

MAG 185 — Locked In

Content Warnings

- Prison (including SFX)
- Dehumanisation
- Wrongful imprisonment & victimisation
- Police brutality
- Uncertain memory & distorted time
- Abuse of power
- Physical violence
- Bullying
- Isolation
- Pleading
- Explicit language

JONATHAN SIMS

Hi, it's Jonny. We wanted to say a few words up top of the next episode.

First up, it is definitely a heavy one, and it's worth reading through the content warnings and show notes before listening.

This episode deals with authoritarianism, imprisonment, and the police as a tool of political repression by the state in a general sense. It is rooted in my own experiences and those of people close to me.

To put it bluntly, there is a reason that police violence is a subject that finds its way into a lot of my work. This episode was written as a sincere exploration of my own fears about the rise of authoritarianism and violent repression around the world.

We also wanted to acknowledge that, on reflection, we believe this episode does blur the line between horror and trauma, depicting the awfulness of detainment and imprisonment without much fantastical distancing.

Season 5 was always intended to explore more realistic fears through the medium of the hellscapes, but as our world has gotten darker, real-world fears and feelings have occasionally bled too directly into the writing of this series, and I believe that means I have broken my own rule of avoiding using trauma as a direct source of horror. I apologise for this.

We will be more careful in future with similar topics. From here on out, while characters will still fear and suffer and die as part of their stories, they should do so without the show dwelling quite so directly on real-world traumas.

Thanks for listening.

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

Rusty Quill presents... *The Magnus Archives*. Episode one hundred and eighty-five: "Locked In."

[Theme finishes]

[Tape clicks on]

[Hissing static]

**[A distant prison door alarm sounds, metal doors slam; there
continuous background sounds of unhappy imprisoned people,
many shouting in anger; sporadically metal doors and bangs echo
down the corridors]**

ARCHIVIST

They have never told her what crime she has been arrested for. She isn't even sure she was ever arrested.

[Hissing static ends]

[A metal bench creaks occasionally]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

They had walked up to Tina in the street, as she was loading her car with shopping, and placed a hand on her shoulder gently but with the certainty of gravity. Her fingertips still remembered the chill of the milk as she placed it in the boot of the old Toyota. She had smiled when she turned, reassured by the sight of the uniforms, and didn't even notice the sternness of their expression or the fact that the faces beneath the helmets were identical. All day she had been feeling on edge, smelling the faintest hint of something rotten on the wind. Had it been her imagination? No, others had sensed it too, she was sure of it. In the shops she had seen them, eyes darting nervously, fingers drumming incessantly on trolley handles, waiting for whatever was coming. And all day, that intense, unshakeable feeling that she was being watched.

So when she turned and saw them standing there, so official in their vests and helmets, what else was she to think? Ah, thank goodness, it flitted through her mind as Tina felt herself relax, whatever it is, someone is taking care of it.

Because that's what they were for, to take *care* of these problems, to shuffle people away for their own protection, and keep the world working as it should be. She smiled, even as the shadowed figure did not remove his hand from her shoulder.

“Hello, officer. How can I help?”

“I’m afraid you’re going to have to come with us,” they had said, as the sky above them began to change.

And then she was here. Tina didn’t remember the journey, not properly. There was an image of the back seat of a car, bruised face pressed against metal grating, wrists pinched so tight by metal she could feel every beat of her pulse. Or was it the back of a van, deep rumblings from the wheel well beneath her seat, vision obscured by a black bag that smelled of other people’s despair? Had she been forced to listen to a sanctimonious lecture on choices, on right and wrong and other luxuries? Or sharp-edged jokes at her expense in a language she didn’t quite understand, which turned to shouts and blows when she risked a movement. It didn’t matter, it wasn’t her memory. She was just here.

The room in which Tina found herself was barren: a metal bench encrusted with something black and flaky, and a bucket in the corner. That was it. It was obviously a mistake, some miscommunication somewhere, or a case of mistaken identity. These things were unfortunate, but sometimes they happened. One of the people in charge would no doubt realise and sort it all out. She smothered the kernel of dread that was lurking in her chest. She just needed to be patient.

[The bench creaks]

ARCHIVIST (CONT’D)

The bench was uncomfortable to sit on, and she began to shiver from the cold. Had she ever been this cold before? Outside, of course, in the deepest winter, bundled up and pushing through to a heated home. But sat inside, with

nowhere to go, nothing to change or wrap up in, just a thin grey jumpsuit, unable to do anything but sit there and shiver. That was a sort of cold that was alien to her.

