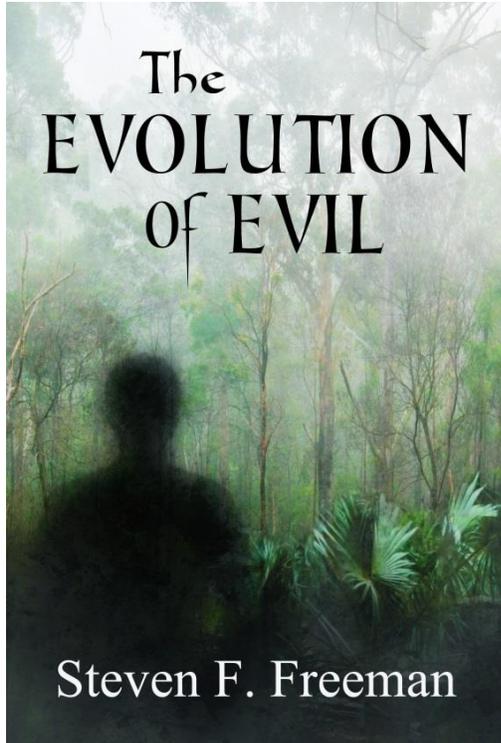


## *The Evolution of Evil*



### **SYNOPSIS**

#### **The Galapagos Islands: Beautiful, Exotic...and Deadly**

Jan Summit, senator's wife and world-class biologist, has disappeared from her Alzheimer's research center on the Galapagos Islands. When cryptologist Alton Blackwell is called in to decode the scientist's last message, he learns of a breakthrough discovery, one that could revolutionize treatment for the debilitating disease.

Alton and wife Mallory, an FBI agent, join an elite force sent to track down the missing scientist. In doing so, they uncover a world of shadowy intrigue—a land where environmentalists, competing pharmaceutical companies, and local Galapagos citizens all battle to suppress the results of Summit's cutting-edge research. The investigators' search is further complicated when a string of murders with apparent connections to both the black market in exotic wildlife and Summit's research begins within days of their arrival.

Following a trail of clues as enshrouded as the islands' volcanic slopes, Alton and Mallory face mounting danger in their race to recover Summit and track down the culprits who hope to suppress her work. Along the way, they discover that some facts—and some people—aren't always what they seem.

### **SUMMARY**

In *The Evolution of Evil*, volume six of "The Blackwell Files" series, cryptologist Alton Blackwell and FBI agent Mallory Wilson race to recover a scientist who is kidnapped before her revolutionary Alzheimer's cure can be fully developed. Along the way, the sleuths discover that some facts—and some people—aren't always what they seem.

### **REVIEWS FOR THE EVOLUTION OF EVIL**

"I found this to be the best Alton/Mallory book yet... fast paced with well-rounded characters and an excellent author's voice." **Willow Humphrey**

"I really do think you have a best seller and that you are a marvelous writer. One of the things I enjoy most is your descriptions of places and people. They are brilliant." **Sharron Grodzinsky**

"Wow. It brought out so many emotions, anger, surprise, humor, suspense, that I didn't want to put it down. It has been awhile since I have enjoyed a book so much." **Terri Sasser**

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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-seven 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

The incessant barking of Dr. Tuttle's German shepherd gave the first indication that tonight might not fit the typical pattern of late-night, marathon research sessions interrupted only by the occasional bout of high-octane espresso.

"What the hell is it now?" murmured Dr. Jan Summit, raising her head from the microscope on the edge of her worn, melamine desk. She squinted in the direction of the noise. The reflection of her office's florescent lights in the large glass window obscured any view of the evening's dark shadows.

Summit shrugged and turned back to her microscope. Perhaps the canine had spotted another iguana idling across the grass.

The sound of a Spanish phrase drifting in through the open window sent a chill up Summit's spine. She knew the voice of every local who worked at her Galapagos Islands R&D research facility, but she didn't recognize the semi-whispered tones of the intruder located somewhere on the property.

The research biologist leapt to her office doorway and switched off the lights. Moving to the window, she gazed outside but saw no one among the smattering of palm trees and heavy undergrowth illuminated by the pale moonlight. Had a drunken local staggered onto the research grounds on accident? There weren't any houses nearby, but with enough cerveza...

The shattering of glass in the adjacent lab dispelled any notions of accidental intrusion. Someone was breaking in, but why? Their goal could be simple theft of the site's valuable lab equipment, but Summit couldn't take any chances. If the intruders hoped to abscond with her research notes, she had to eliminate that possibility before the assailants forced their way into her office.

Summit turned the deadbolt lock in her office door and swiveled her gaze to the glass wall panel separating her office from the lab, just in time to witness a barrage of cylindrical canisters fly through a smashed window and drop with a clatter onto shards of broken glass scattered across the lab's tile floor. Thick, white smoke poured from the devices and expanded into an evil-looking cloud. Had the attackers known about her debilitating asthma, or was their use of the potentially lethal tear gas just dumb luck?

She'd have to leave—fast. But first she had to wipe her computer's hard drive. It was the only way to protect her research. Thank God she had stored her backup files in the usual secure location last night. She'd lose the results of today's research, but that beat losing it all—or letting it fall into the wrong hands. But if she fled, would anyone know where to look for the files? She typed off a terse message, then clicked the "encrypt" and "send" buttons in quick succession.

A small plume of choking smoke puffed through the crack under her office door. Within seconds, Summit could smell the vile odor of tear gas. Tears flooded her eyes, and her throat began to constrict. Fighting down panic, she snatched the rescue inhaler off her desk and took

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several deep breaths as she staggered towards the exterior window. Pushing it open as far as possible, she rolled over the bottom of the window frame and fell into the soft grass below, gasping for breath as she landed on her side with a thud.

Summit's breath caught in her throat. She hadn't had a chance to wipe her computer's memory! There was no way she could reenter her office, not with the clouds of potentially deadly gas growing thicker by the second. She'd have to trust that the encryption program safeguarding her research notes would be enough.

What should she do now? If she activated the beacon, Dr. Tuttle would come running. But would his presence facilitate her rescue or simply put them both in danger? Deciding the man possessed enough intelligence to avoid walking into a no-win scenario, she pressed a small, red button centered on a device secured on a chain around her neck.

For now, she needed to hide, to escape detection from the band of attackers—at least until Dr. Tuttle arrived. She rose, hoping to make her way around the rear of the building and conceal herself in the dense foliage abutting the tortoise enclosure. She wound her way through a patch of overgrown, bright-yellow passion flowers lining the building's side wall. To her left, a tendril of tear gas emerged from the bathroom window on the building's exterior wall, trailing into Summit's path. She fell to her knees as another wave of asthmatic lightheadedness returned.

Trying to ignore the burning in her eyes, she concentrated on steadying her breathing. The inhaler seemed to be helping, but the physical exertion she had demanded from her body, combined with the potent chemical, could not be overcome. She collapsed to the ground, once again struggling to regain her breath and trying to relax when every fiber in her being screamed at her to run. Panic won the battle, and the flickering black spots dancing at the periphery of her vision soon crowded in, obscuring everything as she slipped into the black night of unconsciousness.