

MAG – 052 – Exceptional Risk

Content Warnings

- Abuse of power
- Prisons
- Graphic violence & injury
- **Discussions of:** Serial killings, police brutality
- **Mentions of:** Knives, attempted suicides, stereotyping, claustrophobia, paranormal encounter, character death
- **SFX:** Low drone, high pitched tone

[The Magnus Archives Theme - Intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

Rusty Quill Presents The Magnus Archives Episode Fifty Two Exceptional Risk

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro - Continues]

JONATHAN SIMS

[Pre Statement]

Statement begins.

JONATHAN SIMS

(Read aloud from the archived witness statement of Phillip Brown)

Statement of Phillip Brown, regarding his time working at HMP Wakefield between 1990 and 2002. Original statement given April 9th, 2004. Audio recording by Jonathan Sims, Head Archivist of the Magnus Institute, London.

Statement begins.

JONATHAN SIMS

How much do you know about the prison service? Not much, I'd bet. Maybe you've seen a few prison movies, think you know a bit about how it is in there. You've got to keep face and watch your back, right? After all, you never know who's got a shiv with your name on it. Well, for a start, you're probably thinking of American movies about American prisons and I can't speak to that. Maybe it is non-stop gang warfare over there, but in my experience the biggest danger in a prison is, and always will be, boredom. I say that like it's some glib observation, but we work hard to keep it as boring as possible. The first hint of violence among the inmates gets smacked down.

I worked as a prison officer in Her Majesty's Prison Wakefield, or 'The Monster Mansion' as the press insists on calling it. It houses the real scum of this country, class A dangers the lot of them, and it was always a point of pride to me that we kept that place quiet. I mean, I say it like I had any real power, but I was just a grunt, keeping an eye on a cage full of wild animals. I won't even pretend I was proportional in my use of force. I mean, prison inspectorate have been over that with me already, but the sort of things you have to have done to end up in Wakefield... Well, let's just say the suicide attempts far outnumbered the murder attempts and I never lost any sleep over that fact. Nor did any of the inmates. I made sure of that.

After lock-up at 7pm sharp, I made a point of keeping my wing dark and quiet. It helped that they were single cells, of course. No worries about conversation or violence between cellmates, but even then I was careful to make it very clear that drawing my attention after lights-out was something they would regret. I'll admit, I was a real bastard when I worked there. Sometimes you need a bastard to keep an eye on the monsters. And back then I really thought

that the murderous filth we were looking after were the closest thing this world had to real monsters. I was wrong, of course.

I'd been working there for almost five years when Robert Montauk came to us. Now don't get me wrong, we've had plenty 'celebrity' criminals pass through Wakefield over the years, but I can't say it didn't give me a slight chill to know that we were going to be keeping watch over the most prolific British serial killer of all time. I mean, he killed 40 people. That's a ridiculous number. I mean, maybe in America, where you have so many places to hide. But his nearest competition in this country barely reached half that. And he used to be a policeman. All told, you had the ingredients for a cocktail of posturing, unrest and violence among certain quarters of the inmates. He wouldn't normally have gone to Wakefield, as his crimes had no sexual element to them, but we were the only ones that had space for a prisoner needing that level of security and scrutiny.

He was a big guy. I wasn't expecting that, to be honest. Usually with that kind of prisoner, they've got a 'you'd never know to look at them' sort of feeling, but Montauk looked like a killer. He must have been almost six foot six and built like a barge. His dark hair was cropped close to his scalp, showing off a flat, angular face. Not to put too fine a point on it, but the man was terrifying. When he entered the rec room for the first time, I could almost hear the deflating egos, as a dozen would-be hoodlums thought better of trying to make a reputation by standing up to Robert Montauk. Of course, there's always one, and in this case it was Ivan Ilic, an aspiring Serbian gangster, who decided to go after him, jumping him from the side. Me and the other warders had been waiting for something like this, but we were too slow to get there in

time. Well, maybe we could have gone faster, but 40 murders... sometimes you want to look at what you're up against.

Ilic was not a small man and nearly matched Montauk in height, if not in weight, but there was an energy to Montauk, a tightness, like a rubber band about to snap. Ilic leapt forward with a shout and delivered a solid punch right into the other man's kidneys, but it was as though he'd hit the pressure pad on a bear trap. With terrifying speed, the hands snapped round, gripping the Serbian's right arm. There was a half moment of complete silence as everyone seemed to be holding their breath to see what Robert Montauk did next. He brought his hands around with a violent twist, cleanly dislocating his assailant's arm with a nasty pop and replacing the silence with a scream and a sting of Slavic curse words.