[Sounds of standing, then slow pacing]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

She stood, trying to push down her physical discomfort and worry with movement. The cell was small and cramped, and Tina kept hitting her shin on the bench. She paused, casting an eye over the rough concrete wall surrounding her, covered in deep grooves and... scratch marks. She turned away quickly, and saw the window above her. Had there been a window when she had first come here? When had that been? It had no glass, just thick iron bars, but if she stood on tiptoe and really strained, she could just about see out of it.

[She moves to the window; faint sounds of children playing, a bird, and passing cars]

When she saw the world beyond her walls, her heart sank. The world seemed bright and normal. The sun was high and shining, though none of it passed though the bars, and if she tried to reach through, the light seemed to shrink from her skin. Cars passed by on the road. Somewhere, a bird was singing. The world didn't miss her, didn't know or care about what was happening beyond these walls.

A child passed by, a girl with plaited blonde hair and a bright orange bicycle. Tina called quietly, suddenly afraid of who might be listening on the other side of her cell door. The child's eyes met hers, the first moment of human connection that she had really felt since she'd arrived... but hadn't she only just

got here?... and Tina felt herself begin to smile. Then the child's eyes narrowed in sudden hatred as the little girl bent down, picked up a rock and hurled it at the window. It passed cleanly through the bars and hit Tina square in the forehead.

[Impact sounds of a rock hitting head, followed by falling back with a crunchy landing]

[Outdoors sounds are mostly gone; the prison sounds dominate]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Her vision flashed white with pain as she fell back, slamming against the bench with a crunch.

Part of her wanted to lie there and weep, overcome with what was happening to her. But faster than that came the anger, the indignation. How dare they? She did not deserve this. She was better than this. This did not happen to people like her.

[Movement to the window, and the outdoors can be heard again]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

She clawed her way back up to the window and looked out, trying to see the spiteful little brat, but the girl was now behind her father, who shooed her away with a terror in his eyes, a terror aimed at Tina. And for the briefest of moments, she was certain that the man's fear was mocking her.

[Footsteps and the outdoor sounds fade; followed by a door unlocking]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Behind her she heard the sound of a key sliding into the filthy iron lock of her cell door. She tried to tell herself that sound was a good thing, that it meant someone was coming to check on her, to clear this all up, to tell her what was happening. But this was not the place for such lies.

[The door creaks open, chains jangle, the dull roar of the prison population is louder]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

The door opened and there they stood, identical in their uniforms, their skin fish-belly white and their eyes gleaming with malice.

[Heavy footsteps, chains; the door closes and sounds are fainter once again]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

And then she was back in her cell. She didn't remember the interview, not properly. Or had it been a trial?

[Footsteps, then sounds of sitting on the metal bench]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

There had been a man, she was certain of it, and he had smiled as he sat across from her. And there had been a file, a thick manila envelope stained with grease and coffee, which held the pages of her life typed out in a small, no-nonsense font. She remembered that she had read those pages with increasing alarm. It had all been there, all of it. Her life, her loves, her choices, her mistakes. No details spared, no nasty inference ignored. There was no benefit

of the doubt here, no understanding or kindness, only the disinterested ink of words that would see her prosecuted.

“None of these things are illegal,” she had said.

The man had laughed at that. It had been a dry and hacking sound that cracked the mirrored glass of the interview room, and made the juror’s ears bleed. He stroked his badge... or had it been that gnarled and bloodstained gavel?

“The laws have changed.”

And now she is back in her cell. Or a cell that looks like hers. It is smaller, perhaps, the metal bench is cleaner, but rusted through on the hinges, so when she lies on it, it squeals and threatens to collapse. They never told her any charges, never gave her any verdict. She is certain she will see that man, the judge or the detective or the warden, she will see him again. Perhaps she will be moved, or written up, or reprimanded. The cold is settling in, the hunger is biting her as she tries to sleep. There has been a mistake. She should not be here, but she had met the person in charge, she had pleaded her case, told him of what had happened. And he had laughed at her.

[Metallic slide, followed by wet slopping and slapping sounds, and some metal bangs]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

A tray slides under the door, spilling thin, watery stew over the floor, tipping out chunks of something that glistens and writhes. Tina ignores it as she grabs the hatch and tries to keep it open, tries to tell the guard, to explain what’s happened, that something’s gone wrong, that she shouldn’t be here. This isn’t right! Why can’t anybody see this? This isn’t the place for people like her.

[Metallic slamming, followed by cloth movement]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

The hatch slams shut on her fingers and she pulls her hand back, pain robbing her voice of protest for a moment. Outside the window, night has fallen and the temperature starts dropping even further. Perhaps if she behaved they would give her a blanket? Perhaps she could see other people, share her story of injustice? Tina tells herself so many lies, as she shivers in the dark. The moonlight falls on those old and faded scratch marks on the concrete wall, and as she places her hand on the shallow grooves, they match her fingers perfectly.

