

MAG – 041 – Too Deep

Content Warnings

- Infestation
- Tunnels & underground
- Claustrophobia
- **Discussions of:** Death, murder, disorientation, altered reality
- **Mentions of:** Scopophobia, nyctophobia, rotting, injury, knives
- **SFX:** High pitched tone

[The Magnus Archives Theme - Intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

Rusty Quill Presents The Magnus Archives Episode Fourty One Too Deep

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro - Continues]

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JONATHAN SIMS

Statement of Jonathan Sims, Head Archivist of the Magnus Institute, regarding exploration of the tunnels recently discovered below the archive. Statement given direct, 2nd September 2016. Statement, uh... Statement begins.

JONATHAN SIMS

I've been going into the tunnels. It's.... There are, uh... Jane Prentiss is dead. I know this. I have a small jar on my desk of what are supposed to be her ashes, though I don't believe it for a second. I think Martin just gave me a jar of dust to try and calm me down. Give me something to focus on for closure. I hate to say it, but it does appear to be working. A victory for the placebo effect, it would seem. But that's beside the point. The worms have been cleared and

incinerated, the floors and walls repaired, and the archive looks remarkably like it was never attacked at all.

Unlike me. I've healed enough in the last month to return to work, but I'm told it's unlikely the scars will ever truly fade. Tim is still signed off. Truth be told I could have stayed away longer, probably should have, but I don't think the boredom was good for me. I tried to come back earlier, but Martin wouldn't hear of it. Almost threw me out of the archive. Is he hiding something? Heh. No, of course not. He's probably just legitimately concerned for my health.

Why do I still feel like I'm being watched? I'd just about convinced myself it was Prentiss, watching me in secret while she filled the walls with her writhing hordes, but no. She is dead and gone, and still whenever I talk into this... damn thing, I feel this... I'm being watched. I know I am. I'd think it was some aspect of the recorder itself, but it still happens even when I'm just reading these files. Not as strongly as when I'm... recording them, perhaps, but still there. Is it...

Huh. You know, I always despised those witnesses who rambled on, unable to stay on topic, couldn't give as concise a statement. Yet here I am, mumbling my vague suspicions of being watched, and completely ignoring the reason I'm making a statement of my own. I have been exploring the tunnels.

It's been a couple of weeks now. From before I was officially back. If you listen to this, Martin, I am sorry. I've gone behind your back to explore the tunnels on... several occasions. I took the key from Elias' desk some time ago. I don't think he noticed. Since Martin stopped living in the Archives, I've had ample opportunities for exploration by night. Part of me still wonders if going down there after dark was more dangerous, but the pitch black of those tunnels would be no different in the daytime. The only light down there is what you bring yourself.

The first time I attempted to explore them, I had no idea. I brought one torch and that was it. The lights in the archive were off when I arrived at the Institute. I hadn't been down here since just it was full of worm carcasses. I'd never explored down here by torchlight, and the shadows were... starker than I had anticipated. Every time I walked between the shelves, I swear I would see movement out the corner of my eye. But when I turned, there was nothing. Obviously there was nothing. Then I came to the trapdoor.

If Sasha hadn't thought to clearly mark it with hazard tape, I'm not sure I would ever have found it again, but there it was. It took several minutes of fumbling before I was able to figure out how to lift the concealed handle and expose the lock, but I managed it. The key turned with a click that I found oddly satisfying, and I pulled it open. When I had thought about that moment before, I had always imagined it groaning open with a tortured, ominous creak, but it was almost silent. It glided open as though on freshly oiled hinges, with only the faintest puff of stagnant air being released from beneath it.

The opening was utterly black, with the faintest hint of decay in the cold, clammy air that rushed out of it. The stairs down it were steep, far steeper than I remembered them from when I had first climbed out, but those memories are... unreliable, and tinged with other, more potent, experiences. I turned the torch on, and was pleased by how easily it penetrated the darkness, illuminating the rough, grey stone below. I was expecting my torch to be met by hundreds of decaying worm husks, but the passage seemed to be empty. I headed down into the tunnel, closing the trapdoor behind me.

