

BREAKING NEWS>>>

FIRST FEW CHAPTERS

The shocking new thriller from Rex Richards

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<Midnight Friday>

The church has a back door that is always open, *just like a gay whore*, The New Prophet tells himself. It is, including its steeple, one of the highest buildings in this area of west London. An imposing gothic mass of sand coloured stone that is corpse grey this late at night. He walks up the path, tapping His Victorian walking cane on the wind lashed gravestones and stained glass windows, enjoying the sharp echoes. He skirts around the back of the building and finds the unlocked door. He steps into the church. It feels cavernous inside, the dark stale air making it more like a forgotten entrance to hell than a house of God. Then He drifts through the vestry and up the stairs to the belfry.

There's a dankness to the warm air. A faint smell of rot. In the belfry are four snake-like bell ropes, bat black in the midnight light. Behind them is a ladder leading to a trapdoor in the ceiling. It is a maintenance hatch giving access to the four giant bronze bells that hang there. They are motionless and silent now, but capable of unleashing a thunderous peal that once would have echoed across hundreds of rooftops bringing people to worship.

Behind the bells is a smaller ladder leading up to another trapdoor which in turn opens up access to the top of the steeple. And at the top of this final ladder is a platform and window offering spectacular views out over the decaying magnificence of Victorian London.

He opens the window and leans outside, aware of the caress of the autumn breeze. An infinite cascade of city light lies before him. The rusty glow of shielded streetlights mingles with the urgent flashes of prowling cabs looking for revelers who missed the last Tube. It is a clear night. For a few moments He allows the moon to bathe Him in purity and splendour. He holds His Victorian walking cane by its black polished wooden shaft and

grasps the simple silver rounded end with His other hand. He twists it. The mechanism clicks, revealing the hidden blade within. He slides the swordstick free out to catch the moonlight. An intricate carving of a dragon breathing fire twists down the wicked slender blade. He feels potent beyond measure.

For a second He thinks he sees a flash of light from behind the bushes which are slowly drowning the gravestones at the edge of the graveyard.

The Heat, the all-powerful living fire that swirls and whirls and burns within Him is whispering in His mind, telling Him there is nothing to worry about. He listens. It tells Him to believe in His Destiny and He feels safe and strong again. The Heat floods through Him, sending tendrils of fire through his veins. He opens His mouth and He sees yellow and green flames lick out of it, bursting out and into the night sky. He looks at the flames as they cavort in the air around Him, marveling at the power and beauty of The Heat and He feels humbled by it.

He remembers the time of His creation. When the Heat first formed Him inside the body of the Other. He remembers how He slowly grew inside the mind of the Other, how He hid from the Other's conscious mind, how He slowly formed, guided and encouraged by The Heat until He was strong enough to take control of the Other's body and was free to walk, to talk, to run and to understand His Destiny.

And now He is formed and He has control of the Other's body whenever He wishes. He is a Holy Wind, a cleansing breeze that will bring a storm down on this world, using the fleshy carapace of the Other as His vehicle.

"Tonight is to be a special night." The Heat tells him, its voice a crackle of fire and spark that floods his mind. *"Tonight is where Your Destiny begins. The road to Godhood is open. The first part is the destruction of the innocent."*

<Park life>

Finally, the New Prophet climbs down from the church and starts to walk through the streets of London. These are the hours before dawn and people are sleeping. The late summer sun that has been baking the pavements still gives the air subtle warmth. There is a murmur of traffic in the background but otherwise it is silent save the tap of his cane. The Heat rises from the top of His head in plumes of fire.

He continues down the tight roads, past row upon row of Victorian red bricked terraced housing protected by hulking garbage waiting for morning collection. He sees red lights winking at Him from the walls, burglar alarms advertising their presence.

