sat upon it, black against the glowing background, was a spider. And not just any

spider, but I swear to you, and here's where you march me out of your little institute as a time-wasting lunatic, but I swear that it was the same damn spider.

It was the same size, the same shape, the same thick, pulsing abdomen. But more than that, I felt it. I felt it in that fear that hit me like I had been punched in the stomach, and I felt it in the way that the thing just sat there, unmoving, waiting for me to kill it again. I was stuck to my chair, just watching this spider as it stood there on the screen of my television. I called for Major Tom, but there was no response.

God knows how long I sat staring at the spider on my television. I don't wear a watch, and I couldn't move my arm to check my phone. If I hadn't been sat down I would have run already, but standing up was more movement than I could bring myself to make while it watched me.

Finally, I got to my feet. It was less effort than I expected when I finally mustered the will to do it. Although that's not really how it felt at the time – at that point it felt almost involuntary, as though some something were lifting me, hoisting me to my feet by unseen strings. I began to walk, but rather than fleeing the spider I found I moved towards it, until I stopped there, so close I could have touched it, though my mind recoils at the thought. Before I realised exactly what I was doing I lifted my leg, and kicked the television, instantly crushing the bulbous spider beneath the heel of my shoe, and now I think about it, narrowly avoiding a nasty electrocution. I had had no inkling I was capable of such a thing, but once again the spider was dead, and I had a slimy stain on my shoe.

I threw the shattered remains of the television away, burned the shoe and tried, desperately to return to something approaching my normal life, but it

was no good. The spider that I had killed had come back, of that I had no doubt, and a deep paranoia began to set in as I waited for it to return again. I saw Major Tom only once in the weeks that followed. He came in, sniffed at the bowl of food I had continued to put out for him in the vain hope of luring him back, and turned around and walked away. As he left he gave me a look that I could have sworn was one of pity.

I called in sick to my job, as I wasn't really sleeping and so much of the time was spent checking nooks and corners for the spider, that I was a nervous wreck. More than once I did find spiders, but they weren't the one who was after me, so I killed them without a second thought. My life descended into the mess that it, well, it still remains today.

I was right, though. Two weeks after I kicked it to death on my TV, there it was. Over my bed. Standing on the wall over the spot where my head lay each night as I tried in vain to sleep. It was that damned spider. And I recognised it. My bedroom is better lit than the kitchen, and it wasn't silhouetted against a screen, so for the first time I got a really good look at my tormentor, and I realised that I had seen it before the kitchen.

I was not born with a fear of spiders. In fact for the first six years of my life I can only assume I existed in peaceful harmony with them. But that changed in the autumn of 1991. I didn't live in London then but with my parents in Southampton, and we would visit my grandparents every Sunday, out in the nearby New Forest. They lived on the edge of a suburb, and from the bottom of my grandmother's garden you could see fields stretching away for a half a mile to the tree line. I used to spend a lot of time down there, and if you were lucky, sometimes there would be horses..

That day, there were no horses, just an overcast sky and wind that threatened to blow off my blue woollen hat. I was wandering through the scattered trees by the fence I wasn't allowed to cross, and I noticed a fallen log. I had seen it before, of course, as there was little in that place that changed much between my weekly visits, but there was something different about it. In one of the hollows sat something that I did not recognise. It was a pale brown, and looked soft and lumpy, like a small sack. Knowing no better I approached it, and saw, perched on its top, a small spider. It watched me, warily, its fat abdomen twitching, but it did not move

In my childish ignorance, I thought it looked silly, and I reached over for it. But I tripped. My hand hit the spider, killing it instantly, and plunging into the egg sack below, causing it to tear open and explode. I was suddenly covered in thousands of small, white crawling things, those tiny, dripping, half-formed and unfinished spiders. They covered my hands, my face... my eyes.

I can never forget that feeling, and since then the presence of spiders has filled me with the deepest dread. And that was the spider that sat before me on my bedroom wall. Though I remembered little of what the long-dead thing had looked like I knew it was the same. Can you be haunted by the ghost of a spider that destroyed your childhood? It sounds absurd. It sounds laughable. But there it was. I didn't know why it was here. And I didn't know why I was reaching for it. My mind screamed to stop, and I let out a terrible cry, but my hand kept moving towards it inexorably, as though willed by something else. This ghost spider felt real enough when I crushed it beneath my palm, legs splayed and body bursting warmly against my skin. Once I had control of my limb once again, I spent the rest of the night washing my hand.

I am moving out of that building. I officially gave Major Tom's paperwork to the family on the ground floor he decided to move in with, and will be leaving the moment I find somewhere, anywhere, available for immediate rental. I can't risk seeing the thing again. I'm also seeing doctors, trying to get a referral for psychiatric treatment or possibly some antipsychotic medication, but I felt I should probably give you a statement as well. I don't expect you to believe me, but if "ghost spiders" falls under anyone's remit, I suppose it's yours.

JONATHAN SIMS

Statement ends.

I think the most important lines in this statement come at the very end. Antipsychotic medication and disbelief are, I think, exactly what Mr. Vittery needed to get through his problem with, er, "ghost spiders". There simply aren't enough details given in this statement to actually investigate, short of Martin confirming that Mr. Vittery did indeed live at the addresses he provided.

I would have asked Tim to follow up with Mr. Vittery himself, but he appears to have passed away shortly after giving his statement. He was found in his Boothby Road residence, after neighbours complained of the smell, and had apparently been dead for over a week. Coroner's report lists asphyxiation as the cause of death, probably due to choking, though it doesn't say what he choked on, simply lists "foreign organic material" blocking his throat.

If I were of a more alarmist nature I might think the appearance of Mr. Vittery's corpse lent some credibility to his tale. But as I told Martin earlier, he

was there for over a week, so there is very likely a perfectly natural explanation for the fact that his body was completely encased in web.

Recording Ends.

[The Magnus Archives Theme - Outro]

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