It is hard to put into words how it felt to be down there, in the cool, mouldering air of the tunnels. Have you ever left a crowded room, and literally felt the silence as you walked out into the night? It was something like that, a

sudden, quiet absence. Not in itself a fearful thing, but unsettling in a way I hadn't noticed through the fear and adrenaline of my first time in the tunnels. I took a moment to examine the feeling, but couldn't trace it anything obvious, so I began to explore.

It was almost unreal how quickly I became lost. I generally consider myself to have an excellent sense of direction, but within minutes I became unsure of exactly which passages I had come from. I didn't even have the excuse of the corridors all looking the same, as they varied significantly in height and construction. Some were built of sturdy brick, some seemed almost as though they had formed naturally, though in all cases it was the same dull, grey stone.

To call it a maze wouldn't quite be accurate, as a maze is designed. It is set out with an obvious goal, even if that goal is to confuse and disorientate. This place, it felt more organic in its unpredictability, as though it had been intended to be used, to be travelled, but had gotten twisted somehow. I found spaces that seemed intended as rooms but without doors. Elsewhere, there were doors that seemed simply attached to the walls. Most of these were firmly shut, though some opened to reveal the flat grey stone behind. Only a handful I opened had actual rooms behind them, and in every case I found myself wondering whether that was where Martin had found her.

There was no way to tell. Even when the police finally found Gertrude's body, they took it, chair and all, as well as all the tapes. Evidence, they said, and they might be right, though I don't envy them the task of going through all of them. There must have been hundreds.

No. I suppose in some way I do envy them. They are an insight into my predecessor's time here; something I desperately want to know more about. Whatever's on them, it must be important, because... either she chose to hide

them down here, or whoever killed her did. Either way, I have a feeling it isn't something the police are going to understand. I half-hoped to stumble across a lone cassette lying in one of the corridors, dropped or overlooked, but there was nothing. Just dark and empty tunnels, silent and unwelcoming.

I foolishly didn't think to make a note of the time I entered the tunnels, so it was hard to say how long I had been down there, or how far I had gone, when I found the first of the worms, but it can't have been more than a half hour. They were long dead by then. Shrivelled, stringy things, like discarded sausage casing, and it was odd to see how clear a line there was between the wormless tunnels and those where they still lay rotting. A clear line beyond which the cleaning crews had decided not to advance. When I crossed that line, I half-expected the corpses to spring to life, turning their squirming heads towards me with a predatory lunge, but they were still.

Nonetheless, I went slower through those deeper passages, picking my footing carefully so as not to touch them. The air was colder here, suffused with the faint tang of rot, and I began to wonder how much battery I had in my torch. I had put a fresh one in before my expedition, I'm not stupid, but the more I thought about it, the more I realised that I don't actually know how long batteries last for continuous use in a heavy-duty torch. I hadn't even been down there an hour, but already it felt like the light it cast was weaker, somehow, and I realised how unsure I was of my exact route back. I decided I would rather cut my first trip unnecessarily short than risk being trapped down there without light. So I turned back.

It was almost impossible to retrace my steps. I tried to remember my route using what vague oddities I could remember as landmarks: a burned door, a particularly warped corridor. But trying to find them again was useless in the

winding passages. In my increasing panic to find the way out, I almost forgot the things I had originally gone down there to look for. Then I found the circle of worms.

When Tim had first described it, I had only half-believed him. I'm sorry, Tim, if you're listening, but the CO2 had done some strange things to you at that point. He had the right of it, though. By the time I found it, there was little left but a thick carpet of dead worms, but a few were still embedded in the wall providing the clear outline of a circle. The ceiling was higher here, and all told it must have been about... ten feet in diameter. Its size was not the most disconcerting thing though. Inside the circle, the stone was... wrong somehow. Solid, but oddly wavy, like chocolate that's melted and then rehardened. It took me a minute or two to work up the courage to wade through that shallow sea of filth, but I did, and when I touched the warped wall, it felt soft and porous. But stable. I turned and left, but not before noting that another path also appeared to have been pushed through the worms on the floor, though when it had happened or who had made it I couldn't say.

