



## **Nefarious**

*Steven F. Freeman*

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Upon returning state-side, the quiet civilian life is quickly left far behind when Blackwell's colleague Zach Lambert calls him from a weekend camping trip in the throes of a devastating illness with forbidding implications.

In a story out of today's headlines, Blackwell and now-FBI Agent Wilson explore the possible diversion of a biotech's project to develop an improved vaccine, scouring leads at the CDC and biotec company, putting their Army and professional skills to the test, and narrowly escaping agents with a murderous agenda at every turn. The closer they come to the truth, the quicker the bodies pile up, along with the suspects. To get to the bottom of the sinister scheme, can Blackwell still use wits when his body has failed him? And will he survive long enough to tell his colleague of the feelings for her he has long kept secret?

## **Nefarious Details**

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## From Reader Review Nefarious for online ebook

### Richard A Peters says

This is the first 5 star Indie review I've ever given. Nefarious is a first class mystery thriller that starts in a military setting but doesn't limit itself to the military world. This story will rope in both civilians and veterans alike.

While great mysteries are a dime a dozen, what sets this tale apart is how well the author explores serious, real world issues. He brazenly takes on uncomfortable subjects, such as injured veterans' challenges with overcoming shattered self-confidence, emotional disconnection from reality and struggling to find new goals in life. He deftly drops the reader into the shattered warrior's shoes in such a way that you aren't just interested, but you really care what happens next to the character. All without coming across overly depressive and still crafting this emotional angle as an integral part of the story rather than a side diversion.

Now, the author does take some extreme "artistic license" with the details of military operations. For example, officers wandering around off base in Afghanistan to some civilian bar to drink, flirt with locals and "hang out." Many veterans would find that annoyingly fictitious. Still, I admit that's a personal bias that doesn't detract from the narrative, but rather makes for a more wild story.

The only issue that's somewhat negative is the rushed ending. While the conspiracy is wrapped up tightly and logically, the method doesn't fit with the rest of the book's smooth tone. During the journey you're fed tantalizing hints, grim foreshadow and believable twists. The "who done it?" feeling rises to a fever pitch by the last chapter... and then the heroes just have a eureka moment and unravel the whole sordid tale in one scene. Rather anti-climactic, in my opinion.

However, none of that changes the fact that this is one of the most addictive page turners I've had the pleasure to read in a while. The tale is both fun and emotionally engaging- a thriller with a soul. Definitely worth both the money and time to read.

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### John Bell says

Nefarious is one of those books that pulls you in from the first chapter and never really relinquishes its grip until you read the final page. Mr. Freeman's military knowledge is impressive, and he weaves it seamlessly into the narrative. I love the 'fly on the wall' feeling that comes with reading a story that is grounded in realism. And the book certainly doesn't disappoint in that aspect. The excitement really ramps up midway through the story and ends with what I consider a satisfying climax.

But the real strength of the story, to me, lies with the characters. Alton Blackwell, the Army Communications Captain whose life is changed after an explosion shatters his leg, is someone I related to immediately. His physical damage is matched by his psychological damage, and I was rooting for him every step of the way as he attempted to navigate through circumstances he never thought he would have to face. Along with the way he meets Lieutenant Mallory Wilson and together they uncover a dangerous conspiracy while at the same time developing a strong personal bond. It is this bond that is the most engaging aspect of the novel, and with the promise of a series arising from Nefarious, it is a bond I hope will continue to develop. I will certainly be reading.

I really enjoyed this one.

## **Kerry Hunter says**

I very kindly received this book for free from the author in exchange for an honest review.

This is a very different read for me. I'm not familiar with war or its procedures, so some of the terms should have gone straight over my head, but thanks to the author's detailed explanations I understood every word, and boy oh boy was this story gripping. I loved every minute of it.

We start off learning about Captain Alton Blackwell's tragic accident to the leg, injuring him for life, and possibly ending his military career for good. He sees his current and future life as bleak, and things only get worse when he is relocated to a desk job away from the fast paced action of field duty. He resigns from the army and returns state-side where, with a couple of friends from the military days, he investigates a case where all is not as it seems.

It almost seems like this book is split into two halves - the military scene, and then back in the US, and it's not until the last gripping few chapters that the US half links back to the military half, and everything is just twisty turny and all links in with each other perfectly. The author writes succinctly, but doesn't forfeit any vital information, rich dialogue or vivid descriptions in doing so. I'd say this was definitely a masterpiece with regards to the way this story is written.

Each character is developed so well and you really get to feel for them, and just want everything to be alright for everyone in the end. I think a lot of the time great plots come before character development, or character development comes before the story line, but in this novel both live harmoniously and provide a wonderful read.