There is little or no movement on the street or in the frozen windows. Restless TV flickers from behind occasional curtains. But apart from those signs of dull life, the city is hibernating. He makes his way through more back streets before coming out on the exposed roundabout bordering His destination, Ravenscourt Park. He looks at the trees bordering the park. *Trees at night stop being friendly elements of nature pushing up for the sun and become claws to pull you down to hell*, He thinks to Himself. He climbs over the fence. There is a musty smell in the air, a faint sensation of what? Rain, earth, decay.

He wanders through the park, seeking... something. Dead concrete paths meander through the park, bordered by anaemic flowers. In the distance He can see, like broken bones from a crushed dinosaur, children's swings reflecting in the low light.

He has reached the centre of the park. Playing fields stretch off into the distance on either side, beaten and humiliated by years of ferocious play. As He approaches a large kidney shaped pond, the Heat prickles his skin. He sees tiny white flames shooting out from his fingers. He stops and looks into the water. He loves water. When He pours it into a glass and holds it to the light it is so pure, so completely transparent. But at night, water is black.

The night is almost silent. The faintest hum of distant traffic, the rustling of some urban animal as it scuttles under a bush. The Heat is around him, a playful child tugging at his sleeve. He holds his breath and closes his eyes, ready to let it guide Him. And then He hears it and smells it. A sound of a kiss, followed by a long drawn in breath and then exhalation. And the smell - sweet burning flowers.

He turns until He faces the sensation, opens His eyes and walks in that direction. He has to walk around the side of the pond, so the first time He sees her it is in profile. She is maybe twenty two. Sitting there, hugging her knees, back arched like a sleeping cat. Long blond hair, she is fragile, beautiful and innocent.

The Heat spins and jumps around inside Him, flames burst out from His eyes. He is now standing maybe three meters behind her. She won't see Him unless He wants her to. As she pulls back the joint she has rolled and breathes in the sickly marijuana smoke He can see she has a half smile on her face. She is rocking slightly and tapping her feet to an invisible beat. She exhales, a long smoky breath creating a miniature storm in the air which quickly

loses heart and dissipates. Then she sits back, propping herself up on her elbows, so He can see the outline of her body, her breasts. She is wearing a lilac blouse that stops above her belly, exposing the flesh.

He steps closer to her and sees she has a pierced bellybutton, surrounded by a tattoo of a sun's flames. He silently unscrews his swordstick and raises His arms, holding the blade above Him like an aerial. The Heat bursts from it, whirls in the air, drawing energy down and into Him. He lets it fill Him, make His soul a vapour. He drops the swordstick to the ground. It nestles silently in the grass.

He is close enough to reach out and brush her hair.

Which is what He does, gently like a leaf falling from the sky.

<Park love>

She nearly jumps out of her skin. For about a second. Then He smiles and offers a sheepish wave.

“Hi” He says. “Do you mind if I join you?”

He squats down to kneel beside her. Her eyes are like saucers. He guesses a mixture of ecstasy and weed. He knows if this were a normal night and He had stumbled across a girl in the park, there wouldn't be any hope of just diving into a conversation. She smiles back, a lopsided smile and He can see the slightly smudged lipstick and silver glitter on her cheeks. Her eyes are big, shaped like almonds and her long legs kick out in front of her signalling she's okay about it. He sees the ground is damp. He takes his coat off to lay it on the ground. He sits on it. She's wearing what looks like leather or PVC trousers, really tight and showing her off. But she's not afraid. The drugs and her natural innocence and trust have seen to that.

“Have you had a good night?” He asks.

“Mmmm, yeah it was great.” Her speech is lilting and serene, a northern accent. An angel on ecstasy. He knows she is sweeping up and down on the waves of her drugs, invisible music and lights still flitting in and out of her mind. “We went to Sugar Reef then got in to the Aquarium. It was cool. Apart from some sleazeball trying it on at the club. He was a div. Frances K was Djaying over from New York. We danced, like all night. It was pure wicked.”

“Frances Kevorkian? That's cool - so it was a nice mellow house vibe then?”

