

Malevolent Maine

Episode 20: Cinema Nocturna

Malevolent Maine is a horror podcast, and may contain material not suitable for all audiences. Listener discretion is advised.

INTRO

This is Malevolent Maine.

Guys, what was that?

I saw it with my own eyes

No, seriously, what was that?

It's just not scientifically possible.

I can't explain it.

Oh my God. Oh my God. Oh my God.

This stuff is wild, man. It's real wild.

But... what was that?

INTRO:

This is it. The season finale. We want to thank you all so much for supporting our show. When we started this we had no idea how quickly we would grow. It's been a blast bringing you our stories every few weeks, and we couldn't ask for better fans. From chatting with us on social media, to buying our t-shirts, to joining the Malevolent Mob, you've been amazing and there with us for every step of the journey. We're wrapping up season

one, but we're not going anywhere, so check our merch store where we're adding new designs, join our Patreon at www.patreon.com/malevolentmaine.com, and be on the look out - you never know when we'll release some bonus material. Again, thank you for all of your support. Remember, if you encounter something strange that you just can't explain, contact us. We believe you.

The house lights go down and for a moment you can't see anything. There are people around you, you know that, but suddenly you're sure you're all alone in the dark. There's a low murmur that could be the hushed whispers of your fellow guests... or it could be the insane chanting of some dark religion. Suddenly, a bright light illuminates the screen ahead in front of you. Strange images start splashing across the screen moving faster and faster. What is it you're seeing... and what is it doing to your mind?

This is Malevolent Maine.

Lights. Camera. Action, MMsers. Today's story is a strange one, and one that we here at Malevolent Maine can say we personally partook in. You may have heard rumors of something called the Cinema Nocturna. It appears to be a midnight viewing of some obscure arthouse-style films. We've heard rumors of them popping up in several different towns and cities across the state: Westbrook, Auburn, Bangor.

We were contacted by a man who wanted us to call him Jim. It is not his real name, but he didn't want to share that on our show. Jim is a senior at the University of Maine at Farmington and he told us the story of a night he and his friend, Abraham experienced last May.

He said it was right before school got out for the semester. He said it was a quiet Saturday night, but he and Abraham were looking for something to do. They had a few drinks at Jim's

apartment on Water Street, then they hit up one of the bars in town that was friendly to college students. Some time around around eleven o'clock, the two friends decided to leave and find a party somewhere just off campus.

As Jim tells it, they were fairly inebriated already, and decided to walk. From the bar it was just a short hike across campus to where the party supposedly was, and the two men thought the fresh air would do them good. As they were crossing one of the parking lots, they saw a light on in the Roberts Learning Center.

There were several cars in the parking lot and Jim said he saw a strange man walk in through a side entrance. Jim told us the man was short, oddly short, but that he wore a top hat that seemed two feet tall. He also wore a suit with long tails trailing behind it. Jim says it might have been the alcohol, but he's sure he saw this strange man.

Intrigued, the two friends decided to stop into the building to see what was going on. It was strange to see the campus building open so late. They followed the strange man in through the side door, which was unlocked. By the time they got in, the short man was nowhere to be found. It was easy to figure out where he went, a series of lights in the ceiling were on, leading them down the hall.

Jim says at this point they were quite drunk and they stumbled down the hallway, taking rights and lefts as the lights led them on. Neither one of them were familiar with the lower levels of the Roberts building, and soon they became quite lost.

"I had no idea where we were," he told us. "I got all turned around. I know I had been drinking, but I don't think the basement of Roberts is that big."

At one point the tile floor seemed to change, becoming a darker, older style. The hallways seemed tighter, more claustrophobic. Neither man knew where they were, but at this point they felt

the urge to keep going. Finally the hallway, and the dim lights came to an end at a metal door set in the brick wall. It looked heavy and thick, and there was a small window set in the door with a mesh screen over it and a sliding panel.

"We tried the door," Jim told us, "but it was locked." They knocked, their fists booming on the metal.

The panel slid back and a pair of eyes peered out at them. It seemed to study them for a second, moving back and forth between the two men, then the panel slammed shut. A second later, the door opened. The room beyond was almost completely pitch black.

