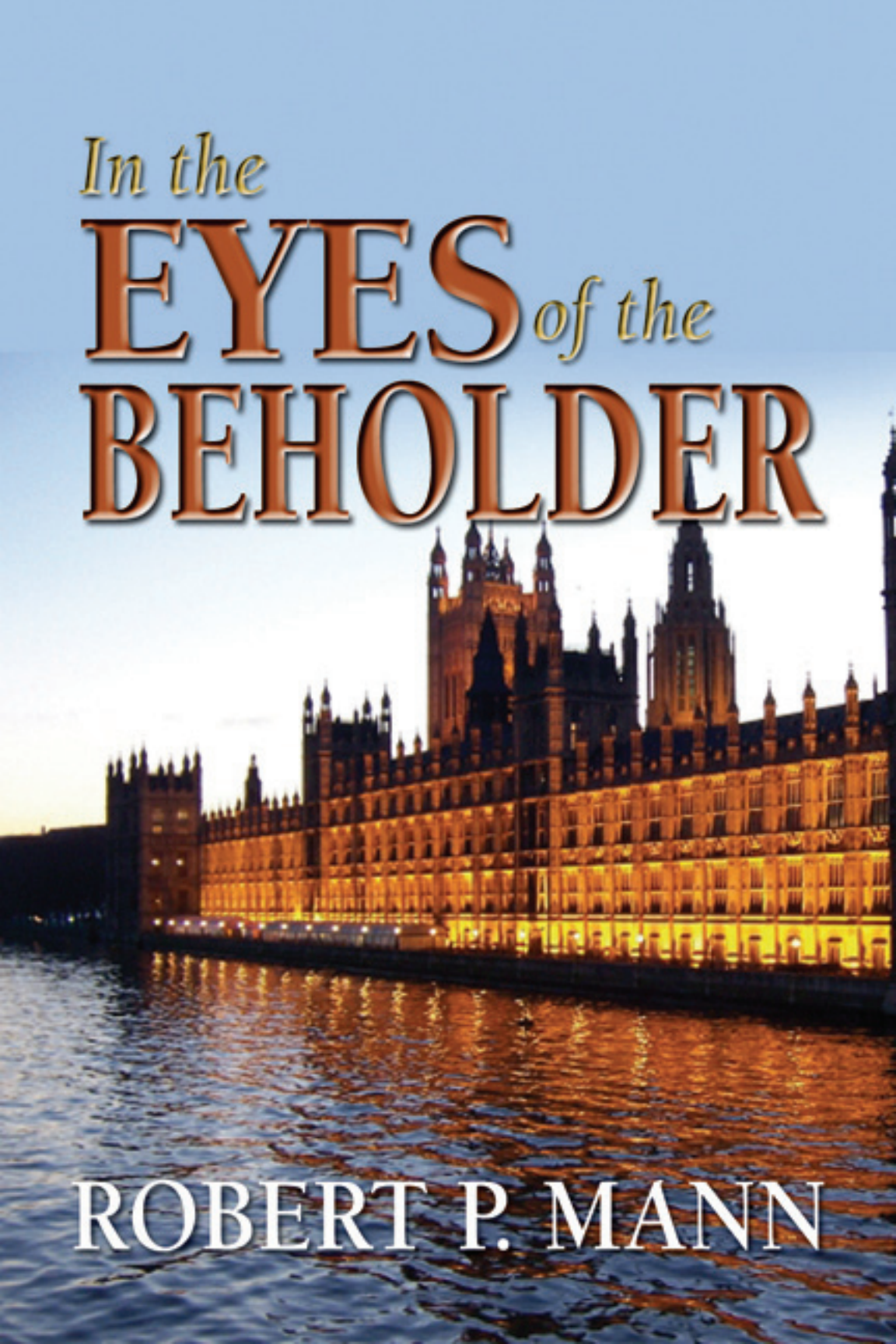
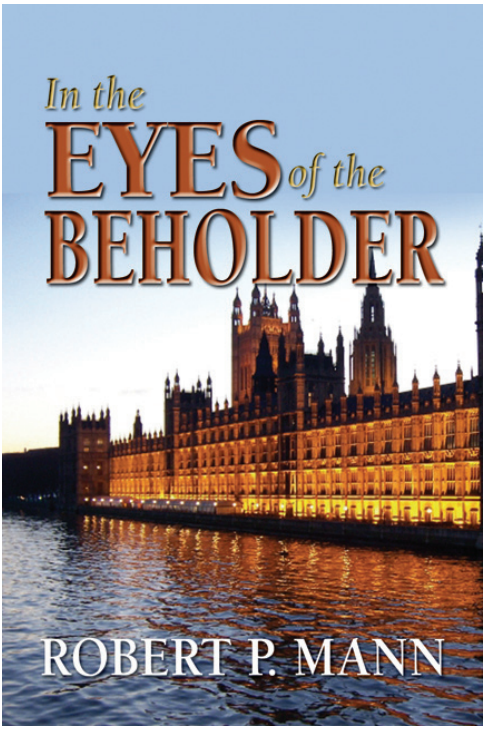
# In the EYES of the BEHOLDER