[Sounds of scratching stone]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

She refuses to count the tally marks that cover every inch.

[Hissing static starts]

[In the background, a subdued version of the prison]

[Metal door creaks open into a small, echoey room]

[Hissing static ends]

MARTIN

All done?

ARCHIVIST

Yes.

MARTIN

I still think doing it in one of the actual cells was a bit much.

ARCHIVIST

It was the most soundproof place I could find.

MARTIN

Pffft. Soundproof? Yeah, dream on.

ARCHIVIST

You... heard? I-I'm sorry. I know it was—

MARTIN

I-I actually didn't, but only 'cause I was too busy hearing what was going on in all the other cells.

ARCHIVIST

Ah. Well, they seem to have quieted for a while at least.

MARTIN

Yeah, one of those... things, passed by just now, and everyone shut right up.

ARCHIVIST

Mm. The jailors have that effect.

Shall we go?

MARTIN

What if another one comes along?

ARCHIVIST

It's fine. We're, uh, we're 'guests of the Warden'.

MARTIN

Eurgh.

ARCHIVIST

Mm-hmm. Come on.

**[The metal door creaks as they walk out, continuing down a
corridor]**

(Beat)

MARTIN

Does it not bother you?

ARCHIVIST

What? Being a 'guest'?

MARTIN

Yeah. I-It's-It's not like it resisted. Hell, it was chummy.

ARCHIVIST

Would you rather it had attacked?

MARTIN

No it's just... Is that how these creatures see us now? As one of them?

ARCHIVIST

(Amused) Hm! I forgot that's a new experience for you.

MARTIN

Excuse me?

ARCHIVIST

You have to remember I've had this for years. Right from the start, it's always been 'Archivist' this and 'Archivist' that. All these weird, awful creatures assuming I'm 'in' on all the secrets. Even when they were trying to kill me, they treated me like I was a... a peer.

MARTIN

Yeah, but they were still trying to kill you.

ARCHIVIST

Not all of them. And now? Sure the power's shifted, it's all politeness and respect, but it still feels just like more of the same. I guess I just stopped caring at some point. Besides they are technically right, I *am* one of them. To a degree.

MARTIN

I suppose.

ARCHIVIST

I think the real question is how are *you* finding it?

MARTIN

It's not the same. I'm still just your 'plus one'.

ARCHIVIST

(Amusedly) Don't put yourself down. It's not your fault you're a bit overshadowed. I am such a very big deal after all.

MARTIN

Oh, very big arse, more like it.

(The Archivist chuckles)

ARCHIVIST

Either way, even if I wasn't here, I don't think you'd be in any danger. Not anymore. I wasn't sure when we first started out, I hadn't properly, er... looked into it, as it were. But now I'm certain.

(Beat)

MARTIN

I'm one of them.

ARCHIVIST

One of... us.

MARTIN

(Sighs) That's not as comforting as you think it is.

ARCHIVIST

Doesn't mean it's not true though.

[A nearby prisoner cries]

MARTIN

And this is all because I've been given a domain? Because apparently I somehow have people's fear feeding me?

ARCHIVIST

Well, feeding The Eye *through* you, but yes.

MARTIN

Even though I didn't ask for it? Did nothing to *deserve* it?

ARCHIVIST

'Deserve'. Huh. Now there's a word that always causes trouble.

MARTIN

Don't be patronising.

ARCHIVIST

I just mean that nobody here *deserves* the position they've found themselves in, not really. I suppose a few may have asked for it, sought it out even, but far more didn't. They just made the wrong choices for the right reasons. Or even the right choices. But ones that still led them here in the end.

MARTIN

...I hate it.

ARCHIVIST

On balance that's probably a good thing.

[A couple of quick footsteps and sudden rattling against metal bars]

INSPECTOR

Hey! Hey, you! Yeah, I know you!

[The Archivist and Martin stop walking]

MARTIN

Uh...

INSPECTOR

It's.. f-f-from the, uh, Magnus Institute! Um... ah... Mark!

ARCHIVIST

You know him?

MARTIN

Martin.

INSPECTOR

Martin, right, yeah! You remember? You tipped us off, and we came and nicked your boss, the, the Bouchard bloke.

MARTIN

Oh! Oh right! The, um... oh, Inspector... I-I'm so sorry, I've forgotten your name.

INSPECTOR

Eh-So have I. Eh-I'm just 547 in here.