According to Jim, a tall, thin man dressed in a tuxedo stood in the doorway, holding a lit candle. The man's face was pale and thin, with deep shadows beneath his eyes. The candlelight reflected off his bald skull. The man smiled at them and told them he had been waiting for them. He said he was glad they had arrived.

"We didn't know what he meant by that, but we laughed," Jim told us.

Then the man ushered Jim and Abraham through the door. Beyond was another hallway, this one darkened. The thin man led them down it, then into a room.

At first, the friends couldn't see anything because it was too dark, but as their eyes adjusted they saw the large room was set up like a movie theater. There was a white screen set up at one end of the room and maybe one hundred black wooden chairs set up in rows. Jim says there were other people scattered around the room sitting in small groups of twos and threes.

The patrons appeared to be wearing all black and were staring up at the blank, dark screen. The tall man ushered Jim and Abraham to some empty seats and told them to get ready for the show. He was. Back a moment later, offering them glasses of what appeared to be red wine from a silver tray.

"We were trying to get to a party, but we found this little artsy movie night," Jim said. "We were just drunk enough to think it might be kind of funny, and besides, they were giving out free wine."

Jim told us the wine was thick and bitter, and it didn't taste like any wine he had ever had before, but he thought nothing of it. He assumed they were at some midnight showing off some art student's film, and they were trying to make it fancy.

All of a sudden the light on the projector came on and the room filled with pale light. Jim thought to look around to see if recognized anyone from campus, but before he could, the tall, thin man was standing in front of the screen.

He welcomed them to the Cinema Nocturna and clapped his hands twice. Suddenly the room went dark for a second before the film began.

Jim couldn't describe the film to us. He said there were lots of disjointed images and short clips. He said it was random and kept flickering to new scenes. He told us as they watched a horrible sound track began. He said it sounded like screeching violins playing a dozen different songs.

Jim began to feel sick. He thought it might have been the wine or perhaps all of the drinks he'd consumed. He tried to get Abraham's attention, to tell him they had to leave, but his friend seemed entranced with the strange film. Everyone else was staring up at the screen as well.

"I began to feel real weird," Jim said. "Like something inside my head was... was growing," he told us. "I had to get out of there. I thought I was going to be sick. So I... I just got up and hurried out."

Jim staggered out of the cinema, bouncing off the walls. After what felt like a long time he found himself outside. He was sick

in the grass beside the door. He said he leaned back against the cool brick and closed his eyes, trying to gather himself. The next thing he knew, it was morning and he was lying on the dewy grass.

Jim assumed he had just passed out and that Abraham hadn't been able to find him. He tried to call his friend, but got no response. He went back to his apartment, but there was no sign of Abraham. Finally, that afternoon, Jim went back to the Roberts Learning Center, hoping to find some sign of what had gone on the night before.

Jim says he went down into the basement, but couldn't remember where they had gone. He said he walked along the halls, but none of them seemed familiar.

In the end, Jim was forced to give up the search for his friend. He filed a police report, but at the time of this episode no sign of Abraham Nash has been discovered.

Jim was questioned, but eventually dismissed as a person of interest. He told us he was sure they were in the Roberts Learning Center that night. He says he remembers it all up until he staggered out of the building and collapsed, though he admits everything seems dull and foggy around the edges. "It's like a bad dream," he told us.

This wasn't the first story we had heard about the so-called Cinema Nocturna. So Lucas decided to see if he could uncover anything else about these strange film nights.

LUCAS: There isn't much out there, to be honest. There are several smaller websites, but none of them seem connected to these pop up movie nights. I did find several web forums dedicated to the paranormal with some posts mentioning them, but most of these seemed to be asking questions, having a similar experience as Jim. All of the stories seem similar, though locations changed. Someone accidentally stumbled upon the Cinema Nocturna, saw part of the film

being presented, but grew sick. They managed to make their way out of the theater, but afterwards weren't able to find it again. This seems to occur all over New England, but the oldest sighting appears to be in Portland in late 2012. One interesting thing to note is that none of the witnesses have ever seen the entire film. Every one of them described disturbing scenes, but none of them have been the same. It's hard to tell whether this is one long, disturbing film... or a series of them.