ROBERT P. MANN




Mann, Robert P.
In The Eyes Of The Beholder
Eloquent Books / E-book / 6x9
200 pages.

ISBN: 978-1-60693-913-0
SKU: 1-60693-913-0

Controversial-Yes! Worst-case scenario or a wakeup call? Could it ever happen in England in the future? Read it and make your own mind up in this breathtaking story of one Muslim family in their desperate fight for their freedom and their lives in an England torn apart by civil war and ethnic cleansing after the fabric of society is torn asunder by two catastrophic suicide bombers just before Xmas. The agony that the Muktars go through causes them to question their own beliefs and values in an emotional and religious journey of self awareness which ends in tragedy for one but revelation for another. The nail biting climax in the centre of London will leave you on the edge of your seat but also questioning the righteousness of a religion alongside the lead character, that seemingly embraces violence by many that worship and believe in it's ways! His decision may not be yours. Only by reading it can you make your mind up!

About the Author:

Author Robert Mann is 45 years of age and lives in South Devon, England. He started writing about three years ago due to a lack of fulfillment in his working and social life. So far he has had two published books by Pneuma Springs - *An Icy Step To Oblivion* and *90 Minutes Is Not Enough*. When he is writing he feels alive and inspired. His latest project, a Sci-Fi horror called *Dreamers,* is currently finished and with the New York Literary Agency. Currently he is back working full time but would love to be in the position to go back writing again in the near future.

# In The Eyes Of The Beholder

By

Robert P. Mann

Eloquent Books
New York, New York

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Eloquent Books
An imprint of AEG Publishing Group
845 Third Avenue, 6th Floor - 6016
New York, NY 10022
www.eloquentbooks.com

ISBN: 978-1-60693-913-0
SKU: 1-60693-913-0

Printed in the United States of America

Book Design: Roger Hayes

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# Chapter 1

## The Time Of Vengeance

All it took was minutes but it would be minutes that would change people's lives irrevocably for ever. For years, politicians had continued to warn about the dangers of terrorism from within and senior police figures had issued stark warnings that one day another attack would get through. It could have been bad luck, complacency or just overwhelming odds against over stretched security services but on a busy sporting and shopping Saturday in early December it happened. There were four bombers. For tens of thousands attending a Premiership game at Old Trafford and Christmas shopping in Oxford Street, the end was mercifully quick with no warning given of the ensuing holocaust! The bombs were so powerful and all consuming that many initially feared they had been small nuclear devices. Tests would later prove that not to be the case. However Oxford Street and Old Trafford were virtually vaporized by

explosions so immense and powerful that when rescue teams were able to get in thirty-six hours after the initial explosions there was nothing left but dust. Over a hundred thousand people were missing, presumed dead with hospitals in the London and Manchester area overwhelmed with injured people.

The lucky people were those of Birmingham and Liverpool. An off duty MI5 officer on a train pulling into New Street Station acting purely on gut instinct alone, challenged the young teenage man sitting in the corner of the carriage nervously fiddling with his mobile phone. The MI5 officer had been watching him for the last fifteen minutes and just knew that something was not right. Sweat had been pouring down his face and despite his obvious discomfort he would not take off his bulky duffle coat which was done up to the neck. When challenged his hands almost adopted a praying attitude as he frantically tried to dial a number on his mobile. The officer's one warning as he produced a gun to cover the suspect was ignored and then his training took over. A single shot to the forehead was all it took, the officer not daring to aim at his heart for what he might inadvertently set off under the coat. The young Asian looking man slumped backwards onto the seat his head at an obscene angle, a trickle of blood running down his face as pandemonium erupted within the carriage.

