

Diabolus et Prophetiis

A Story of the Macabre

By

David Philips

www.davidphilipsauthor.com

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In the first and second centuries after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, priests and sages began to write a book based on the texts of those who followed His teachings. They also included works of other contemporary writers of the time. This book would come to be known as the New Testament. Those who collaborated on this work were scrupulous in what they notated. Some writings were omitted because they were similar or identical to other accounts of the period. More tractates were disregarded for different reasons, and others still were not included as they were considered too dangerous, heretical, and even blasphemous. Some of these forbidden works were burnt, but others were kept hidden in secret vaults whose existence was known only to a select group of biblical scholars and people of the highest learning. Throughout the centuries, the knowledge of these papers was handed down to a secret cadre of similarly minded individuals, known as *The Group Of Twelve*. Each member swore on the most sacred of oaths never to reveal their contents. Discussion of these sealed documents was confined to specific times, and only those bound by these vows were permitted to attend such gatherings. With each generation, more understanding was gained of these works until the time would come when it was believed that the portends they contained were finally about to be fulfilled. These writings were known as *Diabolus Et Prophetiis* or The Satanic Prophecies.

Neville Buchanan had spent more years than he cared to remember in the service of the state. In fact, he could not recall any life he had before joining the Directorate. His past had been erased from his memory. They had seen to that. Better he did not know how he had come to work for them. It might cloud his judgment, skew his reasoning when reasoning

was all-important to the job at hand. He might remember he once had a conscience, a moral compass which, however flawed, was still an integral part of his being. They had turned him from being a man of peace with a quiet, insightful intellect into a murderer. Neville was an assassin, a dedicated killer, trained to eliminate those his government said were their enemies, enemies of his country. They taught him how to use all kinds of firearms. Rifles with telescopic sights which fired projectiles that could kill someone over a mile away, to more personal sidearms, revolvers, automatic and semi-automatic, machine pistols, all of it. They showed him how to use a knife and, if a knife wasn't available, how to improvise with whatever sharp object was on hand. They instructed him in all sorts of hand-to-hand combat techniques and the quickest, quietest, and most effective way to take out his opponents. They even showed him how to use a garrote, how to strangle manually, how to take a life with a rolled-up newspaper, and how to stop someone breathing with the use of only one finger. They explained the times it might be better to use poisons and taught him how to administer them so no trace of the lethal cocktail could ever be traced. They schooled him in all the arts of killing, and he employed each of them during his long and non-illustrious career.

Early on in his time with them, they told Neville that it was not his place to ask questions about the moral, ethical, or even legal imperatives. His role was a simple one; best not to over-complicate it. So he dispatched his country's foes without question, without demurring, without remorse. It was his job; it was what he did. But now, he had had enough. He wanted out. He was starting to experience dreams, something he had never done. Or if he did, they had vanished on his awakening, like an early morning summer mist. But these dreams did not disappear when he opened his eyes. He could remember them all too vividly. Visions of those he had killed in the service of his country, now coming back to

sit in judgment on him. Pointing accusing fingers, showing the scars or holes he had made on them. At first, he ignored these, shaking his head as if to excise them from his mind. For a while, this tactic had worked. But then they became more persistent. They encroached on his thought patterns and eventually made him doubt what he was doing and why he was doing what he did. He even asked himself the most heretical of questions: who exactly were the good guys? Were they the people he worked for or those they had tasked him with killing? He did not know anymore. So he had tendered his resignation.

They accepted his decision with equanimity. It was not as if they could do much about his intentions. His was not a nine-to-five job with a manager always standing over him, overseeing his work. They had invested much in his training, but he had repaid them time after time until the debit was definitely on their side of the balance sheet. And he had been good. He had been the best they had ever used, had never failed an assignment. His performance had always been exemplary, so they had no reason to refuse him his retirement with a pension. But they had one last job for him to do. Just one more, then he was out. Out for good. But he had heard that one before. There would always be 'just one more.' Neville knew how they worked, but not this time. He was too smart for them. Neville wanted this in writing, signed, sealed, and delivered; in triplicate. There was always the fine print, of course, but he would make damn sure he read and re-read every word of every line of every sentence of every paragraph of the whole document. There would be no loopholes, no subtle clauses for them to hide behind, to use against him. When he said he wanted out, he meant out. He would accommodate their request and carry out this final assignment. Then it would be over. For good.