It seemed our investigation might be at an end, and our episode would focus on describing the different scenes various people have claimed to see. But then, one day in October we received a mysterious call at our office. Our intern Mark was manning the front desk that day and took the call.

MARK: I knew right away something was off with the call. To be honest, most people who call seem more than ready to tell their story. I mean, not too many people call paranormal investigators unless they have something to talk about. I've found that most people that contact us have some incredible story that no one thinks is true. They're looking for someone to believe them and when they contact us, it all comes spilling out. This call was different from the start.

We're going to play the call for you now in its entirety:

MARK: Malevolent Maine. How can we help you?

CALLER: ... [deep breathing]

MARK: Hello?

CALLER: ... [deep breathing]

MARK: Hello? Is anyone there? Alright, I'm hanging up.

CALLER[in a disguised voice]: Tomorrow night. Midnight. 129
[beep] Street.

MARK: What? What is this?

CALLER: ...

MARK: Who is this?

CALLER: Cinema Nocturna

[Phone clicks]

A quick search revealed the address was to an empty building in Biddeford. We've opted not to reveal the exact location at the behest of the building's landlord who appears to be unconnected to the Cinema Nocturna and the events that followed.

Biddeford is the commercial center of York County at the southern end of Maine. It is one of the oldest European settlements in the United States, a former mill town working to rebrand itself. The address we received was a white brick building on a side street in the downtown area. Records indicate it had once been a hair salon, a lawyer's office, a record store, and at one point, a hatter's shop. It had been vacant for the past two years and the current owner, an out of state investment group, was looking to lease it.

As far as we could tell the building has never been used as a movie theater. No one that we contacted believed it had any prior connection to the *Cinema Nocturna*. This appeared to be a completely random location.

And yet, we couldn't help but feel that maybe this was something more. We had been researching the *Cinema Nocturna* and out of the blue received a call presumably inviting us to a midnight showing. This felt like more than a mere coincidence.

Here's Tom to elaborate.

TOM: We called a team meeting and the four of us decided that we should go to the location, all of us together. If it really was the *Cinema Nocturna*, we thought it best to stick together. We knew the stories of missing persons and wanted to make sure we would be safe.

The next night, we parked our car not far from the location we received in the phone call. We parked in a well-lit area, locked the car, and walked back along the sidewalk.

The building was dark and seemingly empty. The front door was locked and the storefront windows were soaped over. We knocked on the door, but no one answered. We were about to give up and assume we had been pranked, when we checked the side of the building.

Along a small side street, we discovered a single yellow light beneath a deep purple awning. A set of stairs went down below the street to a basement level. At the bottom of the stairs was a steel door with a paneled mesh window set at eye-level. We didn't see anyone coming in or out from the entrance, and after a moment's discussion, we decided to descend and try the side door.

The panel slid back almost immediately after we knocked. A pair of shifty eyes studied us for a moment, then the panel slid shut and the door opened.

LUCAS: It was the tall, bald man Jim had described to us in his story. There was no doubt about it. He was wearing a tuxedo and held a single white candle in his hand. "We've been expecting you," he said to us and smiled. I can't verify this, and I don't know if any of the others saw it, but I swear his teeth were filed to points.

TOM: His smile was too big. Like he had too many teeth crammed in his mouth.

MARK: His teeth were brown. Not coffee-stained, but rotten brown.

LUCAS: The man turned then and walked off into the darkened interior. We didn't say anything, but we followed him.

We followed the man through a series of dark and twisting hallways. It was much like Jim had described to us. The basement felt labyrinthine and much larger than the exterior indicated. Eventually we were led to a small room. It was exactly as Jim described it, a large silver screen on one wall, a hundred wooden chairs arranged in small clusters.

TOM: I looked around. There were quite a few people in the chairs. It was hard to make out what they looked like because it was so dark. They were all wearing black and that didn't help either. The best I can describe it is like... did you ever see Batman Returns? The Tim Burton one, with Danny Devito as the Penguin? Everyone was dressed like that. Like their clothes were outdated, but also like a caricature of gothic style. I don't know. It's hard to explain.

MARK: I'm pretty sure I saw the short man with the tall top hat Jim said he saw. I think he saw me and whispered something to a lady he was sitting next to.