She looks surprised. “Yeah, it was tight,” she says and starts to hum a tune to herself “What about you, what you been up...” then she peers into his face, putting her hand on his arm. “Hey, don't I know you, you're... I know you from somewhere, don't I? What is it... God my head, I can't think.”

Inside He laughs. She is looking at the Other, seeing his face, seeing his body. But she has no idea, could not possibly understand who The New Prophet is, or know that He is a spirit inside The Other, capable of controlling The Other whenever He pleases.

And now, it suits Him to let the girl think she is talking to The Other. He can plunder his memories, his thoughts, use them to make the deception complete.

“Sorry, I'm not sure we've met.” The New Prophet says with a smile. He holds out His hand and introduces Himself as The Other. She giggles and takes it, awestruck. They hold hands a bit too long and He strokes the outside of her hand with His thumb before they let go. Her hand is warm. He pats the ground next to Him. “Why don't you sit down next to me. It's a bit wet now with all this dew.” She thinks that is okay and she shuffles over a bit and sits on the coat. “So what's your name?”

“Oh, I’m Star,” she says. “Named according to my mum after the night I was conceived on a beach in Egypt. She said she got a good view of the stars that night,” she giggles. “Mum and dad were probably the last of the hippy generation to give it all up. 1985 was a bit late for acid and long hair.”

He leans back. “Well we’ve got a good view of the stars tonight - not bad for London. Probably not a patch on an Egyptian night, but okay.”

She started humming a tune - Nights Over Egypt. “Yeah I love the stars,” she says dreamily. Her joint has gone out due to lack of attention, so He offers her a light. He always carries a light. She sparks it up, takes a big drag and hands it over. “So what’s it like being famous, then? Do you get people stopping you in the street a lot and stuff?”

“Quite a lot I suppose. It comes with the territory. But it isn’t always what you want.”

“Ah well that’s the price of fame, I guess, you’re public property.”

“That’s me, like a church, open all hours to anyone.”

“Shouldn’t that be a corner shop?”

“That’s me, overpriced and full of unhealthy crap.”

“Oh ha ha. I bet you get lots of love letters and that too, yeah?”

He laughs. “Well, I have to admit, I do get the odd one.”

She sat up now, more interested. “I had a terrible thing for James Blunt last year. It used to keep me up all night sometimes, but I didn’t go that far, sending him a letter. Tell me about the rude ones.”

“Are you sure?” He said, looking into her eyes. She nods, her eyes are glistening with the drugs. “Usually it’s lonely housewives, complaining about husbands who haven’t had sex with them for years, that kind of thing. A few of them send photos too.”

“Oh yeah, you get naked pictures?”

“Sure. There are one or two. Usually by email these days. What about you? Do you get naked pictures sent to you?”

“Ha ha, the closest is from my ex of him having a great time with some girl in the background on a beach in Australia. The tool.”

“It’s hot there.”

“Tell me about it. It’s fucking boiling. But there’s no ozone layer anymore so everyone gets burnt up.”

“Well, there’s nothing wrong with a bit of Heat.”

“Mmmm, yeah it’s great isn’t it?”

“So what about you, Star, what do you do? Student, or are you working?”

“Well we've finished at college now, I did a teachers training and I want to get into pre-school teaching. Nursery stuff.”

“I remember reading somewhere or something a while back that a kid's brain is developing at the highest rate from the ages of two to six. That you could stuff an unbelievable amount of knowledge in there, but most pre-school just doesn't do enough.”

“Yeah that's right. You really are a smarty pants. You know about DJs and you know about little kids too.”

“Well is there any difference between the two?”

He finds out about her evening. She has done a pill and nearly got off with her mate's boyfriend. She has been hassled by some bloke and there has nearly been a fight between him and her friends. She wants to move into teaching pre-school because of a work placement she did at college. She lives in The Grampians, an art deco block down the road. She comes here every week after clubbing. Her flatmate is crashed out, she went home hours ago.