I have the second in the series and cannot wait to start reading it. This book received my highest recommendation and regard.

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## **Christine says**

Oh my! This is not the type of book I usually read. I am not drawn to novels or movies involving either the military or the Middle East. I have not read Saving Private Ryan; I have not seen Lawrence of Arabia. I picked up this book as a number of people whose opinions I respect in my favorite Goodreads group thought it was terrific. They were right. Nefarious is a very strong novel by first time author Steven F. Freeman.

There were a number of things I loved about the book. I was intrigued right off the bat by chapters 1 and 2, which appeared to have absolutely nothing to do with each other. I was thinking "how in the world are these two story snippets going to dovetail?" As I read on through the first half of the book, I found myself really engaged. This was surprising to me as this section of the book involved the military in Afghanistan. I honestly had been preparing to slog through that part to get to the second half where the two stories from chapters 1 and 2 merged; that section was set primarily in Georgia and Washington D.C. Another feature I really loved and which contributed to the fast pacing of the book was the short chapters. There were 317 pages and 69 chapters, which repeatedly lulled me into reading "just one more chapter" before turning out the lights. The protagonist was extremely likable and easy to root for. The villains were indeed nefarious; I got so worked up regarding one of them 20% into the book that I actually sent a Goodreads personal message to Mr. Freeman just to let him know this guy better get his comeuppance or I would not be happy!

The storyline held my attention all the way through. There was no unnecessary prose. The ending unfolded like concentrated orange juice (one could not skim this part), and I was completely, utterly surprised by it. A final feature I liked was the hint of a romance though not enough to put off romance-haters.

I give this book 4.5 stars. The slight knockoff from a 5 star rating is because the good guys were so incredibly smart. Not sure there are people that brilliant. If I am wrong, then this is a 5 star novel. In any event, I see a very bright future for new author Steven F. Freeman.

I highly recommend this book to all mystery/crime/thriller readers, even those who think they won't like it for whatever reason. I plan to read the second, third and fourth books in the Blackwell Files series by the end of summer.

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## **William Stuart says**

As my blog readers know, I'm reading at least one book per month from a Georgia author. This time, it's Nefarious (The Blackwell Files Book 1) by Steven F. Freeman. This one's a thriller, so read on for my thoughts!

Synopsis (from the author): When Army Communications Captain Alton Blackwell takes a hit to the leg while on active duty in Afghanistan, his self-confidence and his leg are equally shattered in the explosion. Assigned to a desk job while recovering, Blackwell manages to prove his resourcefulness as he matches wits with Al-Qaeda operatives in the dangerous regions of Kabul. Unable to fully heal, he resigns himself to the abrupt end of his military career as well as any hope to win the affections of the beautiful and intelligent Lieutenant Mallory Wilson.

Upon returning state-side, the quiet civilian life is quickly left far behind when Blackwell's colleague Zach Lambert calls him from a weekend camping trip in the throes of a devastating illness with forbidding implications. In a story out of today's headlines, Blackwell and now-FBI Agent Wilson explore the possible diversion of a biotech's project to develop an improved vaccine, scouring leads at the CDC and biotec company, putting their Army and professional skills to the test, and narrowly escaping agents with a murderous agenda at every turn. The closer they come to the truth, the quicker the bodies pile up, along with the suspects. To get to the bottom of the sinister scheme, can Blackwell still use wits when his body has failed him? And will he survive long enough to tell his colleague of the feelings for her he has long kept secret?

What I liked: Nefarious is a good story! The trials Alton Blackwell goes through set the stage for his later career, his interactions with the locals in Afghanistan, and his guilt over the death of a high school friend all helped me identify with the character. As a real-life supply chain professional, I liked Mallory's Army occupation, and her character added the love interest. The bond one finds among service members rang true, and the plot, as it evolved over the course of the story, made for a good read.

What I didn't like: Captain Blackwell's antagonist in the Intelligence group and their "rivalry" was too clichéd for me. Similarly, some of the intelligence gathering seemed contrived to me.

Overall impression: Nefarious (The Blackwell Files Book 1) by Steven F. Freeman was a solid and entertaining read. Good characters, a believable plot, a conspiracy, and good writing kept me engaged throughout. If you need a new thriller series to read, try this one!

My rating: 4 stars

## Amanda says

I received this book from the author in exchange for an honest review.

**Nefarious is one of those books that grips you from the very first chapter.** It was a fast paced book filled with lots of action. I can't say there was a dull moment in this book. I wouldn't say that I am typically drawn to war stories, yet I really liked this book. Even though it was a *little* out of my typical tastes. I believe that this book would make a great movie.

