

MAG – 148 – Extended Surveillance

Content Warnings:

- Eye trauma
- Physical violence

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

Rusty Quill presents: The Magnus Archives. Episode one hundred and forty-eight. Extended Surveillance.

[Tape clicks on.]

(Elias sighs.)

[Door opens, then slams shut]

ELIAS

Good evening, Detec—

[Basira punches Elias.]

BASIRA

Useless, scheming piece of shit.

ELIAS

Detective, this is quite unnecess—

[Basira continues to hurt Elias.]

BASIRA

I'm sorry, was that unnecessary?

[Basira hits Elias once more.]

BASIRA (Cont.)

Because this is the most helpful you've been so far, unless you've got another crisis for me?

ELIAS

No! No, no, it's fine ... I'm sorry.

BASIRA

Oh yeah? For which part?

ELIAS

All of it?

BASIRA

You sent us to the North fucking Pole for no goddamn reason.

ELIAS

A miscalculation.

BASIRA

No. No, I'm done with your games.

ELIAS

Look, Basira—

BASIRA

And when, exactly, were you planning to tell us he's been feeding on innocents?

ELIAS

I've always thought that a man's eating habits were his own private business.

ELIAS

(Conciliatory) But, I can see how maybe I should have mentioned it.

BASIRA

Or that we were being stalked by some freaky spider woman? Don't tell me you didn't know about that.

ELIAS

Ah, yes. Well, to be honest, I'd advise you to leave that one well alone.

BASIRA

Oh yeah?

ELIAS

Look, I've been doing this a long time now, and if there's one thing I've learned about The Web, it's that it plays its own game. All you can really do is hope it

doesn't get in the way of whatever your plan is, because the Spider usually wins. Assuming you have a plan. Do you have a plan, Detective?

BASIRA

Why do you do that? What is that?

ELIAS

Do what?

BASIRA

You always call me Detective. Is that supposed to mean something?

ELIAS

Honestly? I just like the way it sounds.

BASIRA

So, why'd you agree to see me?

ELIAS

I missed you.

BASIRA

Right. That's why you've been refusing my visits since we got back?

ELIAS

I thought it might have been an idea to give you some space.

BASIRA

Oh, and how'd that work out for you?

ELIAS

Not ideally.

BASIRA

So, what now? Another wild goose chase? More gloating about John's 'destiny'? Because right now, I'm having a real hard time figuring out why I shouldn't just tell them to throw your little deal right out the window, and see how you do in here without special treatment.

ELIAS

I mean, you have plenty of reasons to do that, of course, but I'm not sure that they have any reason to listen to you.

BASIRA

I'll make them listen.

ELIAS

Will you? You're not police anymore. You've done them some favours, but they've done you some as well, and I think you'll find that the information that I've been giving to them has been far more consistently useful. You want to issue them an ultimatum? Go right ahead. I'm just not sure it'll go quite how you hope.

...

And, um, no more violence, Detective, or I may have to call in the guards.

BASIRA

So that's it, then.

ELIAS

As far as I can tell, you have no interest in anything I have to say and mainly came here to let off steam. So yes, that's probably it.

BASIRA

Surprised you didn't foresee it.

ELIAS

Well, that's always been my problem: ever the optimist.

BASIRA

You know, when you have no more useful information, and they're done with you ...

ELIAS

You'll kill me, yes. I'm sorry to say, Detective, but you're becoming predictable.

(Basira makes a noise of disgust.)

ELIAS (Cont.)

Goodbye, Detective. I shall miss our little chats.

[Tape clicks off. Tape clicks on.]

ARCHIVIST

Well?

BASIRA

Just useless gloating, like I said he would.

ARCHIVIST

You should have let me come with.

BASIRA

No. Besides, he wouldn't have seen me if I had.

ARCHIVIST

Can't believe you've been seeing him all this time.

BASIRA

Oh yeah, that's the terrible secret sabotaging the trust between us.

ARCHIVIST

Did he mention it at all? My, uh ...

BASIRA

Oh, your new diet? Nothing useful. Didn't seem too phased by it.

ARCHIVIST

(Sighs) Right.

BASIRA

What?

ARCHIVIST

I don't know. I mean, we still don't really know what Elias actually is. I thought maybe if he was more like me than we realised ...

BASIRA

He might have some advice?

ARCHIVIST

Stupid, I know.

