

Wit's End

a play in one act
by Neil Rhodes

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Wit's End by Neil Rhodes

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First Produced by the Sherman Theatre Company
at the Sherman Theatre, Cardiff June 1996

Nigel Phillips : Simon Armstrong
Dave : Paul Waring

Directed by Matthew Bailey

Wit's End was produced as a part of the HTV Sherman Plays, an association
between the Sherman Theatre and HTV Wales.

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CHARACTERS

NIGEL PHILLIPS Aged 36, he is a television broadcaster. He wears an expensive dressing gown and pyjamas.

DAVE A demon who looks like a financial adviser, he dresses in a suit and tie, and with a briefcase.

THE SET IS NIGEL PHILLIPS' LIVING ROOM. HE HAS ANTIQUE FURNITURE, A DESK, A SETTEE, A LARGE SWIVEL CHAIR, A STAND WITH EXPENSIVE ELECTRICAL EQUIPMENT, A TELEVISION WITH ITS BACK TO THE AUDIENCE, AND A LARGE BOOKCASE. THERE IS A BOTTLE OF UNOPENED CHAMPAGNE IN AN ICE BUCKET ON A TABLE, ALSO A TELEPHONE AND A CONTRACT.

(NIGEL, AGED 36, IS SITTING IN EXPENSIVE DRESSING GOWN AND PYJAMAS, WATCHING THE TELEVISION. HE HAS BARE FEET. WE HEAR NIGEL'S VOICE FROM THE TELEVISION)

Well, you'd have to make sure the right people did it.

(LAUGHTER FROM THE AUDIENCE)

Or you'd find everyone was upside down.

(MORE AND LOUDER LAUGHTER FROM THE AUDIENCE, AND APPLAUSE)

Well that's all we have time for, and it's the last of the series, I'm afraid, so from me, Nigel Phillips, goodbye – and keep away from those polar bears.

(LAUGHTER, APPLAUSE, MUSIC. NIGEL SWITCHES OFF, WITH HIS REMOTE. HE ISN'T SMILING)

NIGEL: Hmm. Pandas would have been funnier.

(HE GOES TO HIS PHONE AND DIALS)

Pandas. Or penguins.

I (TO THE PHONE, WARMLY) Hi, Tina. Oh, you managed to – Great. Well I happen to have, in my hand – Not that! The new contract! was just wondering if you could just pop over so I could pop the cork of this lovely bottle of – God. Six thirty start? That's a bit – No, I understand. You get some rest. Yes, I am too [tired]. Bye, love.

(HE PUTS THE PHONE DOWN)

Well thank you, Tina.

(HE LOOKS AT THE BOTTLE OF CHAMPAGNE, THEN POPS THE CORK. AS HE DOES SO, DAVE, DRESSED IN A SUIT AND TIE, AND WITH A BRIEFCASE, APPEARS)

DAVE: Hello, Mr Phillips.

NIGEL: (JUMPING) Ah!

DAVE: It's only me. Dave.

NIGEL: Hell! Damn. All right. My wallet's over there, on the table.

DAVE: No...

NIGEL: I'm not looking at you, just take it, and go. Take the hi fi, video, it's all insured, go on.

DAVE: I'm not a burglar.

NIGEL: (LOOKS AT HIM) No? Then what are you doing – I've met you before, haven't I?

DAVE: That's right.

NIGEL: Oh God! Were you on the programme? Oh no. Did I... say something about your play, or book, or... Look, if I said something that seemed rude, or unkind, I'm sorry. It wasn't meant to be. It's just part of the show.

DAVE: No...

NIGEL: Give as good as you get, I say. Outdo me with an amusing reply. Words should be answered with words, shouldn't they? Not with...

DAVE: What?

NIGEL: ... violence.

DAVE: Violence? Me? Mr Phillips, I don't mean you any violence.

NIGEL: That's just as well. I do have an alarm system, direct to the local police station.

DAVE: No, no. I've never been on your programme.

NIGEL: Then what are you doing in my flat, uninvited, at half past ten in the evening?

DAVE: Mr Phillips, I did think you'd remember. After how I've helped plan your life prospects.

NIGEL: What? Life assurance! Well if this isn't the limit. It's not enough, I suppose, to get phone calls three or four times every evening, letters every day, some jargon talking idiot coming round, so I have to watch him play on his laptop computer and his new portable laser printer for five hours – but you turn up, without an appointment, while I'm relaxing in my own home and – How did you get in, anyway? Did I leave the door unlocked? God! What a thing to do!

DAVE: Mr Phillips, I'm sorry, I don't advise about finances. Your future, yes, but not pensions, or life assurance.

NIGEL: I don't care what you call it, I don't want to hear it. Just walk out of this room, and do not return, or ring me, or my office, or...

DAVE: I'm a demon, Mr Phillips.

(PAUSE)

NIGEL: What?

DAVE: A demon. From Hell.

(PAUSE)

NIGEL: Oh God, what an idiot. You always think, when you get Beadle, or Candid Camera, 'Well I'd never fall for that.' And here I am, and – Is it Tony? (HE CALLS) Tony! Where are you, you bastard? I should have known you wouldn't let me alone tonight, last of the series, new contract for the new show. Or Frank! Oh no! (CALLS) Frank, put that bloody camera down! (TO DAVE) Where are they?

DAVE: No...

NIGEL: Have I been a total humourless nerd? Nigel Phillips gets his own medicine. (HE CALLS) Come on, Frank, you can come out. (HE LOOKS AROUND) Where's the camera?

DAVE: There isn't a camera.

NIGEL: (TO DAVE) Frank, Tony?

DAVE: No.

NIGEL: Just you.

DAVE: Just me.

Neil Rhodes

Lives in Llanymynech in Powys and first wrote plays whilst working as an actor/teacher for a children's theatre company, but has since written mainly for adults. He has had five plays broadcast by both BBC Radio 3 and BBC Radio 4. his play *Rats*, *Brats and Bureaucrats* won the Crawshay Cup for Best Original Script at the Wales One Act Festival Final in 1995.

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Wit's End

Regret, redundancy and redemption all collide as Nigel Phillips, a chat show host, tries to avoid his past and escape his fate; both are closing in on him relentlessly. Who'll win the battle of wits?

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