At this point, me and the other screws broke it up. I got the unenviable task of taking the still cursing Ivan Ilic down to get his arm treated. I didn't see Montauk again for some time. After that little incident, he was immediately transferred over to F block, where he wasn't going to be a danger to anyone but himself. I'd occasionally hear rumours about him filtering through the other inmates and there wasn't a spooky story in Wakefield that didn't have him at the centre of it. Barely a week went by without some loudmouth nobody spreading word that he'd killed a guard, or escaped, or been found dead in his cell with his heart ripped out. It was never true, of course, not at that point. I think most of it came from Dave Harrington on F wing. He always loved to drop fake gossip on new inmates and the old hands knew not to trust a word he said.

It was in 1998 when–

[A DOOR CREAKS OPEN]

JONATHAN SIMS

Hello?

BASIRA

Hey, I just wanted–

JONATHAN SIMS

Oh, hold on.

[CLICK]

JONATHAN SIMS

Sorry, can't be too careful. Accidentally mentioned you on one of my earlier official recordings and had to go back over it.

BASIRA

Oh, sure. I've got another tape for you.

JONATHAN SIMS

Ah, fantastic. Here's the other one.

BASIRA

Was there anything on it?

JONATHAN SIMS

Oh, very much so. Um, a Russian circus that... oh, but, er, nothing relevant to Gertrude's murder, if that's what you mean.

BASIRA

It is what I mean.

JONATHAN SIMS

Right, sorry. Have you had a chance to listen to any of them yourself?

BASIRA

Well, the precinct has exactly one tape player and it exploded when I tried to put batteries in it.

JONATHAN SIMS

Oh.

BASIRA

I've put in a requisition for a new one, but that's lost somewhere in the Met and I haven't had a chance to chase it up. So, no.

JONATHAN SIMS

Well, if you keep bringing them to me—

BASIRA

It's better than nothing, yeah. Anyway, I thought you could try this one next.

JONATHAN SIMS

'Alexandria'?

BASIRA

Hey, at least this one actually has a label. I figured you're probably into old libraries and stuff so—

JONATHAN SIMS

No, you're right. Thank you, Basira. Honestly.

BASIRA

Yeah. Oh, what's the name of that helper of yours?

JONATHAN SIMS

Er, Martin.

BASIRA

No, no, the hot one. He has scars like you—

JONATHAN SIMS

Oh.

BASIRA

But kind of manages to pull them off?

JONATHAN SIMS

Yes, Tim.

BASIRA

Yeah, what's his deal? He gave me the weirdest grin when I came in just now.
And like, the thumbs up?

JONATHAN SIMS

I... I wouldn't worry about it.

BASIRA

No?

JONATHAN SIMS

[Sighs] He thinks... we're sort of... together?

BASIRA

Oh, oh, oh. No, you know I'm not–

JONATHAN SIMS

No, I... I know. Me neither, I... he just got it in his head.

BASIRA

I mean you're nice and all–

JONATHAN SIMS

Yes, yes, no, I feel the same way.

BASIRA

Right... I mean, I suppose it's better he thinks that?

JONATHAN SIMS

I won't tell if you won't.

BASIRA

Right. I'm gonna go then.

JONATHAN SIMS

Yes, yes.

[DOOR OPENS AND CLOSES]

Right.

(Clears throat)

[CLICK]

Statement resumes.

It was in 1998 that I next came into regular contact with Robert Montauk. The government had commissioned the construction of Close Supervision Centres

in prisons all over the country and Wakefield was one of the flagship initiatives. A good portion of F wing was given over to our own CSC, soon to be known as the Exceptional Risk Unit. It could only hold eight prisoners, but they were to be the worst of the worst, kept under constant scrutiny and given no chance to harm anyone. I was picked to be one of the officers transferred into the new unit. I don't know if it was specifically because I had more inmate altercations on my record than any other prison officer at Wakefield, but given the intensity of the set-up, I'm sure it didn't hurt my application.

Robert Montauk was an obvious choice for the Exceptional Risk Unit. During his time in Wakefield, he had been involved in several further violent incidents and, though he hadn't yet killed anyone inside the prison, the higher-ups reckoned it was only a matter of time. So, in he went. The CSC was not a nice place. Wakefield had had the budget to make it secure, but not to make it anything less than starkly utilitarian. The individual cells were cramped and claustrophobic, with almost no natural light filtering in from the outside. Oh, they still got their exercise, but it was in bare, metal cages. We kept them separated from each other almost as much as we kept them from the rest of the prison. You must never underestimate how violent and desperate a trapped animal can become.

