

MAG – 056 – Children of the Night

Content warnings:

- Serial killings
- Graphic violence & injury
- Blood & gore
- Body horror
- Infestation (spiders)

Discussions of: hunting, addiction, compulsions, arguments

Mentions of: drug use, infection, poverty, animal attack, trauma, knives, cancer

SFX: low drone, high pitched tone, shouting

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

Rusty Quill presents: The Magnus Archives. Episode fifty-six. Children of the Night.

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro *Continued*]

[Tape clicks on.]

ARCHIVIST

Continued statement of Trevor Herbert, regarding the latter years of his career as a vampire hunter. Original statement given July 10th, 2010. Audio recording by Jonathan Sims, Head Archivist of the Magnus Institute, London.

Note: several pages are missing from the file around the time that he apparently did not die of lung cancer in the Institute.

Statement resumes.

ARCHIVIST (STATEMENT)

She died in the end. Sad old thing, but she didn't deserve that. Always wondered what would have happened if I'd gotten there a bit sooner. Trouble is, once they've really got their teeth into you, you're as good as dead even they don't drain you. Gushing on the floor or bloating a vampire's belly. Doesn't make much difference to the poor fool bleeding out.

I've often wondered if I was mad, you know. I mean, no one else seems to have seen these things and I've found plenty across my life. Perhaps I just got the smell of them. Like, no one else ever really got away, and my early escape from Sylvia Macdonald gave me a sense that could pick them out. There's a sharpness to them. They're hunters. But over the years, I've become a hunter as well, and maybe predators recognise each other. All I know is these days I

can almost smell the blood coming off them. That's not to say I can't be wrong though. I can be very wrong indeed.

I found Alard Dupont in the summer of 1982, and murdered him shortly afterwards. I use the word 'murder' here where I've not before, because he was the only one I've killed I know to have been human. In most ways, I regret his death, but there is a certain comfort to it. If I was just a serial killer with a hallucination, I don't see why my mind wouldn't have made Dupont a vampire as well. The fact I was able to kill normal people reassures me that the creatures I hunt are real. Do you understand?

That's not to say that the death of Alard Dupont wasn't the result of several extremely bad decisions on my part.

In the early '80s I was deep in the grip of my twin addictions. As I mentioned, after a while the hunt became an addiction of its own. Of the two, I have always found heroin the easier one to quit. Heroin is calm. It's a small chunk of peace in a world that's full of nothing but hard edges. It's hard to put that down permanently. But the hunt? The hunt is a purpose. It's not just a way to get through the day; it's a reason for there to be a day at all. I tried to give it up for a while after Dupont, but it burned in me far deeper than any itch I got when I was clucking.

Back in '82 though, those addictions were running pretty much unchecked. It had been several years since I had last found a vampire and every waking moment I wasn't high was spent in keen look-out for anything suspicious. I was in bad shape physically. I'd acquired an infection from injecting between my toes which would eventually hospitalise me and lead to my losing two of them, though I luckily kept the foot. At that point though, it just slowed me to a limp and caused me a reasonable amount of pain. Perhaps if I'd been faster, able to keep up with Dupont more easily, I would have realised my mistake. Perhaps if my mind hadn't been so fogged with brown, I might have figured it out. Or perhaps if I hadn't been so dead eager to kill another vampire. Any of these might have saved him. Maybe even if he'd had a name that didn't make me think of Dracula. But none of those things were the case, so dwelling on them is pointless.

I don't know if Dupont was technically a mute or not. I've had no real experience with the condition and he didn't seem to have any problems with his hearing. Either way, I never saw him speak, which by now I'm sure you know is what I would consider a significant warning sign for vampirism. A friend of mine I had shared a shelter with some weeks before, and who shared a similar weakness for narcotics, had mentioned how amazing it was that his dealer was always able to know exactly what he was after without either of

them saying a word. In retrospect, I should have realised that this didn't exactly match the vampires I'd met before, who'd never displayed any sort of mind reading. But I was aching for a kill.

The kid who told me this was a weird one, must have been about 19 years old. Told everyone his name Stanley Kubrick. He was always making references to his film career and I was never able to figure out if it was actually his real name that he happened to share with the director, or if it was just some weird joke he was really committed to. What struck me about him more than that though were the scars on his neck. I later discovered they were from a dog attack when he was younger, but at the time, I was convinced they were connected to Dupont.

