

MAG – 141 – Doomed Voyage

Content Warnings:

- Coercion

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

Rusty Quill presents: The Magnus Archives. Episode one hundred and forty-one. Doomed Voyage.

[Tape clicks on. There's echoes of a ship's hold. Ocean sounds are audible throughout.]

ARCHIVIST

Any better?

BASIRA

(Nauseously) Not really.

ARCHIVIST

You were the one that suggested we go by boat.

BASIRA

Didn't think I, urgh... (sniffs) I haven't really done proper boats before.

ARCHIVIST

Hmm. Hold on.

[Footsteps ring on metal]

Excuse me?

SHIPHAND

Yeah?

ARCHIVIST

Do you know when we're scheduled to arrive?

SHIPHAND

Captain reckons two days.

ARCHIVIST

Thank you.

[Footsteps ring on metal]

ARCHIVIST

He says another two days.

BASIRA

Yeah, I heard. Thanks.

What?

ARCHIVIST

The tape recorder.

[Sudden inhalation from Basira]

BASIRA

Get ready. Any idea what's coming?

ARCHIVIST

N-No... No, I-I don't think that's it.

BASIRA

It's not recording for nothing.

ARCHIVIST

No, I... I think...

(Calling out) Excuse me?

SHIPHAND

Yeah?

[Footsteps approach]

ARCHIVIST

(Interestedly) You...

SHIPHAND

Uh...

BASIRA

John?

ARCHIVIST

You used to work for Salesa.

SHIPHAND

What? You— -Who did?

I don't know what you're talking about.

ARCHIVIST

Mikaele Salesa. You used to work on his ship.

SHIPHAND

I don't know you.

ARCHIVIST

(Archly) But I know you.

BASIRA

John...

ARCHIVIST

Floyd Matharu. Served on the Dorian from 2011 to 2014. With Salesa.

BASIRA

John, I'm not sure about this.

ARCHIVIST

I am.

Tell me what happened.

FLOYD

Wh-What is this?

ARCHIVIST

Whenever you're ready.

FLOYD (STATEMENT)

A-Alright. Sure.

He... H-He w-was a good boss, you know? I worked for him for three years, and... treated us well. He never lied to us about the sort of thing he was into. He didn't exactly volunteer specifics, but we all knew what we were doing wasn't legal, and we trusted him because he knew what he was doing.

It was a weird ship to be on, though, and not just because everyone was always gossiping about whatever the latest haunted cargo was. A lot of it was because we had a-a captain, a man named Gaultier, but he reported to Salesa. Normally, if the captain's working for someone they're going to be on the ship all the time; they'll just be organising things, so there's no worries about who's in charge, you just obey the captain. But Salesa always travelled with us, keeping an eye on whatever he was moving that day. It felt like... it felt like he was a part of the crew, even though he didn't actually have a job to do. Always felt a bit uncomfortable when the captain was giving orders and he was there. I could sometimes feel Captain Gaultier looking to him for support or confirmation, and that always slightly undermined our confidence in him. It wasn't a problem, not really, and Salesa never threw his weight around, never contradicted the captain in front of

us or anything. It was a weird dynamic.

Way the others talked about it, he'd been at this for a long time, decades at least, and when I sailed with him it was clear he knew exactly what he was doing. He was the only one ever allowed in the cargo bay during a voyage.

I only saw one person try to break that rule, Jésus, a nasty piece of work we picked up in Colombia, and who clearly thought he smelled an opening. Salesa was a big guy, you know, but he never really made anything of it. He always used to say he needed a crew to follow him out of trust, not fear. But he didn't have a problem using his size against Jésus when he found him. He threw the little rat overboard without a second's hesitation, and there was nobody on that ship unhappy he did it. They'd all seen what could happen when someone else got in the cargo bay.

My last voyage with him was the one that killed him. Seven years ago; I still have nightmares sometimes. Tried to escape it, but some things follow you no matter where you go. A smarter person might have stayed off the water, but this job, it's all I've ever really known. So here we are.

It was an odd time, I remember. I don't know exactly what was different but the whole mood of the ship was off. Kind of sour, somehow. I think it must have been Salesa. Everything always kind of... reflected him. You know people like that? When he was happy, satisfied, everything seemed to run smooth. When he was angry, everyone would be on edge, irritable. But right then?

He was tired. Everyone could tell. The man had been doing this job non-stop as long as any of us could remember, and he was clearly starting to feel it. Once found him pouring over an old photo album. The ship was there in the pictures, but a different captain, different crew. I asked him who they were,

and he just looked at me, eyes sunken like hadn't slept, and for a second I felt like he was seeing someone else, not me. But then he just shrugged.

"Dead now," he said, "doesn't really matter."

