\* \* \*

**Introduction—BADMIND**

All of us have the capacity for evil. Even on the warm, friendly islands of the Caribbean, deceit and manipulation abound at the expense of cooperation and harmony. The creation of doubt for selfish and nefarious purposes poisons understanding of facts and truth and is almost impossible to guard against. The locals have a name for this trouble in paradise: *badmind*.

 Anatomically, *badmind* can be said to live largely in a knot of neurons at the base of the brain, often called the reptilian brain. This is the seat of humanity's primal behaviors, referred to as the five Fs: freezing, fleeing, feeding, fighting and fornicating. The reptile mind unconsciously keeps its host apprised of the dangers lurking around them—handy when in jungles, watching for predators. Less useful in the twenty-first century when threats are rarely immediate. It often overrides the human, rational-thinking process directed by much of outer neocortex, or the so-called mammalian mind.

Badmind can be weaponized.

In 2011, a little known but horrific man-made catastrophe took place in the Caribbean just south of Cuba on the colorful island known as *The Rock*—Jamaica. It occurred close in time to the tragic events surrounding the January 12, 2010, Haitian earthquake, which followed on the heels of four hurricanes in a single year.

 Scant attention was given to the incident because the US declared it to be a matter of national security. What information did escape was either ignored, covered up, discredited, or erased through a covert PR campaign by the National Security Agency, the CIA, and the Voice of America. The few news leaks found in local Jamaican papers were dismissed as conspiracy theories.

 But here’s what really happened.

**Chapter One—Blood Moon Rising**

20 December 2010, 11:59 p.m.,

Portland Parish, Jamaica

The foliage crawled with the male tree frogs huffing and puffing to distinguish themselves from their competitors. A thrashing high above in the naseberry trees echoed below. The soapy scent of fruit bats wafted down from their roosts along with the rain of discarded seeds and pulp. And off in the distance was the cry of a man. “Evil is here! Flee . . . flee while you can!”

The Blue Mountains had a purple hue in a rare total eclipse. It was just before the winter solstice, and Earth passed between the sun and the moon, its shadow cast upon the full lunar surface.

Glinting in the moonlight, a coiled, razor-wire embroidery ran along the top of the ten-foot-high stone wall surrounding the Chainey Estate. Beneath it was a humming high-voltage wire, woven through the broken glass bottles embedded in the cement.

 At intervals of every thirty feet or so, signs anchored near the top of the wall bore the same message: YOU ARE TRESPASSING ON PRIVATE PROPERTY—NOT CROWN LAND. VIOLATORS WILL BE HELD RESPONSIBLE AND PUNISHED. REAPING FROM THIS PREMISE WILL RESULT IN YOUR INJURY OR DEATH.

 The bushes rustled just outside the wall, caused by something large enough to be a wild boar, an ass, or a human.

Five men crept into the moonlight, moving closer. All wore black and carried backpacks. Two of the men used metal cutters to snip the coiled razor wire and then threw several thick blankets over the glass and electrical wire and scurried up the wall. The others hurled machetes and tools over the top. The five silhouettes maneuvered with the practiced efficiency of a special-forces military unit: scurrying up the wall, swinging their legs over the other side, dropping silently to the ground.

“Careful!” a deep voice whispered. “Don’t trigger the motion detectors.”

When they all were on the other side, they scrambled into what remained of the moonlight in the open field. The coffee bushes cast dark shadows in the light of the eclipse.

Male hands seldom touched these bushes, although some of the men’s wives picked the berries by day. It is commonly known that red-and-green color blindness is more common with males, and since the berries ripen from green to red, coffee growers have traditionally favored hiring women. But *uman’s* work was not what these men had in mind. Even at the high price that coffee was currently selling, it would take too much time to harvest enough to make this operation a success.

 The men split up into two groups—two men climbed uphill and three raced downhill toward the thick patches of ganja, or marijuana. With sweating hands, they all held machetes at the ready. The three men who had raced down the slope were first to begin toppling the ganja. The moonlight turned to amber as they whisked the cut stalks aside into neat piles. Their work effort was poetry in motion, done so well it looked easy.

As the three finished, the frogs on the entire mountainside suddenly went silent, and every cricket in the ganja ceased chirping. The men buttoned their shirts and stiffened. Shivering, they drew close together and put their backs to each other in a defensive posture.

Something tingled in their noses, then it turned their stomachs and quickened their hearts to a nauseating pace. A metallic taste in their mouths and a ringing in their ears followed.

The men leaned over and began spitting until their mouths were dry. Urine chilled them as it soaked through their underwear and ran down their pants. Two of them suddenly pointed their machetes at each other.

“What did you steal, Bigie?”

“Nothing, Reefer. You full up with badmind. You think you’re such a big *mon* . . .”