When they gave him the identity of his target, he thought this was their idea of a going-away prank. Or it would have been if they had had a sense of humor. It couldn't be him; it just couldn't be! For the first, last, and only time in his career, he queried the hit. Was this right? Surely there had to be a mistake. Not this individual, never him! But he was told there was no mistake. The mark had been identified and verified. This was a code five mission. He had only ever had to handle one other such directive before. Code five – *you must, if necessary, forfeit your own life to achieve your objective*. Not that they thought it would be essential in this case, but the target was so important, they had to consider all eventualities. And this edict had come from the Head of The Directorate himself. No one had ever seen or spoken to this figure. It might even be a woman. No one knew. All communications to and from this person were conducted through email, SMS, and other untraceable means of correspondence. But not by him. Even his immediate superior had no direct access. He might walk past them in the street or be in the same well-lit room. He would still be in the dark. And as for his final target. There was no doubt that this was who he had to eliminate. But this man was a man of the highest integrity, the most exceptional caliber. Someone who had done so much to bring people together. Those of diametrically opposite political views, both domestically and internationally. Politicians and others who would barely agree to be in the same room as their counterparts. Somehow he had managed it. He had made the impossible possible. Countries who sought to conquer their neighbors by force, Governments who mistrusted the motives of other administrations, all suddenly found that, in his presence, they had more in common than that which divided them. This individual was a person who was beyond reproach, above condemnation. It did not make any sense. This man, Doctor Walter Aitchison, was the world's best hope for survival, for salvation.

But then the Directorate told him. This figure was not all he seemed to be. There was a dark side to his nature that he had kept hidden. It would be no good to expose it, even if they had had the evidence to do so. No one would believe it. But this man was a danger, the greatest threat the world had ever known. He was just biding his time, awaiting the opportunity to put his evil plans into operation. Then everyone would see him for who he truly was, what he truly was. But by then, it would be too late. This situation could not be allowed to happen. He had to be stopped, and The Directorate was given the mission. This order had not just come from his government. It had come from many. All united in concern regarding Aitchison's secret agenda. And there was one final condition to this contract. He was not to carry out the execution remotely. Neville had to execute this kill face to face. Aitchison had to see, he had to know in his final moments alive, that all his schemes, his years of planning, his patient maneuvering, had been for nothing. He had to know that at the last, he had failed.

Before his recruitment to this ultra-clandestine organization, Neville had been a priest. He had worked, had volunteered to work in the poorest parts of the community, doing what he could to help those less fortunate, those whom society had ceased to see as human beings. Wives and children who were beaten and abused by their menfolk and fathers; men and women who did not know how to say 'no,' when to stop, either drinking or gambling or doing drugs. He tended the homeless and the dispossessed, those who once had everything but now had nothing. Sometimes all he could give them was God's benediction, His pity, His love. But he could provide them with something more, something greater even than those; he could give them hope. Until that day. It started like any other day, with no reason to think it should end any differently, but it did.

He was in his local store, purchasing some groceries for an old couple who had fallen on hard times. They had lost all their money on bad investments, investments their broker assured them were 'solid gold.' They were anything but. Not even tin, and as for the broker? He was long gone with their money. So there they both were, this elderly, loving, naïve couple having to decide day by day whether they should eat or keep warm. They could not do both. And into all this, there came a young woman with a baby in her arms. She was buying formula for her infant when out of nowhere, two masked gunmen burst into the grocery shop, demanding all the money in the till. It all happened at the same moment when the young mother was reaching into her coat pocket for her purse. Mistaking her actions, the gunmen fired off countless shots at her, killing both her and her infant daughter. The whole scenario played out within a few seconds, and the men fled without waiting for the money that the storekeeper was about to hand over. Rooted to the spot in helplessness and impotence, something changed within Neville. Something snapped. He had put himself among these people to help them, yet others valued human life so cheaply.

Well, those who thought such things would only have themselves to blame from now on. He would still be a priest and carry out his parochial duties, but now he would become someone else, something else, too. He continued to believe in God, but he found it harder to maintain his faith, especially after what had occurred in front of him. Where was God then? Even if the mother had somehow sinned in her past and deserved what happened to her, how could an infant be punished in such a cruel and final way? A child who had probably not yet even reached her first birthday. It seemed that the Almighty was indiscriminate as to whom He chose to punish and those He elected to save. But, he, Neville Buchanan, would not be so arbitrary. The good, the pious, and the Godfearing would have

nothing to fear from him. Only those who walked the path of evil would suffer his wrath, and yes, they would suffer. He would see to it.

In his day garb, Neville was the last person anyone suspected when local villains started disappearing or turning up beaten, knifed, or shot. Whoever it was who was doing it, well, they could keep on doing it, as far as the law-abiding folks were concerned. The more scum who ended up dead, the less there would be to terrorize them. But Neville was not a professional killer. Not then. He made mistakes, and eventually, they caught him. The Church managed to use its influence to keep their priest's name out of the media, and some of the detectives who finally arrested Neville only did so reluctantly. He was doing what they would have liked to do but could not. The Church had arranged for one of their lawyers, an attorney named Graham Chalmers, to defend Neville. He was still being held in the precinct cell. Chalmers had read the brief with astonishment. It was almost unbelievable that anyone, especially a priest, could have performed so many slayings. The fact that all his victims were low-life hoods made no difference.