The two of them lie there for an hour. Everything begins to take on a dreamlike quality. The New Prophet feels as if they are in a scene from a Monet painting. He is holding a joint and spacing out. She leans over Him murmuring to give it to her. He feels her hair drag across His neck and her breath. He raises His other hand up and it finds the curve of her hips and her waist. His hand rests on her warm flesh. He feels her pause and her breath quicken. He moves the joint a bit more out of her reach and she giggles and leans across Him again. They are perilously close to kissing.

So they do.

For a moment He thinks of the deception running through her mind, that in her innocence she thinks He is The Other, and does not know that his body is possessed by The New Prophet and that her innocence is here only to play a role in His Destiny. Then He rolls His tongue around the shape of her mouth and tickles the end of her tongue.

He kisses her neck and can feel her heartbeat pulsing under the skin. She groans and He feels her hand slide down His back. Then the Heat leaves him and floats up into the air above them. He can feel it expand into an immense ball of purple fire, then drop down over them, a bubble of energy enveloping them. There is a sudden urgency. It is out of both of their control. The New Prophet rolls His hand up inside Star's top, scratching lightly at her stomach, making her squirm and giggle. Her breasts are warm and full and as He pulls up her top and kisses them in the beckoning moonlight, He starts to become frighteningly aroused.

For now He just wants to make love to her, to try and bring her pleasure, see if she will reach the stars, to see the true depth of her innocence.

She is tugging at His belt, getting His trousers down and He is pulling at hers. Which are ridiculously tight. They both laugh as they tumble over and finally He frees her. They are almost naked. Her pierced belly button glints dully in the semi light. He is in His open shirt and underwear. He scoops her up in His arms and lays her down on her back on His coat.

He is careful to move His swordstick out of the way. He bends down and kisses her belly, taking the time to tug at her knickers with His teeth. He licks across her stomach and blows on the wet skin, which makes her shiver.

He pulls her knickers off to reveal blond hair, neatly shaved into a heart. She lies back and He glides a hand over her stomach and slides a finger into her. He feels her hand reach up and tug at His boxers, her fingers making their way in, pulling him towards her. He leans back, scrabbling in his spurned jacket for His wallet. He finds it and opens it to reveal a condom. He rips open the packet and she takes it off Him, unrolling it over Him, scratching Him lightly with painted nails.

He enters her and she slides her hands inside the back of His shirt and her nails graze His back and she pulls Him towards her, grunting in His ear. They move together slowly and He feels her passion rising, there is a musky scent in the air. Then He stops and pulls out and He can hear her questioning murmur and her hand finds Him again. He kisses her mouth, then her breasts, then down her ribcage, down her stomach, over the mound of hair and stops with her in His mouth. He enjoys the sweaty acid taste, the taste of the end of a night. He moves His tongue around it, darting occasionally into and out of her. He can feel her back arch and her nails dig into His back. He pulls His tongue away and transfers His attention to the inside of her thighs, kissing them. Then back to her centre, but this time with a tiny bit more pressure and she is moaning “fuck, fuck, I'm gonna come.” And she does.

He enters her again and feels His own orgasm coming almost immediately and as He comes the bubble of energy explodes, raining down in drops of flame, of pure power.

He stands up and looks down at her, deep in thought. A smile plays across her lips and He can see her happiness. She is lying there, relaxed, on her back. *She is such a lovely girl. Young and bold, unbeaten by the world, with it all in front of her. The very definition of the innocence I seek.* He reaches over and finds His swordstick. He looks at the blade. *No, using that on her before would have been wrong. He had to make sure, to invade and understand her, to make sure she was the one who would set the wheels of His Destiny in motion.*

The time was not then, but now.

He holds the blade up to the sky. Flames jump out from it and roar around him, twisting through the air as The Heat screams in a kaleidoscope of fire. For a second the flames take the shape of the dragon etched on the blade and He drops to his knees so He is kneeling between her still open thighs. He pulls the blade back, then suddenly pushes it into her, entering her the way He had done just minutes before.