Looking back, the room was dimly lit, but I am unsure how. We didn't see any light sources, but there was a dim glow that partially illuminated the dark. After showing us to our seats the tall man returned with a tray of wine glasses. Remembering Jim's story and the countless others we had heard of missing people, we wisely didn't consume the liquid.

TOM: I drank it. I mean, just a sip. It was thick, like cough syrup, but it was bitter. Almost coppery.

After a few moments, the dim light went out. Then the bright light of the projector went on and our host, the tall, thin man, welcomed us to the *Cinema Nocturna*.

Soon after the film started. It was black and white. It looked like 35 MM. It started with several flickering images and rough jump cuts between seemingly unconnected scenes. Not all of them were disturbing, but they were... odd. They didn't seem to make sense and each scene seemed *wrong* in some way. It felt off, like we were watching a film in reverse or as if the footage had been flipped horizontally.

After we decided to have our producer Megan ask us about the film. She interviewed us individually and we didn't talk about what we had seen with each other until after the interviews. We're going to play them for you now.

MEGAN: Alright, Lucas, tell me about the film.

LUCAS: It started totally black. Then there was a pinprick of white in the center of the screen. The camera slowly panned in and the white dot was revealed to be a human skull. The camera zoomed in until it filled the screen. All of a sudden the naked forms of a man and a woman started scurrying out of the eye sockets. They moved in jerking, hectic motions clinging to the surface of the skull. They were crawling like flies over the skull, going in and out of the eyes, the nose, and the mouth. They kept twining in and out and all over the skull. It was grotesque, but strangely hypnotic. Then the camera started pulling back until everything shrank back to a pinprick again.

MEGAN: Mark, you watched the film. What did you see?

MARK: So the lights went out and when the film started there was an image of a young girl on the screen. It was just her, staring at the camera. It felt like she was staring at me. Then, right there, she started aging. The camera didn't cut or anything, but it was like time lapse.

She was probably like seven or eight when it started, but soon she was fifteen. Then twenty. At some point I began to think the girl - now a woman - looked like my grandmother. And she kept aging. Soon she was middle aged, and - I know this sounds crazy - but I know it was my grandmother. It was definitely her, and as the film kept rolling she got older and older. Her hair went from dark brown to gray. Wrinkles appeared at the corners of her eyes and mouth. Then her hair got thin and started to fall out. Her eyes sunk deep in her face and her skin grew taut. She kept aging. She got older and older. She was seventy, eighty, a hundred. And she kept going. She never blinked, just kept looking straight at me. She was a hundred and fifty and she kept getting older. She was ancient. It was ... it was horrible.

MEGAN: Ok, Tom. Tell me what you saw that night.

TOM: The screen flashed to a cluster of reeds. Like a whole field of them. I don't know how to describe it. They were swaying in the wind, moving back and forth slowly. That's it. Nothing else. At least, that's what I thought at first. The more I watched though, the more I was sure I could see faces in the reeds. Just an eye here or half a mouth there. It was like there were people hiding in the reeds, just out of sight. The more I watched, I got this sick feeling in my stomach, like something was wrong. And... Listen, this part is crazy. I know there wasn't any sound. Just the gentle rustle of the wind, but... but I swear I could hear the people hiding in the reeds. They were whispering and giggling. I think they were kids...oh God... I think they were dead kids.

MEGAN: Chris, can you tell me what you saw at the *Cinema Nocturna*?

CHRIS: Did you talk to the others about what they saw?

MEGAN: I did.

CHRIS: Was it... was it disturbing?

MEGAN: Can you just tell us what you saw?

So... the scene opened with a man in a black suit walking his dog. He was skipping down the road with what I think was a German Shepard on a leash. It was a real Charlie Chaplin style shot. Then he was home feeding the dog and patting him on the head in that overly exaggerated manner of old time movies. Then it cut to a scene where the dog came into the room and the man was lying on the floor, dead. The dog sniffed him for a few minutes, then it started chewing on the man's stomach. He's biting and pulling at strands of what I can only imagine are his intestines. And then... and then... the dog starts burrowing inside the man's chest cavity. First his head disappears, then his front legs so all you can see is the dog's hindquarters. Finally the dog disappears all together, it has crawled completely inside its former master. Everything was still and silent for a moment, the corpse laying there in a spreading pool of his own blood. Then the man sits up and the camera zooms in on his face. Except the dog's eyes are staring out where his used to be. The dog has crawled inside the man and is now controlling his body or has become him or... I don't know. It's impossible to explain, but it was one of the most terrible things I've ever seen. That's when I couldn't stand it anymore. I broke for the door.