That was about a month before Gantulga died. It should have been a nice simple job. I helped load the box under Salesa's supervision, and it was barely a few metres across. Dantez told me it was a carpet that he'd bought from an old Burmese beggar woman who fed lost children to a crocodile head, but I never paid any attention. He liked to make up wild stories about whatever it was that Salesa had bought. It light enough, though, so I thought he might have been right about it being a rug. I don't know what went wrong. He was always so careful. I didn't even usually think about the cargo during the trip itself, but this time I didn't have much choice.

Gantulga and I were both off-duty that night. Played some cards, I lost some money, and we both headed to our bunks. Nothing unusual, nothing worth being burned into my mind. Except that three hours later, I was woken up by the sound of Gantulga screaming his lungs out. I ran over to him, trying to see what was going on. And he was being attacked, that much was clear, but there wasn't anyone there. The thing that was grabbing him, trying to reach down his throat and pull him apart... it was a pattern. Diamonds and swirls and colours that seemed to imprint itself upon his skin even as it pushed itself messily into his nose and mouth. What it was made of, I couldn't say; the way it moved and shifted made my head throb with pain. I screamed, staggered back and fell, hitting my head on the table. I can't have been out for more than a few seconds, but when I opened my eyes he was there, dragging the thrashing body of Gantulga through the door and up onto the deck. I followed

slowly, unsteadily, but got there just in time to see Salesa throw both him and what looked like a blank rug over the side and into the ocean.

Then he collapsed against the railing, a look of intense exhaustion passing over his face, and I left him there.

He was drunk for the next two days, and we kept sailing on towards Cape Town. We no longer had anything to deliver there, but no-one was really sure what else to do. Whenever there'd been similar disasters before, Salesa was quick to make a new plan, let know Captain Gaultier know what the next steps were. It was one of the reasons the crew trusted him so much. He just always seemed to know what we needed to do next.

This time, though... felt different. He was distant, quiet. His words, when he spoke to you at all, were blurred with alcohol and regret. Nobody knew what the plan was, so we just kept going.

When we hit port, he disappeared for a while, nobody was sure where, and even when he showed back up he was spending his time on the phone. We all assumed he was trying to arrange the next job, but he had this... wild energy I'd never seen in him before, and it scared me.

Whatever he was planning, it wasn't going to be like the others. We were sure about that.

Finally, he calls us all together. The captain's there, but he doesn't look happy. Salesa starts talking, says he's been doing this too long, he's getting slow. Says he's retiring. So far, so sad, but not unexpected at that point. Then he says he wants to send us off with a proper payday, that there's one last job he wants us to do. Very dangerous, very illegal. There are murmurs, questions, some

angry, some confused. Salesa says anyone who doesn't want to be a part of it, they can stay in port with a decent severance and find another job. A few take him up on that, and the rest of us decide to stay, though the captain's clearly not happy this is costing him experienced crew. Still, he doesn't speak up. I can see in his eyes the greed's got him, like it's got the rest of us. It's not like we were underpaid on the Dorian, but there were rumours about how much money Salesa was making out of all this. When someone like that says there's going to be a big payout, you listen.

He was really cagey on the details, clearly being careful about exactly who he was telling exactly what. All I knew about what we going on were as follows: we were on our way to the Maldives, to a tiny island about a hundred kilometers south of Malé. No-one would tell me the name of the island, but in that area of the world any islands that small are usually private, though I had no idea who the owner might have been. Once there, Salesa and the four crewmembers he trusted most were going to take the small boat over to the island. We were to wait, and prepare to depart as quickly as possible as soon as they returned. He didn't say exactly what he was expecting to happen on the island, but it wasn't hard to guess that whatever he was retrieving, it wasn't something he was purchasing legally. He made it clear we shouldn't stop if we were followed or challenged by the authorities, and we should all be prepared to defend the ship should anyone attempt to board or stop us.

The three hours I stood on the deck after they left on the little boat may well have been the longest of my life. It was night, of course, and we had no lights showing, nothing that would give us away. The island was completely dark as well, and if it hadn't been for the bright moon shining down on the dense trees and sandy beach, I might not have been able to see it at all. The

sound of the boat's engine died quickly, and I was left standing there, surrounded by silence, waiting for something to happen, full of fear over what it was I had agreed to be part of. I longed to have a drink, to close my eyes, and rest for only a second, but every nerve in my body was on alert.

When they returned, only two of the four crewmembers Salesa had taken were still with him.

Questions as to what happened were met with dark looks and shaken heads. I felt the rumble of the ship beneath me almost immediately, and only got the briefest of glances at exactly what it was we were all risking our lives for.

I've gone over that memory so many times, trying to think what I might have missed, but even now, whenever I think of it, it just looked like an old camera with a broken lens. And then Salesa closed and locked the metal box, and carried it down into the hold as we started to sail away.