“Stop chatting like *gyals*, and do your jobs!”

“Me suck your *mada*!”

“*Bombaclot*!”

“Batty boy!”

“*Aarait*. That's nuff . . . get hold of yourselves,” said the third man.

The two combatants dropped their machetes but immediately began wrestling, attempting to strangle each other or gouge the other's eyes out, rolling through the piles of cut ganja.

The surrounding bush seemed to move.

“Listen!” The eyes of the only man standing were wide, scanning.

The combatants pushed off from one another and struggled to their feet, trying to gather composure. The wind whistled through the distant pines.

Up higher, the other two men were bickering. “I'm going to kick your ass if you don't shut up!”

“Shhhhhhhh!”

They stopped, listened, and looked around, their eyes wide and white in the moonlight. Both suddenly took off their backpacks and yanked out headlamps, forcing the straps on over their saturated brows. Abandoning all caution, they switched the lights on, eyeballing their surroundings.

Silent as death, something lunged.

“Jesus Christ!” one of the men screamed; the light beam from his headgear trembled. Whatever the hell it was had bitten him. Where his right pinky had once been, blood pulsed with each racing heartbeat, spraying a red deluge over the ganja.

His beam shifted to the right and onto something coldblooded and about a foot long hanging from a nearby coffee branch by its long prehensile tail. Its powerful jaws sent ripples through the flesh of its temples as it swallowed.

Out of nowhere they came, out of the darkness, out of the moonlight—more creatures advancing as a wave, crawling up the man’s arms, their sharp claws drawing blood. In control, the reptiles held firm, hissing and advancing steadily upward.

Several lunged at the same time.

“Me eyes!” The man fell backward to the ground, trying to get them off his face. “Help me!”

His companion leapt aside, hyperventilating. He frantically patted his arms and shoulders, and when he felt nothing, he breathed easier. But a weight pulled down at the back of his trousers. As he turned his head, in the moonlight, he saw four more creatures climbing up his leg.

By now, the three men in the lower cannabis realized they were being stalked. One still held his machete and looked around the moving bush for a target. It was big—very big.

A beast, several hundred pounds worth, crashed into one of the men. Without even a moment to fend it off, he was pulled screaming and thrashing into the tall, uncut cannabis.

One of the remaining two men backed away, swinging his machete, prepared to fend off an attack. He only got as far as the edge of the cannabis before being knocked off his feet. He screamed, lashing out repeatedly with the blade while being pulled, flailing, into the bush.

The last man stumbled away from the cannabis now filled with the screams of the others. He had nothing to protect himself. “Bigie . . . Reefer . . .” He thought about going in after them but jumped backward as more cannabis moved without wind. Above, from the top of the hill, he could hear the shrieking of his mates. The metallic taste and ringing in his ears came again, and the hair on the back of his neck stood straight up. He turned and ran back toward the wall.

As he stumbled up the steep incline and into the coffee, he sensed a presence following just behind him. Not daring to slow down or look back, he picked up his pace and veered toward the wall. He had that dry, foul taste, again, in his mouth, but he couldn’t spit. His breath smelled like bile and turned his stomach. He could barely catch his breath.

He saw the wall. It looked so promising and hopeful. *I’ll soon reach it. . . . Soon come . . . soon come . . . soon come . . .* He continued the race but felt frozen in time and space, not seeming to get any closer. The warm hug of his grandmother was the last thing he imagined he would think about at a time like this, but it gave him hope. She was worth living for. He’d promised to do more to make her proud of him. He’d joined the Peace Corps as a volunteer and come to Jamaica for her in the first place.

Getting a new wind, he raced along the wall and, with relief, saw the spot with the cut razor wire. The blankets still hung from the top. As he got closer, his breath came harder. But his own breathing wasn’t all he heard. If he could just get to the wall, leap up, and pull himself out of the creature’s reach, he would be safe. Just another twenty feet, fifteen, six . . . He leapt and caught the top of the wall with both hands, pulled upward, and felt the blanket under his armpits.

Charged with the will to live, even the pain of the razor wire through the blankets couldn’t stop him. He kicked to throw himself up and over. A jolt and the sickening crunch of teeth biting into his right calf stopped him. Whatever godforsaken thing inhabited this cursed land pulled him backward. He tried to kick free with his other leg as he looked back, but his attacker appeared as only darkness in the moonlight.

**\* \* \***

**Another Troubling Report of Bad Lizards**

Constable Sergeant Norman Trooper had officially started Labour Day off duty, so he was wearing his civilian clothes—an orange polo shirt and matching Bermuda shorts. But when an emergency call came into the station, he felt obliged to go back on duty, even though he was out of uniform. Halfway up a footpath, with a powerful view overlooking the village, just past Bumpy Adams’s house, he collapsed like cut elephant grass on top of a stump. Every day, he had less energy, mostly because of all the paperwork, and it prompted him to consider early retirement. But the good news was some of that paperwork had brought to the village a new female Peace Corps volunteer who was easy on the eyes and could even sing. Occasionally, when she got upset, she would stand on her head under a guango tree, and the villagers tiptoed around her as if a sacred right was in progress. He smiled.