It took me almost another hour to find the trapdoor again. My torch showed no signs of giving up, but I was still on the verge of panic. My hands were so slick with sweat that I fumbled several times with the handle before finally pushing it open bodily, and falling through onto the floor of the Archives. It was about three in the morning by that time. I had managed to reopen a few of my partially healed wounds, so I headed home to rest.

It turned out the trip had taken far more out of me than I thought; it was almost a week before I felt like I might be up for another excursion. This time, however, I decided that I was not going to take any chances: I packed three torches, with enough replacement batteries to last for days, food and water in

case I was down there longer than expected, a box of white chalk to clearly mark my way, and the largest knife I was able to buy at short notice. The first time down there I had, on more than one occasion, been almost certain that I could hear sounds of movement from further into the tunnels. At the time I had convinced myself it was simply a combination of echo and my mind playing on my fears, but on the chance there was something down there... Well, I had my doubts how effective a knife would be, but it certainly eased my mind. Beyond that, I made sure to take one of the smaller CO2 fire extinguishers from the Archives. I was determined that any surviving worms would not be so for long.

Again, I waited until nightfall before letting myself into the Archives, and heading down into the tunnels below. Almost as soon as I got down there I started marking the walls and intersections with white, chalk arrows. They pointed the direction I had come from, the direction I'd need to follow when I wanted to leave. If there was anything down here and I had to flee, then I reasoned all I would need to do was follow the chalk arrows back to the entrance.

For a while this worked. Once or twice I discovered I had inadvertently made a loop or gotten turned around and was facing one of my earlier arrows, but it was a relatively simple matter to correct it. I also set up my watch so I had a clear idea of how long I had been down there. After a half hour I had gotten far deeper than I had in my entire first expedition, and gotten past the empty area, into the tunnels still lined with dead worms, and then beyond them, to those tunnels wholly empty and, apparently, undisturbed since the days of Millbank Prison.

I had done what research I could on Millbank. First proposed and designed in 1799 by Jeremy Bentham, a philosopher who wished to test his theories of the panopticon prison, where cells would be arranged in a circle around a single, central, guard tower, so all cells were observable at once. It was to have six such areas, arranged in hexagons, giving it from the air the shape of a vast, angular flower.

It's not clear why that original plan was abandoned, but from 1812 onwards, a succession of other architects were brought in to try and finish the project.

Finally, three years later, they brought in Robert Smirke. He saw the project to completion in 1821, with a design remarkably similar to Bentham's original.

However, whereas Bentham's would have been geometric, and easy to navigate, Millbank Penitentiary as it was built was more often described as an eccentric maze: twisting corridors, doors at strange angles, and narrow passages so poorly lit inmates would need to feel their way along. Throughout much of the 19th century it was where prisoners were kept before transportation to Australia, and the brutality of the jailors was said to be second to none. Its position on what was then marshlands hardly helped, with sickness and disease rife within their walls.

It was a huge complex, covering much of what we now call Chelsea, but when it was finally closed in 1890, it was demolished. Flattened. Which meant that what I was in now couldn't be the old prison itself. It had to be something built below it. And it was this that gave me such pause when I found the first set of steps leading even further down.

They were stone, spiralling into the darkness at an angle so steep it made my legs weaken slightly.

The steps led higher as well, but after a few metres disappeared into the solid stone of the ceiling. I made a note of their location and carried on, keen to explore as much of the first level as possible before going any deeper. It was becoming very apparent that these tunnels must have covered the entire area of Millbank, or even further, and there was every possibility they continued for miles. I had seen little down there of note thus far, something I will admit gave me a pang of both disappointment and relief, and took a short break to drink some water and compose myself.

It was shortly after this I found the next staircase. It was identical to the first in material, in construction and look. It was the same in all but one detail: the large chalk arrow pointing downwards. I'm sure I don't need to say that I had not drawn it. My own arrows were jagged, workmanlike things. This was curled and neat, pointing the way with a flourish.