BASIRA

Yeah. John, we've been over this. The key is to not force people to feed you their trauma. You know, just don't do it.

ARCHIVIST

It's not that simple.

BASIRA

No, it is. Or I put you down.

ARCHIVIST

(Mutters) I mean, that's hardly ...

BASIRA

Daisy's been managing.

ARCHIVIST

Daisy is... Yeah, she's managing. Did he say anything about Annabelle?

BASIRA

Not really. Sounds like he's not too worried, though. Says to just ignore it.

ARCHIVIST

Yeah, good luck with that.

BASIRA

Any luck finding her?

ARCHIVIST

Haven't really been trying. Doing that sort of thing consciously ... makes me hungry.

BASIRA

Oh, well then, find a statement to your tastes and read it.

ARCHIVIST

Yes, yes, I know.

Thank you.

(The Archivist sighs.)

Basira?

BASIRA

Yeah?

ARCHIVIST

I've been meaning to ask. The tape, the one of the, uh... my victim. You said Martin gave it to you?

BASIRA

Yeah.

ARCHIVIST

How was he? H-how did he look? Was he, uh ...?

BASIRA

I don't know. I didn't see him. He just left it on my desk with a note.

ARCHIVIST

Oh, right.

BASIRA

Yeah.

ARCHIVIST

Can I ask what it said?

BASIRA

Um, yeah. It said, “Talk to him.”

(The Archivist laughs bitterly.)

ARCHIVIST

I'm going to get something to eat.

[Tape clicks off. Tape clicks on.]

ARCHIVIST

Statement of Sunil Maraj, regarding their work as a security guard and the disappearance of their co-worker Samson Stiller. Original statement given 3rd April 2011. Audio recording by Jonathan Sims, the Archivist.

Statement begins.

ARCHIVIST (STATEMENT)

So, I lost my job last week. I mean, I quit – they didn't fire me or nothing – but you know how, like, sometimes you quit because you want to and sometimes you quit because you've got to? Well, this was the second, although I'm not going to pretend that I'm not glad to see the back of the place. It's cos I kept asking about Samson, you know? And what I saw. And they really, really don't want me to make a stink about that. Because if he just disappeared one day, didn't come into work, that's fine. I mean, not fine for his family, obviously, or for the police who have to find him, but fine for the company. If he disappeared at work, though, if what I think happened is even close to what actually happened, then that's real bad news for them, and opens them up to

all sorts of lawsuits and liability. I mean, it's fine. I can get other jobs and it's not like I really want to be working there after what happened, but I just wish someone would take it seriously. It's messed up, and I'm having a real hard time getting it out of my head.

So, I work security, right? Used to be that a company or shop would have its own little security force they put together that did all the in-store and CCTV vigilance stuff. These days, it's all centralised, though. You tend to have a building, or a shopping centre, that will contract all the security work out to a single company, who'll then cover all the businesses or shops. It's easier from a centralising point-of-view, and cheaper, which is what the owners like, but it does mean there tends to be a lot less stability in how it's all structured, personnel-wise at least. If you're lucky, you'll be assigned to a post and stay there for years, getting to know the place, the systems and your co-workers. If you're unlucky or there're contract difficulties, you could easily end up moving through two or three different places in as many months.

That was kind of the case for me and Samson. We were the odd men out in a lot of ways. We'd originally been brought in for a big corporate office block near Liverpool Street, but there'd been some big problem and the whole place had to be closed up for months. Samson said they found asbestos, I heard it was a lease issue, but it doesn't really matter. Point is, they'd hired us for a job that no longer existed. I expected they'd just get rid of us, but I mean, to their credit, they did try to do right. They did their best to fit us in with other security teams. Over the last two years, we did a couple of data centres, a "digital marketing hub", whatever that is, and three different office buildings near Kings Cross. Trouble was, every time, almost as soon as we got there, there'd be some personnel changes or expiring contracts or some other

trouble, and generally, as the last in the door, we were the first to get reassigned. Started to feel a bit like we were cursed, you know?

Samson took it harder than I did. I mean, I'm young, my mum's got a flat in Hackney, and, to be honest, most of my evenings are out with friends or in with Black Ops, so the moving around was pretty much fine with me. Sam had a three-year-old, though, and lived way down in Morden, so being thrown from one post to another all the time was really kind of getting to him. He tried to talk to me about it a few times, but honestly, we weren't that close. Or rather, we were close because we'd always worked together, but we didn't have a huge amount in common. I mean, I tried to talk to him about football for a while, but I think he could tell I was talking out of my arse. Anyway, point is, when we were reassigned to a shopping centre in Stratford, he wasn't in a great place.