Four men sitting next to each other watching the same film, all four of us seeing something completely different. It's impossible to explain, and yet so much from that night seemed impossible. A lot of that night now seems like a dream. Or like it happened to someone else. I remember seeing the dog, just like Mark remembers seeing his aging grandmother, or Lucas remembers the people crawling over the skull.

But it reached a point for all of us when we simply couldn't handle the images flashing across the scene. Here's Lucas talking about how he felt.

LUCAS: I felt sick to my stomach. Like someone kept stabbing me over and over again. My head was swimming and my eyes started to cross. I was dizzy and nauseous and when I saw Chris stand up, I knew I had to follow him. I had to get out of there. I grabbed Mark and Tom and pulled them after me.

None of us can accurately remember how we got out of the impromptu theater. We stumbled down hallways that twisted and turned at impossible angles.

MARK: I remember at one point, I was literally bouncing off the walls, crashing from one side of a dark hall to the other. It felt like being severely intoxicated or being delirious. I remember Lucas wouldn't let go of my arm. He kept pulling me away from that terrible movie.

At some point we stumbled out onto the street. The air felt cold and refreshing after being trapped in that underground theater. One of us, I think it was Mark, threw up. I remember leaning back against the wall, letting my knees buckle and sliding down the cold brick.

The next thing I knew it was morning. I was around the back of the building, leaning against an empty dumpster.

LUCAS: I don't remember getting into the car, but I woke up in the back seat. I was covered in a cold sweat, but other than that I was fine. Mark was in the passenger seat, buckled in. We found one of his shoes just outside the car and another one three buildings down, wedged into the grate of a storm drain.

We were weak and tired, but unharmed. There was just one problem: there was no sign of Tom.

Panic set in as we began to search for him. This had been a real possibility, and a risk we had known about before we had come to the *Cinema Nocturna*, but it was one we hadn't believed would

happen to us. We searched the area, but there was no trace. The building where we had watched the strange film was locked, but even after we finally called the police and the owner of the building and were able to get inside, we couldn't find him. Tom had simply vanished.

We called and texted him multiple times, but his phone was either off or the battery was dead. We filed a missing person report with the Biddeford police. Unlike the TV shows which usually depict a 24 or 48 hour waiting period, there is no actual waiting period. In fact, in most cases it is far better to report the missing person immediately. We did our best to describe the tall, thin man and the circumstances that led up to his disappearance. The police seemed skeptical, but assured us they would do the best they could. With heavy hearts we returned to our homes, worried for our missing friend.

Two days later I received a call on my cellphone. As soon as I saw the number I began recording. We're going to play the call for you now:

CHRIS: Hello?

TOM: Chris?

CHRIS: Jesus! Tom, is that you? Are you okay?

TOM: Yeah, yeah. I'm okay. I'm alright.

CHRIS: Where the hell are you? What happened?

TOM: I don't know. I woke up outside a gas station. My head is killing me, but I'm okay.

CHRIS: Where are you?

TOM: Augusta. I think.

Tom was cleared medically - there was nothing wrong with him. And yet, he couldn't explain the missing two days. Here he is later, talking about it:

TOM: The last thing I remember, we were trying to get out. The hallways were dark and long. Impossibly long. I remember thinking we weren't in a basement but a cave. At one point my hand slipped out of Lucas's and I did my best to keep up. I watched them turn a corner and when I got there they were gone.

We also noticed the seeming contradiction in Tom's story. If the hallways were dark how could he see us? But all of us, without any hesitation, agreed with that description. There were no lights in the halls, no windows, they were totally dark, however each of us remembers being able to see vague shapes and outlines, as if there were a light source somewhere. None of us can explain it, but that's how we recall that rapid flight from the theater.