The wind rushed up the side of the mountain like the panting breath of a hound. He was too large of a man to be hauling and dragging himself around at such high elevations and steep inclines. Granted, the mountains were a little cooler, but he was better suited for the flatlands. It took a direct order to put him at this new post in Purgatory.

The sweat rolled off his nose as he shook his head. Goats and donkeys liked Purgatory, but he was there only because his predecessor, damn him, had developed a fondness for donning gas masks to scare the hell out of the village children and for issuing too many drunk-driving citations to tourists. One day, he finally went too far and chased a muck-a-muck film producer from Hollywood all the way down the mountain to Strawberry Hill Resort, where he handcuffed and took him into custody beside the pool.

For nearly five minutes, Constable Trooper sat wheezing and rubbing the sweat around his clean-shaven face as he prepared to rise to his feet.

What a Labour Day! Actually, it had been the year from hell—running the Purgatory Constabulary Station. It started out on a bad foot with the disappearance of Mrs. Adams’s two sons. Poor woman, she was known as *Bumpy* because of all the hard knocks life had thrown at her. Bumpy was well-liked and worked like a man, running her tiny shop in Purgatory square, where she sold only baked breadfruit, but with lots of love. Her husband had had a thirst for rum and died young, so she had tried to raise her sons solo. Having never gotten beyond primary school, they were uneducated and best known for misbehaving. They had never moved out, so Bumpy did her best to provide a roof over their heads and put food in their bellies.

Then they just vanished on December twentieth, into that strange, amber-colored full-moon eclipse. No remains were ever found, and it was unofficially assumed that they had run afoul of someone with enough power and respect to have had them killed and to have gotten away with it. Only one person in the area fit that description.

The British billionaire Old Man Chainey demanded more and more favors from those with pay grades above Constable Trooper’s. Chainey had long threatened to cut off the village’s water because its underground spring originated on *his* estate, and now he seemed close to getting his way. Trucking in water during a drought for profit was his plan. That, and bottling and then marketing the spring water overseas because focus groups found that the three syllables in the word *Ja-mai-ca* apparently rang positively with Britons and Americans. As if drinking water from The Rock would somehow bestow the island's unique form of happiness on those whose lips it touched.

Trooper’s thoughts turned into curses as he pulled himself up and lumbered down the path. Another thing that galled him, he was forbidden to go public about the random reports of dangerous reptiles in Purgatory—the village *he* was responsible for. *Don’t want to do anything that discourages tourist from coming to Jamaica*, the Minister of National Security had said.

And most recently, on Labour Day—his day off—while volunteering to mend a schoolhouse fence along with Officers Harvey and Webber, he got a call at around thirteen hundred hours about something amiss at Mr. Shaw’s place, just up the path from Bumpy’s house.

Responding to the call, he felt like an ass for trying to sneak past Bumpy, and of course, she saw him through the kitchen window and came out and burst into tears, asking about her sons. He spent an *olepe* of time holding her as she wept, listening to how everyone deserves a proper burial. Only when he could get a word in did he manage to get free to answer the call of duty.

When he finally trudged up the hill to Shaw’s house, it was fourteen thirty hours. Shaw’s wife, Marlene, their two daughters and four nieces were beside themselves. Trooper knew that at age eighty-two, Robert Shaw had poor health and had recently suffered a stroke. Lovingly, his family attended to him.

Shaw’s niece Shantel was hysterical when she recounted the incident that beckoned Trooper, so he recorded it on his phone so he could tease it apart later for officialdom: “I had just given *Ongkl* Bobby his pills and chamomile tea, and he was resting on the bed. But then I suddenly felt sick, like with a serious chill. So, I closed his opened bedroom window and went back to washing clothes. About ten minutes later, I heard a thrashing about in the room, but it stopped, and I gave it no more mind. Then he started screaming! I ran and opened the door to seehim lying on the floor, kicking at something standing on the footboard of the bed with its mouth wide open, hissing. It was as big as a cat, the ugliest thing I ever seen. Could kill a dog! And it had blood dripping from its mouth! Ongkl Bobby’s right foot was bleeding bad, and I could see the big toe was bitten off, and he was trying to kick the monster away with his other foot! Then the thing looked at me, reared up on its hind legs just like a mongoose and leaped! It tore past me through the house, up and out the bathroom window, and disappeared in the bush. It left no trace but a terrible, nasty smell!”

Another incident Trooper would not be allowed to talk about.