Now, I'm not sure I can legally name the shopping centre I was working in to you guys, but let's just say it wasn't the Westfield. It was old, clearly been around decades, and the security systems really showed it. I mean, one of the shops still had the original alarms from the late seventies, and plenty of them still had cameras that recorded to VHS for God's sake. The security office was a mess. The company I worked for – again, don't know if I can legally say them, but you can look it up, you know – they have a package where they'll replace all your equipment and systems with the stuff we use. It's not cheap, but it's worth it, if only cos we all know exactly how to use that stuff.

Whoever was running this shopping centre had very much not opted for that particular contract. I mean, the teams before us had made a valiant effort to centralise and integrate all the feeds and set-ups into just the one control room, but damn was that place a mess. Flatscreens next to banks of the old

CRT monitors that some of the cameras had to feed into, next to racks of channel banks and a few actual, honest-to-God, computers that tried their best to wrestle everything into something that was almost useable.

I found it properly overwhelming, didn't like the place at all, but Sam actually seemed to get on with it pretty well, almost from the get-go. He'd apparently been an engineer back in the day, and something about all these old surveillance systems all tied together, all wrapping into and around each other like some weird nest of cameras, seemed to really appeal to him. The first week he was there, he spent almost the entire time playing with the system and the wiring, left me to do most of the other work on my own. Well, I mean, there were the other guys working there, of course, but even the ones who'd been there a while started to get the picture and gave Samson a bit of a wide berth after a few days. He really did seem to get the place in a bit of a better order. I mean, some of it only he really understood, but soon enough, it actually made sense what we were watching and when, and he'd managed to get rid of some of the delay so that we even managed to catch a couple of shoplifters.

There was only one piece of equipment that seemed to give him any trouble. It was this old Tecton multi-camera recorder, from the late 80s, that managed the feeds for one of the various budget shoe shops that lined the promenade. It didn't seem all that complicated when you just looked at it, but trying to use it was an absolute nightmare. None of the buttons seemed to do exactly what you wanted them to do, and there were all sorts of sequences, where pressing a button, holding a button, pressing it three times and all that, they'd all do really different things.

Sam spent almost a whole month wrestling with it, before he finally cracked and he asked Dave, the bearded old guy who we all sort of assumed had been there the longest, whether they still had any of the old operating manuals. I remember the smell of dust when Dave went and cracked open the filing cabinet in the back room, before waving his arms in the direction of the drawer and shrugging. I mean, I'd have just left it, obviously, but I think Samson was taking the whole knowing-how-the-system-works thing as, like, a point of pride, something he could salvage from the whole situation. Just a way of getting some control over his life, you know?

So, he found the manual. More of a pamphlet, really – can't have been more than ten pages of A5 in the whole thing, yellowed and water-damaged. Well-used, though. Someone had even put their name in the front, like they were afraid people were going to steal their manky instruction book. Still, Sam just couldn't put it down. I mean, it was like ten in the morning when he finally found it, and when I went in at two to see if he'd taken his lunch break yet, he was still sat there, just staring at it. I mean, I'm not a fast reader or anything, but that's a lot, right? And, like ... Ok, so this is the part that you're definitely going to think I'm having a joke with you, but I'm honestly not. I'm dead serious. Cos I saw some of the pages over his shoulder, and on one of them, there was ... There was a picture of me, like a black and white photo of my face. I didn't get a good look, but it certainly wasn't one that I remember having had taken, not that that would make it any less weird for it to be printed in an old CCTV manual from back when I was still in nappies. But I'm not making it up, I swear. Then Samson turned and looked at me and, I don't know, I got real spooked. His eyes were all messed up, like weird and glassy. It was really, really freaky, and I just turned and I got out of there.

That wasn't the end of it, though. I mean, if it had been, then sure, maybe I would write it off as a weird dream or I was tired or whatever, but no. Because from that point on, Samson just gets creepier. For a start, he's always at work. I mean, we're not always on the same shift, so it takes me a while to notice, but when I ask him about it, he just says that our schedules must have synced up weird. But whenever I arrived, there he was, staring at the monitors, watching all the people come and go, his eyes wide like he was drinking it all in. And whenever I was there late and it was my turn to close up, he'd always say that he was happy to do it, say I could head off a few minutes early, so I never actually saw him leave. I tried to stay once, said I needed to do it myself, but he just got real quiet, like, real quiet, and stared at me.