There was chaos and terror in Manchester and the centre of London but across the rest of the country a well versed anti-terrorist operation swung into top gear. Within minutes of news of the two massive explosions phone alerts were going out to all other large sporting events deemed possible targets that fateful Saturday. Evacuate with all possible speed there is a distinct possibility of an imminent suicide terrorist attack! One of those possible targets was Anfield where Liverpool were at home that Saturday, a full house watching the game against their bitter north London rivals Arsenal. It was the half time interval when the police match day operations commander received the phone call which made his skin crawl with loathing and disgust, as an icy shiver of fear went down his back. Anfield was to be evacuated the game abandoned; there were suicide bombers in the crowd! Long practiced but never used in real life security procedures swung into operation. CCTV operators frantically scanned the confused, fearful and disappointed crowd looking for anything or anyone suspicious as bits of news about the wave of bombings started percolating through to the fans.

As the stands slowly emptied and the first armed police started arriving at the ground a suspect was spotted by an alert camera operator half away up the Kop. Adopting an almost prayer-like stance, the man had fallen to his knees, his mouth working soundlessly as he recanted unheard words to himself.

Terrified fans started screaming, the stampede starting as they tried to get away from this abomination, his waistcoat inadvertently swung open to display a fearful array of explosives strapped to his body. Armed police sprinted through the player's entrance on to the pitch their faces taut with tension as an urgent message went over the Tannoy system.

"Will all fans still in the Kop please immediately lie face down on the terraces? Thank you for your cooperation."

It was clear to the watching police that something had gone wrong with the suicide bomber's firing mechanism as the young olive skinned man frantically dialled a number on his mobile without any effect, his eyes panic stricken with the realization of failure. A line of armed police had knelt on the edge of the penalty area not daring to go any closer. The order was swift in coming. Quickly a single shot rang out as the misguided young extremist crumpled to the concrete terracing, eyes unseeing gone to his own personal paradise.

Saturday afternoons for the male students at the Stoke Bishop Halls Of Residence had quickly taken on a very reoccurring theme since the start of their first term at Bristol University. This would be football and drink courtesy of Sky Sports and the student bar, a warm up prior to a hard Saturday's evening's partying. Amongst their numbers was eighteen-year-old Amir. His family had moved to England before he was born for a better life leaving behind relations in

Pakistan. Amir was English and proud of it despite being a Muslim and following the teachings of the Koran. His parents lived in Handsworth a multicultural area of Birmingham where he had fond memories of his childhood. Amir had partied with the best of them since the start of term but with one difference, he didn't and wouldn't drink because of his religion. He was still happy to enjoy the social life within the bounds of his religion. He loved his football though being an avid Birmingham City fan, having grown up with the ground almost on his doorstep. That Saturday afternoon though he quickly began to wish that he did drink though as the room full of students quickly became unwilling spectators of a horror show taking place broadcast live in front of them. Live camera feed from Anfield had indeed shown the final moments of the failed suicide bomber. And then there were stunned looks of horror and disbelief as the shot rang out and he fell dead on the hallowed terracing!

Numbed students watched the enormous pyres of smoke and flames bellowing over central London and The Old Trafford area of Manchester with disbelief as commentators gravely described the scenes. Both cities were swiftly classified as disaster areas through swift government action. The whole country had gone on to the highest state of alert with airports temporarily closed and all incoming flights diverted. Saturday night went on as usual for the students as if almost by partying

and being normal they could wipe the events of the afternoon out of their minds. Amir for one couldn't and had spent a long time on the phone to his parents in tears. He was deeply affected by the outrage and how somebody could take their own life supposedly in the name of Allah as broadcasters were suggesting. Nobody knew now what the future would bring but in the short term cushioned by their insulated university life style things went on almost as normal for a few days at least. However around the university Amir became increasingly aware that within days of the bombings other students who didn't know him started looking at him suspiciously because of the colour of his skin.

Things became even worse on publication of videos left with all media sources in the country glorifying the dead bombers. They were all shown to be English extremists claiming to act on behalf of Allah in their unwavering pursuit of holy jihad. The film was clearly shot before their deaths and only that evening a student friend of Amir's and fellow Muslim had been beaten up on the way home from a lecture. His close friends who had got to know Amir so well in these first few months of university life told him to ignore these students who didn't know any better. They resolved not to let him go around Bristol on his own until things had calmed down. They didn't calm down though and things rapidly got a lot worse. It was as if a fuse had been lit, a catalyst ignited after years of simmering

mistrust and increased segregation between different racial societies.