He feels the blade as it cuts through her womb, up into her stomach then, pushing like a fury, putting all His weight behind it, He feels it move towards her heart. She is pushed back onto the damp grass and mud by the force and her eyes widen in surprise then shock. She tries to look and see what is happening and the pain begins to grip her and her life begins to leak away. She tries to get up, but she is pinned to the ground.

She searches His dark eyes. “What have you done?” It was a whisper, a sob.

“I've killed you.” He smiles back at her. A thousand tiny purple flames spurt from His eyes and spin around His head, a hurricane.

She looks at Him blankly. This can't be true. She hasn't even seen what has happened. He is a celebrity so she thought it was a good thing to do. But now she panics. What about her life? What about her choices? Where have they gone? The drugs aren't letting her mind accept it, but her body has no choice. Her attempts to scream do not work. She is too shocked. As she slips away He puts His head to her chest, to feel her wounded heart cease.

He grabs her, hugs her. He hears The Heat talking to Him, telling Him how well He has done, how His Destiny is moving closer how this step was so crucial. He can feel The Heat growing and becoming stronger as He hugs the dying girl. He feels her energy, her soul, leave her and enter The Heat, making it more powerful. He sees The Heat celebrate, sees the flames whirl and dance above His head. They lie like that for some minutes.

“And so the innocent one dies.” He whispers, then stands up. He pulls out the blade and looks at her stomach. He makes four swift slashes across it, two vertical, two horizontal, forming a rectangular shape. That is the mark of The Heat.

Then The New Prophet tidies up. He pulls her clothes together and bundles them up. Her wallet and mobile phone fall out of her pockets. He slips the mobile phone into His pocket. It is a Pay As You Go. He is already thinking of a use for it. He drags her across to the pond and after heaving her over the fence, rolls her into the water. He pushes her over one side of the pond where there is a weeping willow tree with branches that trail in the water. Now He just has to wait for the discovery to be made. Then He will begin His own evolution from one of three splintered souls, to the Unity of Godhood. For this is His Destiny, to become a God.

<9.58pm. Thursday>

Do you hear voices in your head?

“Prepare yourself, are you ready?”

There it was again, the voice. If someone told you they heard voices in their head you'd probably think they had lost the plot, a loony tunes.

“Thank you Jack, last few minutes now.” The voice continued. Although I heard voices in my head, I wasn't mad. I heard them four hours a day, five days a week. The majority of the time I only heard one voice. The pain of it was, it wasn't the sort of voice you would have wanted to have a conversation with in the pub or confide in, it was a rasping and scraping voice, an annoyingly excitable buzz which dispensed not cosmic wisdom, but relentless instructions.

“Nod, give me a signal please you are receiving me loud and clear.” I sighed, dutifully complied and replied by nodding my head. It always seemed to interrupt at the most inopportune moments - I had been thinking of anagrams for Mr. Osama Bin Laden and on the sheet of paper in front of me I had come up with:

slam on main beard

I was killing time by idly wondering whatever happened to old Bin Laden. Seeing as he was still allegedly Public Enemy Number One, I kept expecting him to be featured in the news, but he just wasn't interesting enough to make it in there anymore, not when we could frighten everyone with animal flus and economic disaster. I remembered the fuss over avian flu, followed up by swine flu. I was relieved the two hadn't combined - then pigs really might fly.

Where had Bin Laden ended up? Maybe somewhere in Pakistan or Afghanistan?

Imagine trying to run a business as a Taliban barber in Afghanistan. Talk about bad career moves. But if you did want to track Osama down, you could have done worse than look in places where corner shop sales for razors were spectacularly low but other essentials for cave living and suicide bombing were very high. Sales spikes to watch out for could include extra large shoes (for packing in explosives), compasses (to point the way to Mecca from the cave), candles (for dark nights in the cave) and subscriptions to Blockbusters video (for long nights in the cave).

So there I was, minding my own business and trying to find lateral ways to end the War on Terror and I kept getting interrupted by voices in my head. But I knew from previous experience it wouldn't help to complain.