As he did so, I saw a flash out of the corner of my eye. I was on watch, so I hurried to the stern to see what was happening. There was a storm over the island. I don't know where it came from, it can't have been more than a minute since I'd last looked at it, an-and the skies were completely clear. But now it was covered in lightning, the rolling clouds above it dark and angry. The forked flashes came quickly, less than a second between them, and as the thunder started to hit my ears, I could see the trees of the island beginning to catch fire and burn. But there was something else.

In the light of the flashing storm I could clearly see the waters around the island, and there was something there. A huge shape, a shadow surrounding it on all sides; getting darker, getting closer, coming up from deep, deep below the surface. It must have been huge, so large that the edge of it almost

touched the ship, and had we been a few minutes slower I have no doubt whatever awful thing emerged that night, it would have taken us as well. Something began to break the surface as I realised the deep rumble was no longer the thunder, and I closed my eyes and fell to the deck, gripping the rail with all my might as a wave hit us from behind, propelling us away from it.

When it had finally subsided, and I could bring myself to look back, the island was gone and ocean was still.

Our journey back was a long one, but Salesa was in a far better mood than I had ever seen him.

His step was light, his smile was easy, and the deep circles under his eyes seemed to be gone. He didn't talk about what had happened on the island, nor of Christoph or Adreas, the two who had not returned. When we finally arrived at Southampton, he insisted on throwing a ridiculous party to celebrate our good fortune. The drinks flowed freely, and he walked around and shook each of us by the hand, telling us how much he would miss us in retirement and hiding his insincerity well. I do not believe there was a sober person on the Dorian when the night was over, and we slept easily. Well, the others slept easily, but they had not seen what I had seen.

I didn't hear the explosion myself. Dantez told me about it, as it had apparently woken him and a few others of the crew. A big explosion, they said, further into the port. We staggered onto the deck and, sure enough, smoke could be seen a little way off, its source hidden behind a wall of shipping containers. There was no reason at that point to suspect it had anything to do with us, but I think somehow we all knew what it meant. That something had gone terribly wrong.

Nobody could find Salesa or the captain.

We were still stood there, arguing amongst ourselves about what to do, when Captain Gaultier made his dramatic reappearance. His clothes were torn and his hair matted with blood. Before any of us could speak he commanded us to leave, to take up anchor and get out there. We did as we were ordered, and left immediately. Some tried to ask the captain about Salesa, but he just shook his head. He wasn't making much sense. We managed to gather the two of them had left early to deliver the artefact, but something had gone wrong. There had been an argument. They had been betrayed. Salesa was dead.

The captain died soon after; the shrapnel trapped in his skull finally getting the better of him.

Who they had been meeting, how exactly they had been betrayed, were secrets he took with him to the grave. The crew fragmented after that. I think a few of them managed to retain ownership of the Dorian, but they weren't people I was close to. So I jumped ship the next chance I got.

And I have tried ever since then to leave those memories behind me.

ARCHIVIST

Thank you.

FLOYD

(Dazed) What... what...?

ARCHIVIST

(Soothingly) You can go.

FLOYD

Erm... I, I don't...

ARCHIVIST

Thank you Floyd. You've been... very helpful.

FLOYD

C—

ARCHIVIST

It's alright, Floyd. You just... need a break.

FLOYD

Yeah... Sure.

[Ringing footsteps depart]

BASIRA

What the hell was that?

ARCHIVIST

He had information about Salesa. I thought it would help.

BASIRA

Is that why you were so keen on this ship?

ARCHIVIST

I wasn't sure. Just had a hunch there was something here.

BASIRA

And what, you thought the best way to find it was by... slurping it out of his brain?

ARCHIVIST

He didn't exactly seem inclined to volunteer the information. Besides, you said I needed to be ready for Ny-Alesund. "Full power" I believe were your words. The statement helped.

BASIRA

And now he's going to see you in his dreams as he relives that for the rest of his life. Because... because a tape recorder told you to do it?

ARCHIVIST

Yes, Basira, he is. And I am sorry about that. But we needed it.

Anyway you're the one who wants to be like Gertrude. You think she'd give a damn about a few bad dreams?

BASIRA

No.

ARCHIVIST

No. She got the job done, and didn't care about the cost.

BASIRA

But I thought you did.

ARCHIVIST

...

I had to know, Basira.

BASIRA

It wasn't right.

ARCHIVIST

You could have stopped me.

...

But you wanted to know as well, didn't you?.

...

Get some rest. Two days yet.

[Tape clicks off.]

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Today's episode was written by Jonathan Sims and directed by Alexander J Newall.

It featured: Jonathan Sims as the Archivist, Frank Voss as Basira Hussain and Duarte Bandeira as Floyd Matharu.