

MAG ### - Strangling Vines

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MAG ### - Strangling Vines

by [Thunderbirds and Lightning](#)

Summary

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Grian

Statement of Etho S. Lab, concerning the events surrounding the disappearance of roommate and friend, Bdubs Ossent. Original statement given on the 6th May 2022. Recording made by Grian Lunera, Head Archivist of the Institute, London. Statement begins.

Notes

I am not immune to TMA propaganda. I have consumed TMA-Hermit content like slurping up spaghetti.

As always, inspired by christin's TMA-Hermitcraft crossover AU!

Enjoy :D

EDIT 06/07/22: Changed a few dates to fit future canon within the series. Bdubs' disappearance now takes place in 2000, not 2018.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

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Grian

Statement of Etho S. Lab, concerning the events surrounding the disappearance of roommate and friend, Bdubs Ossent. Original statement given on the 6th May 2022. Recording made by Grian Lunera, Head Archivist of the Institute, London. Statement begins.

Grian (STATEMENT)

Let it be said that we weren't a reckless bunch. There were four of us, before Bdubs disappeared: myself, him, Doc and Beef — I'll add their full names at the end, according to your guidelines. We were all in our third year of college, in varying courses, but all fuelled by the same anxious, jittering energy that supports any ilk of students. We were put in the same dorm before we knew each other, and quickly became inseparable — although we were an introverted little pack, we enjoyed each other's company, and even a single familiar face amongst a shifting sea of strangers was more than welcome.

We even had a name for ourselves: the New Hermit Order. I certainly fit the 'hermit' criteria, and even Beef and Doc to some extent, but Bdubs was always the bright, bubbling spirit that bonded our lonely, wayward souls together stronger than any glue. He could provide the noise and chatter to drown us out in the background, which — on days when I wanted to sit down and study Bach's chord progressions — was a welcome distraction.

This is irrelevant. I guess I'm just stalling, avoiding the inevitable.

I believe it was Bdubs who first suggested the expedition. Near the end of the year, final exams contributed to most of our free time spent studying hard and long into the early hours of the morning, as the moon rose to its apex and slipped down beyond the horizon like a silver fingernail. We were all — decidedly — stressed, adrenaline buzzing through our veins in a near-perpetual state of hyperactivity and aching hands. Doc appeared and vanished at odd hours, and nights came frequently where muffled shouts or violent curses would jar the cold, crisp air, and we would turn over and hope that whatever gear system he was tinkering with repaired itself by morning.

So one evening, four pairs of eyes blinking slowly and stickily, shovelling food into four mouths for the sole purpose of providing energy rather than enjoyment, Bdubs suggested a trip. An expedition, it turned out; a friend of a friend working in ecology had a field trip to the edge of a rainforest in a few months, and there happened to be slots on the plane open to students from other courses.

During this time of peak stress, such an opportunity was grabbed with both hands. We pooled as much money as possible — Doc and I even took up another side job or two, just to provide enough for the funds — and reserved our places. There were tickets for all of us. I hadn't felt more elated since as far as my memory went back. The weeks flew by, and studying became a sped-up blur, merely an obstacle to conquer before such a glorious reward. I was exhilarated!

If I'd known what would happen in that jungle, I would have burned the tickets.

I'll skip ahead to actually being there, seeing as nothing else out of the ordinary occurred on the journey, or in the final days leading up to our departure: Bdubs drove us to the airport in the rattling tin can he calls a car, and we boarded with the ecology group. We flew in relative silence, though the excitement buzzing from all of us on that plane perforated every pore of my skin in something like a heady, intoxicating rush that I could practically drink from the recycled air.

Bdubs was the happiest I'd ever seen him, and little did I know that it would be his happiest — ever.

I say that. I'll expand on it later.

We made our camp separately from the ecology folks, who trekked a couple of miles into the denser jungle to make their findings; instead we found a clearing a little ways off the more trodden path, and put up tent rods and made campfire and set about exploring.

None of us strayed too far without letting anyone else know where, and when, and what time to return. And for Doc and Beef and I, that was fine! Settling into the lifestyle became easy enough. We'd have to get used to it regardless, seeing as there would be another three days spent in that place.