"Two minutes Jack, two minutes. VT, are you ready? Victor, audio level check now please, c'mon, get your arse in gear." Just before going on air Max sounded like a girl. Under pressure his voice became nasal and reedy. Screeching through the miniature earpiece jammed in my left ear it ended up the verbal equivalent of nails scraping down a blackboard.

"Audio level is checked. Now Jack, remember you've got Alistair live item two, we will be doing the visual and audio prep with him during the VT for item one." Of course I knew we had Alistair live, for fuck's sake you stupid sod, we had done a rehearsal an hour ago, did he really think I was going to forget?

"Camera 1, 2 and 3, in position please. One minute and thirty to go."

The worst thing about it, was that I couldn't talk back without everyone else hearing. So there was nothing left to do, except sit in my chair, listen and wait. It was a comfortable, classically styled desk chair that had moulded itself to my shape over the last three years to the point where it was as natural to slip into as a favourite girl. In front of me in the darkness of the studio I saw a pudgy outline hunched behind his camera. That was Derek, Big D to his pals. Although he took a few minutes to squeeze his water balloon body in there, once in he had a touch as light as a fairy. Not that he was a fairy in the derogatory sexual sense. Far from it. He was a sexual rapier, if a morbidly obese one. I suppose you might call him a Love Blimp.

Above Big D was another cameraman, perched behind the controls of the crane camera maybe three meters up in the studio ceiling. That was Rod. From below and in the darkness Rod looked like some mad Victorian scientist in a demented laboratory chair, hovering above his patched together monster he was about to bring to life. Not that I was in need of a bolt of lightning to get me going, in fact I felt pretty damn alive.

It was actually quite hard to see much of what was going on beyond the cameramen. Burning white lights connected to the network of high steel beams shone down from the pitch black studio ceiling. Even though the studio was vast, I could still feel the heat of those miniature suns. There was a monitor in front of me, I could see myself on the screen, sitting there looking all officious and serious yet accessible. At first glance I thought I looked pretty good: short military style dark hair, cheekbones that a young Richard Gere would have been proud of, a slightly thin face that seemed wider on camera, dark blue eyes that suited the job just fine. I wasn't entirely sure of my ethnicity. I supposed I was Latin-ish somewhere back in time, perhaps Spanish? Every now and then drunken girls told me I looked like a pale Antonio Banderas, which was annoying, but hey, a good look. My dark grey suit and white

shirt and grapefruit coloured tie gave a professional effect. I practiced smiling, my teeth looked straight at this distance. I thanked heaven for the flattering effect of TV. My graying sideburns and slight belly, that any amount of cocaine and heart palpitations never seemed to be able to get rid of, were suitably disguised. I felt my hands were too small for TV and tried to draw attention away from them with a chunky Rolex and fancy cufflinks.

I was trying not to sniff too hard. I'd just done a line of coke that had looked like a dessicated snake, and now a sparkle of snot was threatening to pop its head out of my nose and say howdy. As a way of blotting out Max's voice, I was going through the list - politics, mass death and destruction, economic gloom, more death, showbiz and other assorted events such as death, death and more death. With some post-life status, i.e. death thrown in for good measure. Death in all its forms was my main contribution to the glory of your day. I glanced around the studio once more and took out a compact from my inside pocket and checked my reflection. Vain, I know, but the consequences of not being vain could be a disaster - millions of people would have stared at me with a runny nose as I tried to be serious.

As well as those two cameramen, we also had cameramen three and four, hunched behind their huge gleaming lenses. Such powerful machines. Capable of taking my image and sending it to the world. There they were, all of them patiently waiting for their chance to grab the light and by sucking my presence through their lenses, achieve some power over the watching world. Huge coils of cable ran across the floor, vast digital snakes that took the images and the words that I said and sent them like a virus to the watching world. I closed my eyes and visualised my audience out there. I wanted to open myself to them, engage them, draw them into the show.