In my personal opinion I think that there was too much military scheming and not enough science. It was clear through reading that the author had a military background and therefore the story felt rather realistic. It was obviously very well researched, which I can definitely appreciate. I would have liked to have gotten better descriptions of the characters, I feel like I only have a vague idea of what they looked like. (view spoiler)

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## Susan Anderson says

Nefarious The Blackwell Files by Steven F. Freeman is a riveting military/techno thriller with multiple storylines that are skillfully intertwined. With the first flip of the page, I was hooked into the action and the characters in this intriguing novel.

When the story opens, the main character, Captain Alton Blackwell, a skilled cryptologist and war hero, has been wounded in Afghanistan. Both his leg and his confidence have been shattered, the author tells us, and Alton must decide whether to leave the military or take a desk job where his skills are sorely needed. But a sudden event thrusts him into action, delaying his permanent decision. After the havoc wreaked by Al-Qaeda leaves civilians wounded and takes its toll on military personnel and operations, Alton meets Lieutenant Mallory Wilson the beautiful and brilliant female lead. Their scenes together, while devoid of passion, qualify as a love story which, while not trying to give away events at the end, has the dynamic of spilling into future books. But whatever their future holds, their friendship grows in this book and extends beyond their tour of duty into civilian life where together they attempt to uncover a dangerous conspiracy.

Nefarious The Blackwell Files was a real page turner. The scenes of conflict were brilliantly written with authentic detail and jargon, and I breathed the dust and felt danger of battle. I loved the bantering dialogue at Gandamak's Lodge and I admired the tender relationship Captain Alton Blackwell had with some of the young Afghani civilians. I also liked how Steven Freeman wove two separate stories into one cohesive novel. But most of all I loved the characters, Alton and Mallory as well as the Afghani civilians who played such courageous roles in the story.

Steven F. Freeman weaves a thrilling tale of twisting intrigue with battle scenes that are brilliant and characters who stole my heart. If you long for well-written action with authentic detail, an adventure that will sweep you away, and lovable characters who agonize and fight and change, you will love Nefarious.

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## Stacey says

What a ride! Nefarious is the kind of page turner where the end of each chapter begs for the next to be read at that moment. No good stopping points. Great story lines developed through alternating chapters with good characters. I love smart, strong women characters and I found one here.

I was given a copy to download, but I had trouble. Out of curiosity I read a sample on my kindle and didn't want it to end so I bought it. Worth every penny. I'm looking forward to the next installment of The Blackwell Files.

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### **Amber says**

I Received a free copy of this ebook in exchange for an honest review.

I was asked by author friend Steven Freeman to check out his book Nefarious. It was a pretty good read. Alton Blackwell is a cryptologist in the army who decrypts messages about enemy targets in afganistan for the army. It is only when his leg gets injured in the field that he is demoted to the C-2 division that decrypts messages in an office setting. With discharge looming, Alton tries his best to help serve his country and do his job to help and save others. He makes many friends who end up helping him later on after his adventures on the battlefield. When a experimental and lethal Rabies vaccine kills one of his army comrades, Alton must figure out who did it with the help of his friends Agent Mallory Wilson and Dave. Can they find out who the culprit of the vaccine is and stop the nefarious plot to sell it before it harms others? Read this book and find out.

This was very action packed and exciting! Definitely check it out. This was like burn notice. A great Military action Medical thriller.

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### **Marla Josephs says**

Nefarious is a fast paced ride. It reminded me a lot of Dan Browns style in the way it introduced characters and story lines, then whisked you away to another one and left you dying to know what was happening in the previous story line but, just as absorbed in the latest, so that your only option is to continue to read!

I am a huge Dan Brown fan but constantly scold him for this as I read. Because all of the story lines are so compelling, there is no good place to stop! And you know they all converge at some point like a big, exciting puzzle. You are kept on a constant, riveting, consuming edge where you must know what is happening, yet you will not know all until the story comes together and brings closure.

So, I suggest you make sure you have the time to read it through, because you get strapped in from the first scene. I really enjoyed the way Alton's character and Mallory were developed. The author appears to have a military background and things that would normally have left me clueless were written in a way that were understandable without interrupting the flow of the story or giving a jargon lesson. And, certain medical terms that I was well aware of, MI, myocardial infarction, comes to mind, were definitely used correctly. So, the fact that Mr. Freeman definitely did his homework to use proper terminology for authenticity, yet did not overwhelm the reader with constant useless terms was very well done.