So, for the first two evenings, we enjoyed ourselves. Nothing struck me as peculiar, then, so I won't waste time explaining how for forty-eight hours, our minds were drawn away from the monotony of student work, and distracted from the looming exams which determined whether the past three years of our lives had been worth it. An opportunity like this was not one to turn down, Bdubs had told us, and at the time no-one could see anything to fault him.

Everything changed on that last night.

The sky was heavy and tinged with the threat of a storm, thick clouds billowing and rumbling over the horizon. Fat raindrops spattered onto the ground and shook the fabric of our tents. We stubbed out the fire and retreated into the relative security of our sleeping bags. Slumber fell easily, don't get me wrong, but throughout all of that, some strange pang twisted in my gut. I now know it was a warning.

I slept until some time in the early morning, when the storm had growled over us and moved on, drawing the electric stench of petrichor from the mulchy earth in its wake.

At first I didn't know why I had awoken. Then the second scream came, and every fibre of my being jolted into motion, blood vessels rippling and pounding beneath my skin, that in that moment felt no thicker than paper. The others were too far away, and I dared not call out.

So I sat up, and peered through the flap of my tent. Never had I regretted doing something more, in my entire life. It still shakes me today.

About twenty metres from the opening of my tent, at the edge of the clearing, where buttressed trees shot upwards from the surrounding dank earth, something moved. I knew at once it was not an animal, or a creeper caught by the wind, because I could see it writhing and clicking like the exoskeleton of some beetle, two burning points of light set deep into a skull like sunken pits, and a limb that bent in three separate places. Long, slender fingers gouged grooves into the tree bark.

And I swear, beyond anything, that it looked back at me.

That was when I screamed. A light flickered on in Beef's tent, and the two heavy sleepers woke up.

It took an astoundingly long time to realise that there were only three of us. Bdubs' sleeping bag was ruffled and the front of his tent was torn to flags. Doc started to cry. Doc never cries, but I remember it as clear as yesterday: him clutching my pale wrist, tears slipping down the bridge of his nose as he muttered and cursed to himself.

By morning Bdubs had not returned. We registered a missing persons report. The ecology trip closed, and we were sent back on the nearest flight as the area was searched.

Nothing.

Not even a footprint, or a shred of cloth.

I still can't quite believe any of this happened. You can ask Doc or Beef, and they'll tell you the same story up to this point. Aside from the face in the jungle, there's nothing supernatural about this disappearance. Probably got taken by a jaguar or some similar predator, and I was hallucinating from the shock. I've heard it all before.

Then explain this.

The incident turns twenty years old in a couple of months. We've all graduated and moved on, processed our grief, parted ways. None of us could stand to see each other without the negative memories attached. And Bdubs is gone, reduced to merely a figment of our past.

That's the part I can't come to terms with, and even more so, I know that he isn't gone.

Yesterday, I swear, beyond anything I can begin to comprehend, *I saw him*.

He was little more than a silhouette, but unmistakably him: from the pinch of his cheekbones to the sink of his shoulders, I saw him in the back of a crowd. *I am not mistaken*.

Do not chalk this up to ghosts of past trauma. He was real, and material, barged aside by the throng of people yet not seeming to waver from his spot. And he saw me, too: just as the creature's eyes fixed me so tightly back in the jungle, Bdubs held my gaze through the mass of commuters and families, burning brighter than the flame of any candle.

And still, as Bdubs forced his way towards me through the bustling crowd, I remained frozen to the spot, feet glued to the asphalt with the cold, prickling horror that seeped through the marrows of my bones.

As Bdubs approached, it only reinforced my fears. He looked identical, don't get me wrong — I was sure that this was Bdubs, the person we had abandoned in the jungle twenty years prior. But as he drew closer, weaving his way towards me with the slink and litheness of a hunter, I could finally look at his face, and the eyes which had so struck me.

He hugged me tight before I had a chance to react.