What had surprised the attorney more than anything was the natural proficiency at which Neville had carried out his 'work.' It was almost as if the priest had been born into the role. Chalmers had the merest germ of an idea, one which might save the young priest from a lifetime in prison. He had heard of a group of people, part of a secret organization dedicated to preserving the country's security. This group was not accountable to its government, was above regular scrutiny, and answerable only to its own code of conduct. The lawyer's brother was involved with the Secret Service, those whose remit was to guard the life of the country's leader. It was through him that he had become familiar with the rumors. That was

all they were – rumors. But what if there were any substance to these ‘myths’? There was only one way to find out. He would ask his brother to investigate discretely.

As it happened, the Directorate was already aware of the avenging priest and saw the potential of having someone like him within their ranks. It did not take much to convince Neville that he could do far more good outside prison than within its walls, a position with which the young priest agreed. And so it was arranged that he was secretly removed from where he was imprisoned. They took him to the Directorate’s training facility, where they honed his innate abilities, sharpened his skills, molded him into what they wanted – a capable killing machine. But they also did something else. They destroyed his soul.

It had not been difficult to arrange a meeting between Neville and Aitchison. He was or had been, a priest, after all. Very few people knew he was no longer a man of the cloth. The Directorate had suppressed his criminal activities, and even the Bishop had no idea what had happened to him. He had just simply vanished. Better that way. The Directorate had used its considerable influence to manage the interview. Aitchison seemed more than happy to give the young ‘priest’ a few minutes of his valuable time. It might be constructive for both parties. With his weapon safely concealed under his robes, Neville approached his target. The man appeared eager to meet with him and motioned him to sit down on the opposite armchair in his hotel room. Aitchison was so busy these days he barely remembered the last time he had been home. Sometimes, he found it hard to recall where his home actually was. The doctor waved away his security team. If he couldn’t trust a priest, who could he trust? It would be fine; everything would be just fine. Neville engaged in some small talk and spoke of religious matters concerning his church. Aitchison turned away to relight his Meerschaum pipe, the pipe he carried everywhere. When he looked up,

he saw Neville, Neville the Priest, standing before him with the knife. It was not so much a knife, more a stiletto, with a long slim blade.

Neville did not know what to expect, but Aitchison's reaction was certainly not what he imagined it would be. It was not one of terror. His expression was a mixture of calmness, pity, and sadness. A smile of serene, almost beatific, acceptance played around his lips. It was almost as if Aitchison had been expecting this to happen. Aitchison, one of *The Group Of Twelve*, who, as Neville's blade was piercing his heart, recalled the words of *Diabolus Et Prophetiis.* '

And it is foretold that in the final days when men have waged war upon men, and brother has fought with brother that one will come to heal. He will be the bearer of peace and shall speak with a voice of great fellowship, so man will no longer have grievance with each other and shall turn from the ways of conflict. His words shall flow like sweet wine, and many will see the truth in his goodness. But others shall arise who will plot against this man of goodwill and confound his teachings. They shall call themselves the Righteous Ones but will speak with false oaths and will cause the truly Righteous One to be quietened. He who once walked with the Almighty shall turn away his ear from His teachings, and no more shall sanctify the Name. He will be filled with the rage of the false prophets and smite the one who would bring peace. And these false prophets shall sow the seeds of discord and chaos in the minds of men until the truth shall not be known. Then they will know the ways of war once more and take up arms against their fellow man. And destruction shall rain down from the heavens bringing death in its wake, and the skies will be rent asunder until a great cloud of smoke consumes all the nations. And when all the spears of fire have been extinguished, and the world shall be in darkness and ruin, then man shall say unto man, "What have we

done to bring this calamity upon ourselves?" From out of this devastation, the One shall arise to take dominion over all the men of the earth and the beasts of the field and the fishes of the sea. To Him alone shall praises be sung and worship be offered. The One True God shall turn His face away from the hearts of men, and The Lord Of Darkness shall reign. To the Antichrist alone shall all men's souls belong. And His kingdom shall be everlasting, and man will know peace no more.

Neville did not yet see that outside, the wind had started to get stronger, rain clouds were forming overhead and the skies had begun to darken, a symbolic metaphor, perhaps, for what was to come. He had completed his final mission, as it had been written, as it had been foretold

The End