We were cruel to them. I am not ashamed of that. If I were to tell you all the crimes of those monsters we kept in the ERU, you'd probably lose your lunch before I was halfway through the list. Keeping them beat down was the only way to make sure they behaved. And besides, atonement is important.

I'll admit though, I always had a soft spot for Robert Montauk. He never gave us any trouble. Away from the other prisoners, he seemed docile, almost eerily so sometimes. Also, and it's a small thing, but he never denied his crimes.

Wakefield is one of those prisons where everyone is innocent and it gets so dull to hear their whining protestations day after day. Anyone who fully owned their crimes always went up in my estimation. I mean, we still beat him down on occasion, but not as bad as the others.

After a year or two, I kind of started to forget who he was, you know? The mystique of being Britain's most successful serial killer just didn't hold up. When you have someone in your power like that, you forget any respect you might have had for them. And he never gave us any trouble.

In 2001, he started to get visitors. His daughter, mostly. Given that she hadn't visited before, I'd guess she'd just turned 18. You get that a lot. Unaccompanied visits aren't allowed under that age and plenty of inmates have kids living with over-protective guardians who refuse to take them, so I assumed she was similar. The visitor rooms in the main prison are quite nice. Not so much in the Exceptional Risk Unit. A dark, bare room, like all of them, cut down the middle with a reinforced window. There were plenty of lights in there, but somehow it always seemed gloomy. I was on observation for a few of their father-daughter visits. She would talk about her life like her dad wasn't a murderer; he would lie about how it wasn't too bad in the prison. It was all very touching, I'm sure.

Aside from his daughter, there was only one other time that he had a visitor. It was six months before he died, late March 2002. It was an older guy, I'd guess late fifties, wearing a well-tailored black suit and an expression of disgust. When I brought Montauk in, his face fell and he went very pale. I'd helped folks beat Robert Montauk a dozen times or more, but I had never seen him look scared. He sat down opposite the old man and they looked each other in the eye through the thick glass. I think the visitor might have been blind. His

eyes were cloudy, but he had no cane or dog and it didn't seem to affect how he looked at Montauk. Neither of them spoke.

The seconds turned into minutes and still they didn't say a word. They just sat there, staring. Given where I work, it's really something to be able to say that I've never seen two people who hated each other as much as Robert Montauk and that old man. After a few minutes, I was all but ready to drag him out, but as I stepped forward, the lights blew. All of them at once. Leaving us in the dark. I heard Pete Gordo, the warden with me on visitor duty, fumbling for the handle on the door to get help or torches. I was tense, ready to fight off Montauk if he decided to make a move, but instead a soft voice came from out of the darkness. I didn't recognise it, but I thought it sounded like it came from the old man and I don't think he was talking to me. "You didn't think you could kill it for long, did you?" That's what it said.

Then Pete got the door open and a shaft of light poured in from the corridor. I could once again see Montauk and the old man sat there, motionless. It didn't seem like they'd moved an inch, though as I went to take Montauk back to his cell, I noticed that he was crying. I didn't mention it. I'll be honest, I was kind of freaked out by the whole thing.

The next few months were quiet. Montauk seemed even more subdued than normal and often had to be goaded into exercising during his allotted time. The only point where he seemed normal was when his daughter came for her visits and maybe that was just because he was already so used to lying to her. That was the summer we had all the plumbing problems in the ERU and the water kept going foul, so we were all kind of on edge. But nothing really happened until it turned to autumn and November rolled around.

It was November 1st. I remember because the date was read out so many damn times in the assorted disciplinaries that followed. The worst part of it is, I wasn't even doing anything wrong that day. I was working the late shift with Pete and we were having coffee in the break room. At least, I was having coffee. Pete was swearing at the taps because the plumbing problem we had all been assured was fixed was back and worse than ever. The taps were disgorging a jet of foul-smelling, stagnant water. I was laughing at him, sipping my own perfectly adequate drink, when all the lights went off. It was more widespread than last time though. It seemed like the electricity had gone off altogether.

We stood there in the pitch black, waiting for the generator to kick in, or for whatever power problem this was to be fixed. But after a few minutes of silence and darkness, it became clear that that wasn't happening any time soon. In the distance we could hear the prisoners of the Exceptional Risk Unit start to shout and holler. Their cells were locked, of course – there was nothing a power cut to do about that. But it was still up to us to keep order until the lights came back.

I had hoped that the other prison officers on shift would have come by to pick us up, but they were clearly busy elsewhere. I called out to Pete, making sure he was still nearby as I fumbled in the locker for my torch. I finally found it and turned it on. The beam was so bright in the oppressive darkness that I had to blink away tears. Using the light from mine, Pete found his own flashlight and together we headed out into the CSC. We checked each cell in turn, lying to the prisoners inside about when the power would be back and sending them back to their beds with threats of violence. I didn't see any of the other warders around and was starting to get really nervous.