This may seem innocuous enough, but Bdubs knows — knew — more than anything about my aversion to contact. As the most extroverted of our little group, he was considerate enough to ensure we felt comfortable in whatever party or meeting before carrying on his own way. Bdubs never even got too *close* to me without asking whether I was fine with it.

It was a rarity that I was even *out* at such peak people-crush, but I'd bundled myself up in my mask and gloves and told myself that *it would be fine*.

Never had I wished more bitterly to go back, to pretend that Bdubs was twenty-years *dead*.

That would have been preferable to experiencing what happened after.

I'd gingerly pressed my arms around his shoulders, onto the firm plate of his scapula, when something beneath his skin *shifted*.

I pulled back instantly, but Bdubs' arms were still laced over my spine. With a growing sense of revulsion and icy dread, I began to see the skin of his neck twitching and pulsing, as if being

kneaded from the inside. My pulse began to race. I tried to prise Bdubs off me, but his fingers remained locked over the hump of my back with a force stronger than I'd ever thought possible of him.

Now I realise that this was not the Bdubs we had left to rot. That person had died twenty years ago, swallowed up by the grabbing branches and bones turned to mulch by the decomposers on the forest floor.

Then I saw it.

A single, green tendril laced its way from the hem of his sweatshirt, winding up the column of his neck and digging barbed hooks into his soft flesh, until it simply disappeared below the jut of his chin.

Not disappeared.

It *entered* the skin, fusing with the hole it had forced itself into, tugging Bdubs' head this way and that like a marionette.

I couldn't tell where on his hairline were the dark strands I was accustomed to, and where were patches of lichen and moss, crawling deeper onto his scalp and leaking onto his forehead. His skin gaped in thin, sagging wounds, and from them poked shoots and leaves and white, straggly roots like maggots.

Now I could see him fully, his face was *writhing* like a tangle of live, hissing wires in a loose sack of flesh.

I would have screamed or thrown up if it hadn't been in public. With a final burst of superhuman strength, I tore Bdubs' hands from my back. I barely swallowed back the choke of revulsion at the dark vines retracting into the tips of his fingers, swaying slowly, dripping a dark, viscous liquid that could have been blood had I cared to look any closer.

I did vomit, once I got home.

And I didn't tell Doc or Beef. I didn't even tell Pungence, Bdubs' brother. I thought it best that they'd dealt with their grief and would not care for bringing up the matter again. They'd moved on, and I wished that I could too.

Grian

Statement ends.

The details that Mr. Lab has provided certainly match up with missing person reports of the time, including one regarding Bdubs Ossent, who supposedly vanished at midnight on the 14th July, 2000. I've sent Impulse to collect statements from the others mentioned in this statement, namely Doc, Beef and Pungence Ossent, and he'll soon return with any relevant information.

One student did go missing on a college field trip at this time, though it does not state the precise location of the rainforest.

Another detail to add here: in the area of the rainforest which they camped, a camera trap recorded footage of the time just before Bdubs went missing — no visuals, but the audio is... disturbing, to say the least. I'll play it here.

[CLICK]

[SWAYING TREES AND THE HUM AND CHATTER OF INSECTS. A VOICE THAT IS NOT BDUBS' ITERATES "WELCOME, WELCOME," IN A LOW, RASPING TONE. THIS REPEATS FOR APPROXIMATELY A MINUTE UNTIL A SCREAM IS HEARD. THE AUDIO ABRUPTLY STOPS.]

[CLICK]

I am unsure if any follow-up is possible with such an event, but I could ask Impulse to... dig a little deeper, shall we say.

End recording.

[CLICK]

End Notes

Related entities: The Corruption, the Stranger (minor)

I actually thought of Corruption!Bdubs *before* seeing chrisin's masterlist of entities and hermits, but it happened to fit, so... yeah!

This is an experiment in style for me, as I tend not to write in 1st person. Like. ever. But I thought I'd try it, and I believe it turned out well?

Not sure how well character voices read, particularly as this was a written statement then being read out, but I hope nothing was too OOC?

As always, thank you ever so much for reading, and comments and kudos mean the world!

I might try another of these in the near future, depending on how inspiration strikes :]

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!