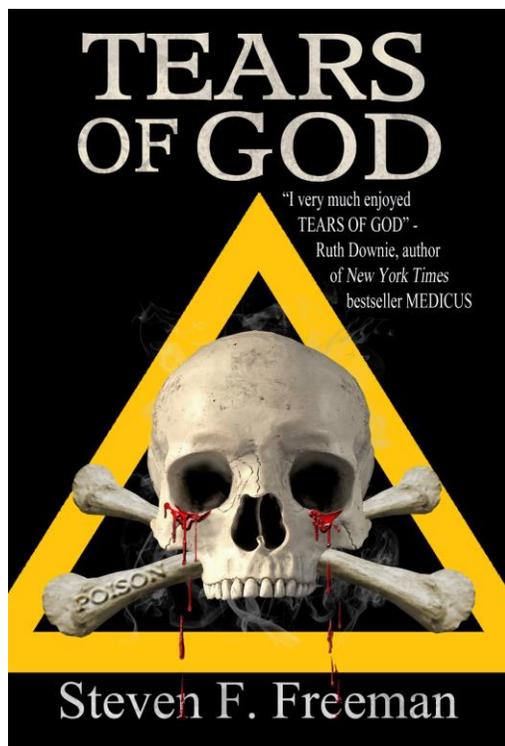


## *Tears of God*



### SYNOPSIS

#### **A prophecy...a promise...a project**

A chance encounter leads FBI agent Mallory Blackwell to investigate the circumstances surrounding the mysterious death of her father, Cutter Wilson, years ago.

Their only informant murdered, Mallory and cryptologist husband Alton lead an NSA team on a round-the-world quest to track down the perpetrator of a mysterious toxicological project.

The sleuths must summon all their investigatory skills in a desperate bid to follow a trail of clues to the hidden truth of Cutter Wilson's death, a discovery exceeding their wildest expectations.

### **SUMMARY**

In **Tears of God**, volume seven of "The Blackwell Files" series, cryptologist Alton Blackwell and FBI agent Mallory Blackwell lead an NSA team in a quest to track down the perpetrator of a mysterious toxicological project.

### **REVIEWS FOR TEARS OF GOD**

"I very much enjoyed 'Tears of God' - if I ever have to go on a covert mission, I'll definitely be taking Steve Freeman with me!" **Ruth Downie, author of New York Times best seller *Medicus***

"It was terrific. It was filled with tension and moved forward with energy and action in every chapter. A great read." **Sharron Grodzinsky**

"I really enjoyed Tears of God...I found myself needing to read on in order to find out what happens next." **Elaine Rivers**

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Thriller/mystery author Steve Freeman is a former member of the US Army's Signal Corps, a twenty-eight year employee of a large American technology company, and an avid traveler who has visited five continents. The novels of *The Blackwell Files* draw from his firsthand knowledge of military service, the tech industry, and the diverse cultures of our world.

He currently lives near Atlanta, Georgia with his wife, daughter, and three dogs.



### INTERVIEW TOPICS

- How have your life experiences influenced the novels of *The Blackwell Files*? To what extent are they autobiographical?
- What writers are most influential to your work?
- Do you anticipate future novels featuring Alton and Mallory, the two main protagonists of *The Blackwell Files* novels?
- What sets *The Blackwell Files* novels apart from other thrillers?
- How did you start writing?

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## Chapter One

Cutter Wilson had to die.

But he might not if the Hunter wasn't careful. Poisoning a person wasn't child's play. It took a certain degree of finesse, especially if one wanted the death to appear natural.

Cutter's good health rendered the job even more challenging. People would question why a physically fit Army officer of only 41 years would drop dead of cardiac arrest. The ME might even perform an autopsy. No evidence of foul play, nothing to contradict such a diagnosis, could be left behind.

A little digging had proved sufficient to identify the perfect opportunity for the poisoning: Fort Bragg's annual Officers' Ball. The gala was scheduled for ten days hence, just enough time to make the necessary arrangements.

At first, the Hunter's plan seemed to hit a snag. Sunset Caterers, the gala's food supplier, had already hired all the additional staff needed for such a large event. The next day, the Hunter had triggered the company's fire alarm and paid a clandestine visit to its kitchen. Hours later, a sudden outbreak of flu-like symptoms had decimated the caterer's staff. Desperate for workers, Sunset had called the Hunter, offering a job for the night of the gala only. The Hunter had pretended to object to the temporary arrangement but had at last agreed.

On the night of the ball, the Hunter donned the white dinner jacket and matching cotton gloves of the caterer's staff. He cut a slit in the index finger of the right glove and slipped three tiny, beige pills into the crack.

He hurried to collect a tray of soup cups. Holding the tray on his shoulder, he pushed out of the kitchen into the vast ballroom of the Grand Manor Hotel, where a sea of soldiers in dress uniforms and their spouses packed the space.

The Hunter weaved his way among dozens of tables and those few guests who hadn't already taken a seat. Arriving at his assigned table, he set a soup cup in front of each guest. At the fourth seat, the placard read, "Colonel Cutter Wilson." As the Hunter turned to retrieve a cup, he used his thumb to push the three pills into the warm liquid, then placed the cup in front of the colonel. The soup consisted of a thick cheddar recipe in which the pills would lie undetectable, and the diminutive size of the serving cups virtually guaranteed everyone would finish their portions.

After dispensing the rest of the soup, the Hunter returned to the kitchen. His task was done, but leaving now would draw attention to himself. If an inquiry were made, he wanted no indications of unusual behavior on his part that a curious investigator might ponder. So he continued to serve the rest of the meal.

At last, after three long hours of serving the banquet and retrieving loads of dirty dishes, the event ended. The Hunter collected his meager pay and stripped off the caterer's jacket. He placed it in the caterer's laundry machine himself, mindful of the importance of eliminating all

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traces of his DNA from the garment. He kept the gloves, which he would later toss in a dumpster behind a bar.

Now to wait. The pills' tough outer shells would keep them from dissolving for another five hours. Once they did, though, nothing could save Wilson. The pills were a custom blend: the first active layer contained a heavy dose of the barbiturates Wilson used most nights as a sleep aid, while the second layer contained a massive dose of digitalis to force cardiac arrest. The medicines would run their deadly course before Wilson was scheduled to awake. To all observers, he would appear to have died in his sleep—tragic, but not inexplicable, especially considering the military ball's liberal alcohol policy and the extra sleep-aid the man would have appeared to consume.

Three hours later, the Hunter leaned back in a first-class seat on a 757 streaking over the Atlantic Ocean. He stirred his drink and checked his watch. Cutter Wilson had two hours to live.