As well as talking at me and everybody else in the room, I knew Max the childish genius was staring at me through the walls of the gallery. It was a darkened room which looked like the bastard crossbreed of an ancient spaceship from a seventies sci fi movie and the security room of drug dealer's mansion. There were numbered screens everywhere, dozens of Star Trek style faders, blinking lights. The room was a twilight techno-world inhabited by people high on drugs, ranging from caffeine to crack, who spoke a strange hi-tech TV code as the numbers ticked over. There was always a weird smell; a brew of boiling electronic circuits, stress sweat and the rabid old air conditioner that roared from the ceiling. The gallery was surrounded by black one way glass allowing Max and team to look out and down over the studio floor. But it was impossible for us to stare up at them. I knew Max was watching. Even though I couldn't see him, I heard him jabbering at me constantly through the earphone as he counted down the seconds.

"One minute studio, one minute. Jack, wipe your nose. Have you got a handkerchief? Makeup, get over there!" I held up my hand and as I tried to show him yes, I did have a handkerchief. I saw a background shadow turn into lolloping lard as Brenda, the

spectacularly obese make-up girl was suddenly right in front of me rubbing my face as if I was a naughty schoolboy covered in chocolate. I got a quick slap of foundation over the offending patch and then she disappeared as silently as she came.

The ten o'clock production team was all up there in the gallery. Max, Ben, Jo, Suze, Victor, and our new-ish researcher Mary. They fiercely monitored the seconds between script links, video feeds and pre-recorded items bounced off satellites from some of the most bizarre and extreme corners off the earth - Lagos, Laos, Lithuania, Leicester. Although I was the one on the telly, they were the ones who made the show happen and without them I would have just been a chemically enhanced goldfish gulping and gawping at the camera, directionless, dopey, deaf and dumb. At the helm was Max, the youngest primetime TV news editor in London. He seemed to use his youth and ambition as an excuse for his irritating behaviour. We rubbed along okay in general but he had no taste in suits and that was exactly the kind of problem that wouldn't go away without therapy or violence.

There were a ton of other people in the studio, like the studio manager and the production juniors who specialized in running around like clumsy ghosts, checking switches, organising tea and coffee for the visitors. They tended to treat me with an embarrassing reverence.

"Thirty seconds, thirty seconds studio. Jack, get ready, get ready. Okay people, let's do it lets have a great show!" For some reason, when Max got like this before a show, I had this weird image in my head of people dropping glasses in the pub and everybody cheering. The autocue came to life beneath camera 1.

"Get ready Jack, autocue is active." Squawked Max.

The music rose to a throbbing crescendo and yet more studio lights came on. As they pulsed into life, a jungle of cables, props, monitor screens and people came into view in front of me on the studio floor. Behind me was a flat wall, coloured in a sky-blue material over which computer images of the ITN logo were overlaid.

My desk was a solid, stylish and simple affair, with a computer half buried on it like a geek's guilty secret. To my left was a massive LCD screen used for the live links in the show. The team were invisible to me, we were connected only by the sounds in my ear, but even so I could sense their heartbeats rise a notch and the familiar electric buzz of tension ran over us all as the clock ticked down. The hackles rose slightly on the back on my neck.

I'd been doing a lot of thinking in my spare time about the nature of my job. I'd come to the conclusion that there was a lot more in common between religion and the news than people initially suspected. The TV audience was, in a sense, my congregation. Most of them were waiting at home - maybe some of them were in the pub having a pint. There would almost certainly be a few stragglers in offices, working too late to be healthy and giving

themselves a break to catch up with what was going on in the world. Like any good congregation in a formal place of worship they would be quiet, waiting for me to speak with trust in their hearts, belief in their minds.