I personally didn't see this book as a "war book", as I have seen stated, but a suspenseful thriller with elements of war, military and even romance. But, whatever overlapping genres it fits into, it is one heck of a ride! Well written and compelling. Can't wait to read the next one.

### **Cindy Womack says**

Part mystery, part techno-thriller, part character study, Freeman has brought a great story to life in his debut novel. After living through a terrorist attack in war torn Afghanistan, Alton Blackwell struggles to reconcile his self-appointed role as protector with the realities of a life changing injury. As the reader, I found myself pulling for Alton, whether he was thwarting another terrorist attack, uncovering a research firm's effort to get its product to market come hell, high water, or murder, or self-consciously navigating his budding relationship with the smart and gregarious Mallory Wilson. Freeman seamlessly transitions from the highly tense life of a Middle Eastern military compound to the seemingly tranquil life of suburban Atlanta. And yet tranquility is the last thing Alton and Mallory discover once stateside. Using his giftedness with the language and perfectly cadenced dialog, Steve Freeman draws the reader into this world and keeps him wanting more. I recommend you start this book early in your day, since you won't be able to sleep until you've turned the last page.

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### **Paula Shene says**

When I picked up Nefarious {hard copy, author signed}, I did not realize I would be in it for the long haul. This book, set in wartorn Afghanistan has many facets to draw different readers. Like Horror, I seldom read war stories, but there was a fast connection with the main characters that had me hooked. There is a mystery, there is suspense, there is a love story, but... going in, knowing this is a series, with a very satisfying stand-alone story, is a delight.

Mr. Freeman is a beginning author with a bright future. I have bought his second book, Ruthless, and his third, T Wave, which just gives me time enough to be ready for his fourth, Havoc, that is due out in August or September 2012.

He's an author I recommend and getting in on the ground floor is the best - it is apparent, he will prove to be, not only a proficient but prolific writer

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### **Lorraine Loveit says**

I received an ARC for an honest review.

I don't usually read war stories, but I have watched several movies/TV series in this genre. I was pleasant surprised that not only did I enjoy it, but for the first time in ages, I read a novel in one sitting.

It's the type of story that stays with you after you have finished it, because the plot and more specifically, the characters come across as real life rather than fiction.

Looking forward to reading Steven Freeman's next instalment in The Blackwell Files.

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## Jean says

When I started seeing book fans on Goodreads raving about this book, I was only vaguely aware of the meaning of “nefarious.” Use it in a sentence? Uh, no. I had to look it up. Steven Freeman’s Nefarious sounded like something I might like to read, so I added it to my “want to read” shelf. Finally, perhaps two months later, I started to read it. It took me less than two days.

A number of reviews of Nefarious start like this, “I do not normally read war books...” Nor do I. This is not a war book. Although half of the book is set in Afghanistan during the war, and the main character is a war hero, as are his friends, this is not a book about war. This is a well-concocted story about a war-wounded former Army cryptologist, Alton Blackwell, and his FBI friend, former Lieutenant Mallory Wilson, as they team up to use their Army and professional skills to penetrate a scheme that is diverting the development of a vaccine to potentially cause harm worldwide.

Freeman’s writing is descriptive, yet concise. The action is riveting, the plot is believable, the suspense is palpable, the characters seem genuine, and their dialogue, true. I was rather puzzled by the insertion of the raccoon scene so early in the book, but Mr. Freeman’s storytelling is so compelling that I had no doubt that he would tie it all together in due time. The chapters set in Afghanistan are very strong. Freeman carefully introduces us to Blackwell, showing him to be an intelligent, caring, resourceful man. His self-esteem took a hit along with his leg when his van was blown up, and as we see him struggle to get his life back on track, we see that he tries to bury his feelings for Lt. Wilson. As the book progresses, they develop a friendship. Back in civilian life, they form an efficient partnership in working to uncover the nefarious plan and to expose its agents. My biggest problem was my impatience with Blackwell’s “regret avoidance” regarding Mallory!

I look forward to reading more about Alton “don’t call me Al” Blackwell and Mallory Wilson. This was a very enjoyable start to what I hope will be a long, successful career for Steven Freeman.

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## Donna says

\*Copy provided by author\*

I'll be honest in saying that in the beginning of this book I was thinking "Why did I agree to this!"

I'm not a fan of books regarding the wars in Afghanistan or Iraq for reasons that are entirely my own. I tend to avoid them all together. So it took a few chapters for me to finally see the whole picture or atleast get a sense of where it was going.

I became enthralled and wanted to see it through.

This was well written with some interestingly developed characters. The authors depiction of war terminology is easy to follow along for those who haven't a clue. For those who are familiar...my sympathies. Great book if your looking for something complex.