So, I found where Alard Dupont made his handovers in Piccadilly Gardens and I started to watch. He was surprisingly brazen about it, sat there on a park bench for hours, smoking or reading some magazine or other. I'd never seen a vampire read a magazine before, but I had seen them pantomime watching television or reading a book to better blend in, so it didn't raise any suspicions for me. Then came the moment that fully convinced me that I had to kill Dupont.

As he sat there on the bench, two policemen walked past me, heading towards him. They took no notice of me, nobody notices a tramp, but as they walked up the path towards the figure on the bench, one of the police nudged his partner and gestured towards him. They clearly considered him suspicious and began to walk over. As they got close though, Dupont looked up and made eye contact with them. They stopped, just for a moment, and he nodded gently. The policemen looked at each other, turned, and walked away.

That was all I needed to be sure of what he was, and the idea I have come to since, that the two police officers were simply on the take and hadn't immediately recognised him, didn't occur to me until much later. It was an overcast day and it seemed to me that Dupont was keeping in the shadows, just as I thought he would. I kept watching as he made a few more transactions. I was craving a hit of my own by that point, but there was a much more intense rush I was chasing just then and it pushed all thoughts of junk to the back of my mind.

Eventually evening fell and I watched Dupont rise from his bench and make his way down into the town centre, keeping downwind of him and sticking to the shadows. Obviously, the darkness would be no impediment to him spotting me, but I'd learned that inconspicuous as a homeless man might be, it's still always best to be seen by as few witnesses as possible. I figured he was

heading towards a nightclub or dancehall, a favourite haunt of the vampire, since the loud music makes their lack of speech that much easier to hide. I was right, in as far as he headed towards The Hacienda, one of the loudest clubs in Manchester. It wasn't as notorious then as it would later become, in fact I think it had only recently opened when all this happened, but even at its worst, it would probably have drawn the line at allowing me entrance, given the state I was in. So, I watched Dupont head inside, adopting my camouflage of softly asking passers-by for change, and waited.

It was about two hours later that he emerged, another man following close behind him. I didn't recognise them. I mean, there is no reason I should have, but Dupont's new friend was almost as big as he was. Vampires tend to go for the smaller victims, those less able to defend themselves should the initial surprise of their attack not be enough. This one really looked like he could take care of himself. Still, as far as I was concerned, he had no idea what was about to happen to him, and as Dupont led him down a nearby alley, I hurried after them.

I was quiet as I limped through the rubbish that covered the alleyway and I silently drew my trusty hammer. After a minute, they turned into a doorway and took out a key. The door opened and they both stepped inside. I had a sudden alarm at the thought of getting locked out and being unable to reach

him. Forgetting stealth, I grabbed the door and flung it open. They turned to face me. I charged in with a cry, slamming the hammer into Dupont's shoulder and knocking him to the ground with a sickening crack.

I will never forget the moment I heard Alard Dupont scream. It was such a piercing sound and something I'd never expected. In a moment, everything I'd built up in my head over the past couple of days shattered and I felt a sudden panic at what I'd done, what I was doing. His friend screamed as well and started run back out the door. I don't know if he got a good look at me. Given the police never came around to question me, I guess not.

Dupont was still screaming, that horrid sound overriding all other thoughts. Blood was streaming from his face where it had hit the ground and I didn't know what to do. I had to get out of there, but that noise was too much. I couldn't focus, couldn't do anything. So, I hit him again. Hard. In the head. And then he was quiet, and everything was horribly still. He just lay there. I have never felt anything like the shame and disgust I felt at that moment. I tried to burn his body, more out of habit than anything else, but it didn't really take, and I fled out into the street before the police arrived.

After that I spent over a decade in a very serious spiral. I don't remember much of it, except that I spent most of it so high that looking back, I'm

genuinely astounded I never OD'ed. I only snapped out of it in '96, when a chance encounter with a creature that called itself Hannah Edwards led to my saving a young woman from becoming its dinner. I won't bother with details. It was very similar to my hunt for June Lewis, except that the victim made it out alive this time. I wonder why it is that I only ever seem to find them just before they attack? It can't be that they spend every night feeding; the world would be a bloodbath. Maybe they just blend in better when they're not on the hunt and I don't spot them? Or maybe they hibernate? It's not a question I think I'll ever be able to answer, but it does mean that there is always an urgency to the hunts that has, for the most part, stopped me doing much investigation into them.