Unlike a church, most of my congregation would not be kneeling on a cushion in their Sunday best, but slobbered out on a sofa goggling at the box. About half a million would be grasping a drink, a beer or a cup of coffee. More than a few would be smoking and tapping ash into a stinking ashtray overflowing onto the arm of the chair. About a hundred thousand would be chewing on a takeaway meal, filling the room with oily odours from every orifice. About forty thousand would be stoned or on some other drugs, maybe a line of charlie and half of those would treat the news I give them with unbelievable intensity and importance, the other half would laugh like a drain. Ten thousand babies would be screaming and parents would be hushing them as they peered across the room into my face and eyes. At least five thousand of my audience would be feeling themselves, with their hands down their pants. A fair few would be trying to get their hands down someone else's pants.

I knew I didn't have as many rituals as a decent organized religion. No singing, praying and the like, unless you count the stirring music and whizzy graphics. But if you doubt that news is a religion, consider this - religions have been designed to unify and control people by telling them what to believe and what to fear. That was exactly what we did on the news.

The key difference was that instead of making you scared about what happened after you died and whether you're on your way to hell or not, we made you scared about your life right now.

The music drained away to nothing and I saw the familiar red firefly of light on camera 1 signalling it was live. "Cue Jack!" The fly buzzed in my ear. I raised my face slowly and into the light, before I lifted my eyes to stare directly into the lens and began my communion. First of all was the ritual blessing to put the viewers at their ease, the confident few taps on the keyboard as the camera zoomed in on me. Then, like the priest in a cathedral who made the sign of the crucifix signaling the congregation to fall to their knees, I picked up my safety copy of the script, shuffled it and placed it back on the desk, doing my best to look reassuring.

In my religion of news people could see me every night. And I didn't rely on the existence of an invisible God to get them interested.

For half an hour a night, Monday to Friday, I was a God.

Want to get the whole book? Email me at rex@rexrichards.co.uk. There's going to be a limited number available to start for collectors before the main push. Want one? Email me.

Rex Richards Author - Quick Bio

demo website: www.rexrichards.co.uk/index2.html (contains out of date material)

Rex lives in London and Buenos Aires, and has worked mainly in marketing as a Creative Director in top London agencies, and before that was a multi award winning TV and radio producer at the BBC and Planet 24. He has lived on a Sioux Indian reservation, worked as a chimney sweep, built houses for the poor in Guatemala, cooked for Raymond Blanc, played sport and music up to midlands and national level, been shot, was once nearly sacrificed by Satanists and is a part-time fortune teller. Other hobbies include metal sculpture, jewellery making and writing music. He was told by Princess Diana's psychic that he should be a writer, and that's what he is focused on now.

He told us about the inspiration behind Shakespeare's Truth.

"My dad died recently of Alzheimers, one of the cruellest, horrific and most demeaning diseases imaginable. During that process the family was subjected to a terrible ordeal as his grip on reality grew ever more tenuous. It's an awful thing to find yourself wishing someone so dear to you would die, but that's the situation we were in. Before the disease destroyed him, he spent many years working on proving that Shakespeare's plays were written by someone else. He managed to get the story onto BBC2, convinced the Dean of Westminster Abbey and many other people, and wrote a huge unpublished academic book on the subject. I decided to take the simplest and most compelling bits of that research, and wrap a thriller story around them. which I hope people will find exciting and easy to read - but also make them think. So really, it's his story as much as mine. It's a strange thing, but I feel closer to him now through this than I did when he was alive. Of course I added extra elements, and put in some of my own research. I also broadened the themes. Shakespeare is one part of the book, but equally important are the origins and role of the British Royal Family, an ancient secret society, a real missing treasure, revenge, ambition and a love story born out of chaos."

He is very familiar with TV, press, radio and online media, and is a great interviewee.

The followup to Shakespeare's Truth features the same key characters but is concerned with organised religions, the origin of the human species, the relationship between science and religion and the quest for immortality. It is called *The Invisible Truth*.

He has also written a shocking satire/thriller about a TV news presenter and a serial killer called *Breaking News* which was compared to Money by Martin Amis. This is not for the faint hearted, and is based on his years working with filmstars and other drug-prone celebrities in central London. An early reviewer called it a 'story to melt your brain.'

Other works include two children's books, short stories and he has plans to promote his sculptures and photography over time.