No one knows how Tom got to Augusta. It is possible he stumbled out into the dark, walked off down the street, and somehow got a ride to the state's capital. His phone records indicate he didn't make any calls or texts from the moment we arrived at the Cinema Nocturna until he called me two days later. His credit and debit cards show no charges made in that time period either. It's almost impossible he walked the entire distance, especially with no memory whatsoever, and he displayed none of the signs of exhaustion and exposure one would expect from spending time out in the Maine autumn elements. Is it possible then, someone from inside the cinema found him and brought him along with them? Tom seems to believe so.

TOM: It's hard to remember what happened that night. Somethings I know couldn't have happened, and others feel like they happened to someone else. At one point, I remember hearing someone whispering in my ear. It wasn't any of the guys. I know that. It sounded like it was right in my ear. In my head. And I felt someone guiding me. The

next thing I remember I was waking up in the back of that gas station in Augusta.

So what exactly is the *Cinema Nocturna*? That's up for debate.

TOM: If you had asked me when this all started I would have said there's nothing paranormal about it. It's some people who like to dress up in goth clothes, take some mild hallucinogens, and watch weird films. Maybe they kidnap people, but nothing supernatural. But after what we went through... I don't know.

MARK: One of the theories is that they're aliens, and this is all part of some sort of experiment they're running on us.

LUCAS: Another of the leading theories is that these beings that gather for the midnight showings are actually vampires or at least some form of parasitic creature. They invite or entice guests to the *Cinema Nocturna* and somehow drain the life from them.

Whatever the *Cinema Nocturna* is, they appear to be quite dangerous. They have been known to kidnap victims and no trace of them has ever been seen again. We don't know why Tom was allowed to escape, or if escape is even the right word. Is it possible they let him go for some unknown reason?

And then there's the mysterious phone call we received. Who made the call and why did they want us - paranormal investigators to go there? Were they hoping we would shine some light on the dangers of this traveling show or were they trying to trap us in the *Cinema Nocturna*?

We may never know. The film we all watched that night, all four of us sitting right next to each other, appeared different to each of us, or at least the parts that we can remember appear to be completely different. If there is something supernatural about the film itself, we have no idea what it is. Only that it

contains a dangerous hypnotic pull to those who see it and the disturbing scenes we witnessed still haven't left our nightmares.

We have returned to the building where we watched that strange film several times since that night. It remains quite empty. We were able to tour the inside in the presence of the building's facility manager. The basement where we were led by that strange, tall man, is almost completely open. There is a small office space, not much larger than a shed, but it, like the rest of the big open area, was almost completely empty. The purple awning over the lower level door was gone and no one connected with the building remembers there ever having been such an awning. The *Cinema Nocturna*, that we are all one hundred percent certain was there that night, has completely vanished without a trace.

As of the time of this episode we have not received any reports of it appearing anywhere else in the state. Has the *Cinema Nocturna* left the area, sated on whatever energy they consume from their victims? Could Tom have been their final offering, just a final top off before they returned from whatever netherrealm they hail from?

Or could they perhaps be lying in wait, hiding and resting only to remerge when we least expect it?

We can't say for sure, but, if you are out walking the streets late at night, and see a tall, thin man gesturing you into a darkened theater, we suggest you turn around and run away as quickly as you can.

Just one last note before we go. When we started this podcast we had no idea how far it would go. I would be remiss if I didn't thank my co-workers and friends. Lucas, Tom, Mark, and Megan - you guys have done an amazing job investigating the odd, the strange, the unexplained. This podcast wouldn't exist without them. Thank you guys for all your hard work.

We're going to take a little break to catch up on some investigations. We've got a backlog of unexplained cases to look into. We've told a lot of stories about malevolent forces at work here in Maine, but there are still more things lurking in the shadows. We'll be back soon for season 2, but in the meantime, keep your eyes open, your doors locked, and above all...

Stay safe out there, Maine.

Malevolent Maine is Lucas Knight, Lucas Wilson, and myself, Chris Estes.

If you'd like to read more about our investigations check out our website at malevolentmaine.blogspot.com/

While there, don't forget to check our merch store. And, if you're so inclined, support us on Patreon at patreon.com/malevolentmaine

Thank you for listening to Malevolent Maine.

And as always, stay safe out there, Maine.