Hannah was my fifth confirmed vampire, and the last one, assuming I don't find another before the cancer takes me. I really considered myself retired, resting after a life spent defending the world from the darkness. Because that's what I thought it was, you know? Vampires were what lurked in the dark. The only thing that lurked in the dark. Last year though, just before my diagnosis, I met something that made me re-think this.

I'm sure you don't need me to tell you that winter's a hard time to be homeless. Doesn't matter how many times you've done it, when that first cold wind blows through you, it's like some awful debt coming due. The last one

was really bad. A bunch of the shelters I normally hit up had closed up shop and those that were left tended to fill up fast. I do pretty okay, given I'm a well-known face and all that, but I still felt the pressure to scrape enough cash together to secure my spot early. Even then, there'd be a couple of times a week that I still ended up in the cold. My old bones don't do so well at that these days, so I was keeping quite a close eye on the comings and goings around the night shelters of Manchester and after a few weeks I started to notice something strange.

Several times, at a couple of different shelters, I watched one of the sleepers get up in the middle of the night, gather their possessions and walk out into the freezing streets of the city. To see it happen once would have been strange, but to see it happen several times was surreal. I was sober at the time, so I couldn't even pass it off as a trick of the mind. Even stranger, every time it happened, within ten minutes a woman would walk in and take their place. It was the same one every time. She must have been about 40 and slender, though her clothes bulged a bit in odd places. Her face was lined from what I could recognise as a hard life and a thin layer of grime matted her hair. She looked pretty normal for the place and I could even write off the distant, neutral expression as the sort of trauma all too common among my people. That's why I didn't pay her any mind the first time it happened, or the second.

When I noticed it happening a third time, I finally started to pay attention, though I didn't approach her immediately. I did ask about her the following morning, but even the staff didn't seem to know anything. I decided to keep a look out and if she turned up again, I would confront her.

Well, she did. It was late January when it happened, about two in the morning, just when the night was at its coldest. I saw one of my fellow sleepers get slowly out of bed. His name was Craig, I think. I didn't know him well; he was a seasonal drifter and we'd only occasionally crossed paths. Well, he walked out without a sound, gathering up his belongings quietly and leaving an empty bed. I waited, wide awake, hand on my knife, breathing steady. Sure enough, a few minutes later in she walks, no backpack or gear of any sort and sat on Craig's bed. I stood up and walked towards her.

As soon as she saw me, her posture changed and she became defensive, although the expression on her face never changed from that blankness. I started to introduce myself and ask how come she was taking over Craig's bed, when she locked eyes with me. The weirdest sensation began to flow through me. I wanted to leave. It wasn't like with a vampire where I would feel like I'd been spoken to. This was just a sudden awareness of my own desire. I'd been sober for three years at that point, but I felt like I desperately wanted to get high and I knew that the best place to get some was out in the night. Looking

back, I think it might have been my own mind rationalising the way I felt my will being tugged out of the room, but it was still very powerful. If I hadn't had a lifetime's experience identifying and fighting off the effect of the vampire's gaze, I probably would have done it too. But I did, so I stood my ground.

There was a long pause as that woman gazed levelly at me. Then she broke into a run, through the door and out. I followed. Didn't matter to me whether she was a vampire or not, there was something wrong and I wanted to find out what was going on. I chased her out into the road. It was cold and still and if anyone saw us, they didn't make a sound. She ran strangely, more like a spasm than smooth steps, and her arms shifted in weird ways as she moved. I'm not as spry as I once was, and my lungs are obviously shot, but I managed to keep pace with her. I could feel it in my blood. It was a hunt and I always felt stronger on a hunt.

Finally, I got close enough to grab her by the arm. My fingers locked around her elbow and then they sort of sunk inside. They didn't go through the skin or anything, but it sort of shifted beneath my fingers, like when you squeeze an uncooked sausage, and I could feel movement from inside the arm itself. It wasn't a vampire, but it definitely wasn't human. With its other arm it took a wide, sweeping swing at me, but I was prepared and ducked below the flailing punch. I got out my knife to try and threaten the thing, maybe get it to answer

some questions, but I misjudged the draw and ended up slashing it slightly across its stomach.

It wasn't a deep cut, or a long one, but apparently it was enough. Her whole body began to shudder, as tiny shapes began to stream out of the wound.