It took twenty-four hours before the reprisals started against Muslim communities and mosques. This quickly spread to other immigrant groups with shootings and fire bombing becoming common place. An already overstretched police force struggling to cope with the security implications and the fallout from the weekend bombings creaked under the strain. Even in Bristol there were soon sounds of gunfire when the sun went down and loud explosions as vengeance was sought for those who had died. Very quietly and discreetly Bristol University authorities advised their students not to venture into the city evenings anymore as their safety could not be guaranteed. With just a couple of weeks left of term an almost siege mentality took over those students who were left, mourning those who had already departed in tears back to their homes in London and Manchester. The multi racial suburbs of Birmingham had seen some terrible troubles in the few days after the bombings. Amir was desperately worried about his parents especially after their local mosque in Newcombe Road was fire bombed one night. He didn't want to go home early but was frantic with fear for his parent's safety and wanted to be back with them so he could protect them. He phoned them every evening and was told not to worry we trust our neighbours and the police to look after us .The decision

however was taken from him when a week from the end of term the university authorities took the decision to send all students home early for Christmas due to the civil unrest. The government was on the verge of ordering the army onto the streets to keep order. Even talk of a nationwide curfew was being bandied around in the press as a last gasp resort in restoring law and order and stopping the killing.

There was still a vestige of normality during daylight hours but a huge amount of nervousness and distrust. Everyday life went on but almost it seemed with people looking over their shoulders with fear and a degree of anger. The first direct experience that Amir had of how badly things had changed was from the taxi driver who came to pick him up to take him to Bristol Templemeads. He took one look at him, shook his head and drove off muttering darkly,

"We should never have let you in."

Amir was still shaken by the experience when he eventually arrived at Templemeads by bus. He almost felt like he was in a foreign country as he produced his student railcard to buy an open return to Birmingham New Street. The lady selling the tickets eying him with open hostility because of the colour of his skin and the two heavy rucksacks he carried. The station was jam packed with frustrated passengers. Departure boards were showing numerous delays and cancellations wherever you wanted to go, with armed police on all platforms suspiciously

regarding all members of the travelling public. One of the great pleasures of Amir's tender eighteen years of life had been train travel but suddenly it didn't seem like fun anymore, an aura of fear and malevolence percolating through the whole station concourse. As he waited patiently for the next service north a tap on his shoulder broke him from his reverie. His eyes rolled with fear as almost from out of his own body he saw two armed police officers pointing their machine guns at him motioning him to the ground .The words seemed to follow the gesture causing screams of panic on the platform,

"Armed police- Get down or we will shoot!"

Amir hit the platform hard all the breath squeezed out of him, his hands roughly handcuffed behind his back as he was dragged, almost carried away. The hostile and distrustful glares of the travelling English public followed him.

It felt like a dream but it wasn't. He was thrown roughly into a holding cell on a police lorry parked on the station concourse, dispirited, scared and confused his wrists aching from the handcuffs .The small cell stank of urine, sweat and he sat there desperately wanting for some sanity to come back into his world.

The questioning when it came was rough, unpleasant with an implicit threat of violence. Two nervous and angry officers still mourning the losses their force had incurred, looking for someone to take out their pain on. Amir fitted the role model

perfectly sitting there in tears repeatedly asking if he could phone his parents. It was not until late afternoon that a degree of normality returned to the young man's life. Thrown roughly back into the cells after questioning that had failed to prove anything bar the fact he was a first year student at Bristol University he had sat there comatose on the floor of the cell. Arms wrapped protectively around his upper body, he was afraid to think, afraid to even move. The noise of the key turning in the door of his cell caused him to look up fearfully wary of any new threat.

This time however it was a friendly face that greeted him, a smiling woman police officer and behind her his horrified, course tutor from the university. Both spoke at the same time the words intermingling inside Amir's tired and confused brain.

"You are free to go sir. Sorry for the inconvenience but everyone is very jumpy."

"I came as soon as I could Amir. I am so sorry for the way you have been treated!"

The words released a flood of emotions from the young student tears flooding down his cheeks, his body shaking as the tension and fear slowly left his body as he held his tutor tightly.

"Tell him to dump those rucksacks Sir please. In today's environment he is only likely to get stopped again at the end of his journey with the colour of his skin. There are a lot of very

nervous police officers and members of the public. I would hate for him to go through this again."

Was the woman officer's somewhat disparaging remark as she left Amir in the reliable care of his tutor!