MARTIN

God, I'm so sorry.

INSPECTOR

You've gotta help me!

MARTIN

Oh. I— er... I don't, ah—

INSPECTOR

I heard you! You said you were chummy with the Warden. And I need to get out, I-I can't— This place— You've got to help me!

ARCHIVIST

Martin? What do you think?

MARTIN

What?

ARCHIVIST

I decided about Jordan. This place is from your past.

MARTIN

Yeah, but I mean only briefly.

ARCHIVIST

Still.

INSPECTOR

Please! Martin! Come on mate, just returning a favour, yeah?

(Martin exhales)

W-Wh-What's wrong? You-You've got to hurry! Th-There's not much time.

[Martin turns fully to the Inspector]

(Beat)

MARTIN

Why are you here?

INSPECTOR

What?

MARTIN

What are you so afraid of, that you ended up in here?

INSPECTOR

I didn't do anything!

MARTIN

John?

[Hissing static starts]

ARCHIVIST

Why are you here?

INSPECTOR

(Resisting) I don't... Argh! Stop! Stop!

ARCHIVIST

I will stop when you answer the question.

INSPECTOR

Argh! Look, you can't know if they're all guilty, alright?

(Martin sighs)

It's just about evidence...

[Hissing static ends]

MARTIN

(Flatly) Right.

INSPECTOR

Sometimes you have to... to...

MARTIN

What, guess?

INSPECTOR

I'm sorry! Alright?

MARTIN

No. You're just afraid.

INSPECTOR

Please, I'm— It's almost lights out. I can't be here for lights out. Not again.

Please? You owe me!

ARCHIVIST

This place is born of their nightmares. And of yours.

MARTIN

If you made him a watcher, he'd become part of this place?

ARCHIVIST

He would.

MARTIN

And if he was... Would he enjoy it?

INSPECTOR

What are you talking about? No! Of course not!

ARCHIVIST

You know I can't see the future.

MARTIN

But?

ARCHIVIST

But I can see his past.

MARTIN

And based on *that*?

ARCHIVIST

He probably would. Yes.

INSPECTOR

Hey-hey, fuck you, you scrawny little tit! What the hell do you know?

(Beat)

MARTIN

Leave him.

INSPECTOR

What? No, no, please! I didn't mean it!

ARCHIVIST

Okay.

[Martin and the Archivist start walking]

INSPECTOR

(Fading) I need your help! Please! Please! D-Don't go away! Come back – look, we can talk— we can— Please! Mark! Martin! Martin obviously! Martin please, come back! Come back please! I need your help! I can't stay here, don't leave me hear, Martin! Martin! Please...

[Walking continues]

(Beat)

(Martin exhales)

MARTIN

That was horrible.

ARCHIVIST

I'm sorry I put you in that position.

MARTIN

No, you were right to. That's... that's a lot of power to have to deal with. Lot of responsibility.

ARCHIVIST

Yes. Thank you, Uncle Ben.

MARTIN

(Chuckle) Pop culture? Really?

ARCHIVIST

I'm allowed to know what Spiderman is.

(A short sigh from Martin)

MARTIN

Not helping people is still a decision, isn't it?

ARCHIVIST

Well, you saw Jordan, I'm not sure 'helping' is really—

MARTIN

I know, I know, not the right word. Ignoring them then.

ARCHIVIST

Yes.

It's a choice I've been making a lot recently.

MARTIN

I guess we should get used to it. Knowing that all these awful things are happening for *our* benefit.

ARCHIVIST

Maybe it's better if it never gets comfortable.

MARTIN

Maybe.

[They walk in silence for a while]

[Strange static sound starts]

[There is less echo from the prison walls as Martin speaks]

MARTIN

Hey, do you feel that?

ARCHIVIST

(Fading) Martin? Martin, listen you need to get ready, we're about to enter y—

[Harsh crescendo of crackling static]

MARTIN

Yeah, my domain. Yes, right, I get it. Dream logic. And timing, huh, apparently.

[Prison sounds have been replaced by pattering of rain and distant storm sounds]

MARTIN (CONT'D)

John? John?

Oh...

Shit.

[Tape clicks off]

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Outro]

JONATHAN SIMS

The Magnus Archives is a podcast distributed by Rusty Quill and licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial ShareAlike 4.0 International licence. Today's episode was written by Jonathan Sims, produced by Lowri Ann Davies, and directed by Alexander J Newall. It featured: Jonathan Sims as The Archivist, Alexander J Newall as Martin Blackwood, and Richard Davies as The Inspector. To subscribe, buy merchandise, or join our Patreon, visit

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