And when we had checked all the other cells, we went towards Robert Montauk's. The torch beams shot out in front of us, but as they fell upon the door to his cell, something was wrong. I wasn't quite sure what I was looking at for a second and then I realised that his cell door was open, but the torchlight wasn't reaching the inside. As it hit the threshold, it just stopped, a clear and distinct line of darkness, beyond which nothing could be seen. From inside there came the wet sound of tearing and a low moan of pain.

I wanted to run, but instead I took a step forward. And my torch died. Pete's went off as well and we just stood there, terrified, unable to see a thing. The sounds were no longer coming from inside the cell and that didn't reassure me as much as it might have. About 15 feet behind me, I heard Pete fumbling around, calling out my name. I was about to reply, tell him to stay where he was, when I heard something that froze my blood. Pete said, "There you are." He was not touching me.

Almost immediately, there was a growl from the darkness. It was throaty and raw, but at the same time sounded almost musical. Pete screamed and I heard him fall to the floor. It was at that moment that the lights came back on. We were alone. I ran to do a quick circuit of the CSC, as the other prison officers arrived, but there was no one else there. Apparently, there'd been some problems with the doors and they hadn't been able to get to the main ERU cells. Pete was still on the ground when I returned, though he seemed physically unharmed. It was one of the other warders that found what was left of Robert Montauk.

I took the fall for it. They didn't try to make out like I had killed him, just that it had happened on my watch and due to my negligence. They'd been trying to push me out ever since the prison inspectorate had written the CSC up for

excessive use of force the year before. They really threw the book at me: gross incompetence. It's a bitter phrase to say out loud. What was I supposed to tell them? A monster made of darkness murdered him? Pete was no help. He handed in his notice two hours after the lights came back on. I didn't even get a chance to speak to him, ask what had happened. He was just gone. I don't really have anything more to say about it. It was a clearly paranormal incident that led to the end of my career. And it's not fair.

Statement ends.

JONATHAN SIMS

Prison records are very hard to acquire for the Close Supervision Centres. Due to the small number of inmates held there, most information could be considered 'identifying', so the prison service tends to hide behind data protection laws when asked about them. Beyond that, many of the prison records from before the mid-2000s have still not been digitised, making follow-up on this hard.

Tim hit something of a dead end trying to look up Peter Gordo, though Sasha did manage to track down the 2002 visitor logs for the whole of Wakefield prison. It took some searching, but I managed to find what I believe to be the entry for the visit from Mr Brown's mysterious old man. The name given is Maxwell Rayner.

Martin hasn't had much luck tracking down Mr Brown himself. According to Caroline Brodie, his ex-wife, she left him in 2004 after his dismissal from the prison service pushed him further into alcoholism and he became abusive. She says she got a single letter from him in 2009 asking for reconciliation, but she

never replied. Martin says the letter was postmarked from Waterford in Ireland, but he's been unable to track Mr Brown any further.

So, what is this thing that seems to have stalked Robert Montauk through so much of his life? And what's its connection to Rayner? Were they summoning it? Containing it? Worshipping it? Whatever the case, it seems as though Montauk earned its anger. I feel it might be worthwhile getting a few more torches for the Archive.

End recording.

[CLICK]

[CLICK]

Supplemental.

I confronted Sasha about the wax museum. It was just too strange to not mention. I tried to pass it off like I had spotted her accidentally while in the area for other reasons. I doubt she bought it, but she did at least give me an answer. She has a new boyfriend, or so she claims, who works there and she likes to get lunch with him. It is... plausible and at this stage. I feel challenging her to produce said boyfriend would potentially damage what trust remains between us.

No luck with any of my other leads yet, but at least I have another of Gertrude's tapes. It's always going to be a shot in the dark with them, but hopefully an informative one. I know the secret to her death is on one of them; it must be. I just... I hope I don't have to hear it first-hand.

End supplement.

[CLICK]

[The Magnus Archives Theme - Outro]

The Magnus Archives is a podcast distributed by Rusty Quill and licensed under a creative commons attribution, non-commercial share alike 4.0 international license. Today's episode was written by Jonathan Sims and directed by Alexander J Newall. To subscribe, buy merchandise, or join our Patreon, visit rustyquill.com. Rate and review us online. Tweet us @therustyquill, visit us on Facebook, or email us at mail@rustyquill.com. Join us on Instagram at [rustyquilluk](#) or join our community via Reddit at [r/rustyquill](#). Thanks for listening.