That was when I heard the noises again. They could have been footsteps, I suppose, but if so they were soft, quiet. Was someone running around those tunnels barefoot? I froze in place and listened, but the noises did not return, and I gripped my knife. I am not a brave man. I believe I am starting to come to terms with that fact, but I am, in certain circumstances, a very stubborn one. And there was something inside me that made the decision that I would rather die at the hands of some tunnel-dwelling beast than work above without knowing what it was. Maybe I'd be lucky, and find a crazed gun-wielding madman, a convenient killer for Gertrude.

I can almost hear my assistants chiding me for not turning tail and running then and there, but it's hard to fully explain the borderline mania that gripped me when I saw that arrow. Mocking and inviting all at once. I was not so foolish as to run down the stairs, but I descended them quicker than was safe. Down

and down and down they went, each rotation revealing more tunnels and doors, but I saw no sign of reaching the bottom. I had gone down about four levels when my torch caught what I thought was movement in the corridors beyond.

I left the stairs in pursuit, but was unable to find any sign of life. Or death, I suppose. Only an empty wine bottle, the label all but rotted away, but the year was still legible as 2003. The passages here were more pronounced in their difference than the ones further up, some being so irregular and seamless as to almost seem organic, while others were almost unnervingly square and regular, with sharp angles and precisely laid bricks.

It was in one of these that it happened. I had continued to mark my route with chalk, and was scratching an arrow into a particularly flat wall, when I looked up to see the turning ahead of me was no longer there. Instead, there was simply a dead end. I could find no sign that there had been any movement, nor had I heard anything. I turned back, and immediately noticed that the wall opposite me was closer than it had been before. I took a step back in shock, and my feet hit the wall behind me. The passage was getting narrower, though I could not see any movement. I stood completely still and for several seconds there was silence. Then, from somewhere in the darkness, I heard a single word, clear as day: “Leave.”

It was spoken simply, without intonation or threat. Just a command.

So I did. I began to shuffle back as quickly as possible the way I had come, keeping my eyes open as long as I could, as every time I closed them the wall seemed to get even closer. By the time I reached the stairs back up, it had almost pinned me. I fled back up the stairs, followed the arrows I had left back to the trapdoor. It took me barely ten minutes, but I was moving faster than I

would have thought possible in those... cramped tunnels. I locked the trapdoor behind me, and placed the heaviest objects I could find on it.

I have not been below the Institute since then. It took no small amount of consideration to decide I should officially make a statement. I did not think to bring the tape recorder with me. I suppose I've gotten out of the habit during my recuperation. I am no closer to determining what is lurking down there than I was when I started. If anything I have more questions. Why point me downwards, only to then demand I run back? Was it some sort of trap? A test? I don't know, but right now, finding whatever secrets might be lurking in those tunnels is my primary concern.

End recording.

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JONATHAN SIMS

Supplemental.

I don't care about the tunnels, or the secrets they might hide. That's not strictly true, I suppose. I do have a burning curiosity as to what is down there, but my primary focus must be on who killed Gertrude Robinson, and I do not believe for a moment that it was a wall-moving spectre from the depths of the earth. No, far more likely it's one of my colleagues. Elias is a prime suspect, but it could have been any of them.

I have told Martin the second tape recorder was lost in the attack. Having two means I can make two tapes from each recording. One containing the main statement and notes, which will be stored in the archive, and the other containing the statement, notes, and... this supplement, which will chronicle

my own investigations. These tapes will be hidden. If you're hearing this, I assume you're my replacement, following my death or disappearance, and have received instructions on where to find them.

I have little more to add to this initial account, as I have only recently returned to my position in full, and haven't had time to begin personal investigations.

My statement was, of course, completely true, though I have deliberately overstated my interest in the tunnels. If my colleagues believe that to be my main focus, they may let their guard down. This level of paranoia is new to me, but I'm learning fast. Trust can get you killed.

End supplement.

[The Magnus Archives Theme - Outro]

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