Spiders. Thousands and thousands of spiders. She opened her mouth at last, as if to scream, and more poured out. Tens of thousands of skittering legs and evil little eyes. I screamed and started to back up as the dark shapes pooled around her feet and spread out in a twitching circle. For a second I was worried they were coming for me, but then they just scurried off into the shadows and crevices of nearby buildings, until the street was empty of everything, except this woman. She was still standing upright, but from the open mouth, I could see that her body was completely hollow, save for a few cobwebs that I could just make out under the streetlights. I ran the hell away.

And that's the last creature I encountered. That's my whole story. You're welcome to it. When I thought it was just vampires about, I might have given you people a miss as a bunch of kooks. But if there's other stuff around out there, well maybe you know about it than me. And maybe you could use a bit more information on vampires. It's a shame I'm on the way out. I will miss the hunt.

ARCHIVIST

Statement ends.

Well, this is... certainly a surprise. Martin informed me that Mr Herbert passed away after making his initial statement, so it is rather a shock to find this misfiled addition to his original, even if it is partially incomplete. What's more, actually checking the hospital and death records for both London and Manchester, I can't find any record of Mr Herbert's death. Then again, I can find no record of him alive either after the date of the statement. The idea that he could survive six years with untreated late stage lung cancer is implausible, to say the least, and yet...

Alard Dupont's death appears to match the statement in most of the particulars. He had a half dozen convictions against him for various drug charges or violent misdemeanours, but nothing exceptional. I can't find any indication of muteness, but aside from that, everything checks out. As for the spider person, the only proof of its existence seems to be that I am far too unlucky for it to simply be an old tramp's hallucination. I need to have some words with Martin.

End recording.

[Tape clicks off. Tape clicks on.]

ARCHIVIST

Sit down.

MARTIN

What is...

ARCHIVIST

Sit.

[Martin sits]

ARCHIVIST

Why did you lie to me about Trevor?

MARTIN

What?

ARCHIVIST

Why did you tell me he was dead?

MARTIN

Sorry, who's, who's Trevor?

ARCHIVIST

Trevor Herbert! The tramp, the ‘vampire hunter’. You told me he died!

MARTIN

But I mean, he did. D-didn’t he?

ARCHIVIST

Apparently not.

MARTIN

Oh. Sorry.

ARCHIVIST

Sorry?

MARTIN

I mean I, I didn’t ever actually meet him. I just heard some of the other researchers mentioning it.

ARCHIVIST

What?

MARTIN

Yeah, well, I could have sworn they had said he died. I mean, maybe they just said he looks like death or something, but I really thought they said he was dead.

ARCHIVIST

So that's it? Just a misunderstanding?

MARTIN

Yes. You seem to be taking this kind of personally.

ARCHIVIST

Because you keep lying to me, Martin!

MARTIN

About what?

ARCHIVIST

I don't know, but you are.

[The sounds of rustling paper.]

MARTIN

Where did you get that? Have you been going through the bins?

ARCHIVIST

It was in the old document room, just next to where you used to sleep. Your handwriting, “If the others find out I’ve been lying”. Lying about what, Martin?

MARTIN

Look, just forget about it, okay, please?

ARCHIVIST

I can’t forget it! Everyone in this place has so many goddamn secrets and I can’t trust a word you say! Not about this and not about Trevor!

MARTIN

John, just–

ARCHIVIST

(Shouting) Martin!

MARTIN

Okay, okay, okay, just, just promise you won’t fire me.

ARCHIVIST

Fire you? Fine.

MARTIN

I... I lied on my CV.

ARCHIVIST

What?

MARTIN

I don't have a masters in parapsychology. I don't even have a degree. When I was 17, my mum, she had... Look, she had some problems and I ended up dropping out of school, trying to support us. I tried everything, but nowhere was hiring. So, I just kind of started to lie on my applications. Sending them out to just about anywhere. For some reason, my lie about my parapsychology got me an interview with Elias and then a, a job here. M-most of my employment details are made up. I'm only 29.

ARCHIVIST

Right. I... uh... I believe you.

MARTIN

Why are you smiling?

ARCHIVIST

Yes, I just... um, I won't mention it to Elias. Just between us.

MARTIN

So, you... don't mind?

ARCHIVIST

To be quite honest, Martin, I'm... I'm really rather relieved.

[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 and Alexander J Newall as Martin Blackwood.