The bank of monitors was behind him, and I'm just trying to come up with something to say, to get him to talk to me, and one by one, they begin to just wink off, turning dark. And I got this feeling, deep in my gut, that if that last monitor turned off, then something really bad was going to happen to me. It was one of the old CRT sets, big and bulky, and the picture on it was never that clear, but for a moment, it looked like it was me on there, staring right back at myself as the screens slowly went black, getting closer and closer. The face on the monitor looked absolutely terrified, and I was starting to feel it myself. So, I just tried to smile, told him not to worry about it, and I headed out as quick as I could. My legs were shaking so hard I almost fell on the way out.

Then there were the actual cameras. I mean, you work in a shopping centre, obviously you do a bunch of shopping there. I used to get my lunch, for one, and usually pick up any of the essentials I needed. Sometimes, if I was feeling hard done by and it was payday, I might buy myself a new shirt or a game or something. And obviously, because I work security, I know where all the

cameras are, where they cover, even how they move. A lot of them are completely static, just pointing at one place, but gradually I start to notice something when I'm shopping. It's like a tickling, creeping sensation all over the back of my neck. Like I'm being watched. And so, I start to keep an eye on the cameras when I'm in the shops and, you know what, I'm right. They're following me. Whenever I look at them, doesn't matter where it was they were meant to be aimed, they're always focused right on me. I keep staring at them, moving around, and they just shift to keep the lens pointed at me. But they're not articulated – they don't have any motor or swivel mount – they just move, pointed right at me.

One time, when no-one in the store was looking, I threw a can of deodorant at one of them, hit it square on. Samson wore sunglasses for the next two days, and when I caught a glimpse of him without them, there was a crack, right down the centre of his eye.

I tried to talk to the others. I'm pretty sure that they were getting similar weirdness from him. They were all jumpy and nervous those last few months. But I was known around as Sam's friend. We'd come in together and everyone just assumed we were close. When I started to ask about it, about what was going on, they just clammed up like I was trying to get them in trouble. My nerves were all shot to hell.

I wasn't in work the week he disappeared. I'd called in with a bullshit stomach thing. I just needed a break, some time to get my head right, and it was almost working, you know? A little distance, a little space to relax, I was starting to feel good. Then I got the call from Dave.

He was frantic. I couldn't make out half of what he was saying over the bad line, but he kept saying Samson's name, asking me if I knew, if he'd told me. I had no idea what he was talking about, but he kept screaming at me. He kept saying I must know; he must have told me what was going on. He kept saying, "What do we do with his eyes?" I mean, I didn't know what the hell to say. I just went quiet, listening to Dave as he started sobbing down the phone. "He won't stop," he said. "We can't get rid of his face." I hung up.

Dave was gone when I went back in, a bunch of them were – all quit suddenly. I wanted to check in with them, find out what happened, but we'd never really been friends, and I didn't know any of their details. I never saw Samson again either, though I did find his old work shirt in the back. It was torn to shreds and wrapped around that old instruction manual. I put it back in the filing cabinet and I threw the shirt away.

I tried to stick around, to do my job, but I was asking too many questions for the folks upstairs, I think. I wanted to know why Samson hadn't signed out of the building before he disappeared, why no matter who tried to reset the system, it always logged back in as him. Or why, whenever I was watching the monitors alone, I'd see him on that old CRT screen, staring right back at me, quietly calling for me to join him.

ARCHIVIST

Statement ends.

Hmm. Better. Does reading a statement of the Ceaseless Watcher count as a sort of auto-cannibalism, I wonder? Or some sort of bird-like regurgitation of fear, re-consuming second-hand terror? Whatever the analogy, I'm finding it harder and harder to ignore the diminishing returns, how much less

satisfaction each one gives me. My desire for follow-up, for verification, for proper digestion of the experience, it grows less and less. I honestly don't care if Mr Maraj was chased down and consumed by his voyeuristic former friend, or if he has forgotten the whole affair, living in blissful ignorance. I just find my mind already wandering to the next statement, and the hopes that it won't be quite as stale.

End recording.

[Tape clicks off.]

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Outro]

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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 Ben Meredith as Elias Bouchard.