An hour later Amir's tutor watched pensively as the young student climbed aboard the early evening Virgin Cross Country Service to Newcastle somewhat nervously clutching two carrier bags full of possessions, his rucksacks and the remainder of their contents now in the back of his tutor's car. As the train pulled slowly out of the station the twinkling lights on the Christmas tree in the station concourse reminded everyone that it was only two weeks to Christmas, a time for giving and a time for peace!

# Chapter 2

## A Train Journey To Die For

Within minutes of the sleek Pendolino train gathering speed as it left Bristol behind in the cold winter's night Amir found himself a seat. Despite the train being packed there was very little talking people preferring their own company as they stared out into the frozen brooding darkness. A sense of pain and mourning, a desire to lash out and attach blame to anyone or anything that seemed not English hung over the passengers aboard as the service sped north. Amir had sensed the antipathy and hostility towards him when he walked into the carriage on Bristol Templemeads Station but he resolved to be strong and to ignore it. Part of him however wanted to scream out to everyone in his carriage,

"I am English too; we are all one and the same."

But he didn't dare, afraid of bringing more attention to himself. He had not been able to pray that evening as normal

but sensed that Allah would understand given the very strange circumstances of the day. Amir hoped that he would guide him and his family through the difficult times ahead.

A commotion at the front of the carriage caused Amir and the other new arrivals from Bristol to stare incredulously. Walking down the aisle eyes carefully surveying all the passengers, checking tickets from Bristol as they went were two fully armed soldiers. A cold bead of sweat broke out on Amir's forehead as the Train Manager welcomed all new arrivals aboard over the Tannoy with the reassuring words.

"Please do not be alarmed by the soldiers aboard. They are for your own safety and protection. You must give them your fullest cooperation though. The buffet is now open serving a range of snacks, hot and cold drinks and light refreshments. Thank you for travelling with Virgin Trains!"

A ragged chuckle broke out throughout the carriage causing flickers of grins to briefly appear on the faces of the two soldiers. As the soldiers approached Amir he was aware that several nervous looking white women had pointed in his direction speaking quietly but animatedly, the young children with them not understanding what all the fuss was about. Resisting the urge to panic and run although he had not done anything wrong Amir sat there fearfully in his Birmingham City football shirt. This was now a reminder of happier days gone by. All league football having been suspended two days

after the explosion at Old Trafford as a mark of respect at the demise of one of the country's most respected clubs and the still rising casualty count. This time there were no false accusations though, the soldiers doing their job quietly and professionally one of them even finding time to banter with Amir about football being a fan of Birmingham's other main club Aston Villa.

The false calm within the carriage evaporated as the train slowed approaching Gloucester. Flashes could be seen in the semi darkness outside the train as an urgent message came over the train's Tannoy system just as the platform came into sight.

"Will all army personnel aboard this service please report to the Train Manager immediately?"

The elderly man who was sitting next to Amir and yet to speak since he had got on nudged his arm before whispering excitedly to him,

"That is automatic weapons being fired. I will never forget the flash they make at night until my dying day. I was in the war see!"

Several passengers around them overheard his remark and suddenly the smell of panic was in the air as one of the soldiers sprinted through the carriage of the now stationary train his machine gun pointed at a yet unseen danger. People wanted to flee away from the windows of the train as the fire fight seemingly intensified outside but there was nowhere to go.

Amir being a bit of a train buff didn't panic himself knowing how strong the glass was in the windows of this top of the range Virgin train. He figured that if they would stay intact in a crash at ninety miles an hour there was a strong chance that any bullets fired at the train would not get through to harm any passengers. Without warning all the main lights in the train went out. The carriage was now just lit by the eerie glow of the emergency lighting and the proximity of the nearby station. Women and children started screaming in terror.

From somewhere very close at hand came the deafening sound of a machine gun being fired. This caused sharp intakes of breath from people near to the young student and a few startled shouts of outrage from passengers further down the carriage. Amir expected to panic but didn't, rationalizing that one of the soldiers must be firing at an unseen enemy from the exit door between carriages. He watched on with an almost morbid curiosity. The skirmish only lasted for minutes and then there was silence bar the hushed breathing of everyone in the carriage. As unexpectedly as they had gone off the lights returned on to a cheer from the passengers as the train once again started to move again pulling slowly into Gloucester .The almost palpable relief in the carriage was tempered by the sight of one of the two soldiers who had checked their ticket's being helped off the train to a waiting ambulance his arm in a sling which was rapidly turning bright red.