

# **Mind Crawlers**

**By**

**Njedeh Anthony**

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**<http://www.njedeh.com>**

# Prologue

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In the dead of night in the middle of the Nevada desert, two men dressed in tailored, black suits and a woman stand around a burning corpse laying flat on the ground. The cold wind blows the scent of burning flesh toward the three living souls. Not a word is shared between them as their shadows are cast on the sand; instead their gaze is intent on the fire, anxiously waiting for the body to burn to ashes. Toni Malone, a 28-year-old, vivacious black woman is hypnotized by the fire. As she stands, staring into it with dark brown skin, full lips, an afro, high forehead, narrow jaw and sexually imposing presence. Her attire presents a provocatively executive look complete with a red silk shirt and dark blue pants. As she steps toward the fire, Silo, the younger of the two men, holds her arm. He has on a white long sleeve shirt in his black suit. Silo, born John Doe, changed his name upon his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. As he stood holding Toni's arm, he has matured much more than his 29 years and his brown hair in contrast with his pale skin makes him look corporate to the outside world. However, his looks do not betray the introspective man within. His hands are manicured, his face clean shaven and his hair neatly trimmed.

“What are you doing?” Silo asks softly.

Just then, Sir Walter Helmsley, a 51-year-old man with white hair, standing six feet four, whispered in horror as his shaky hands point at the body, “It moved.” Usually completely composed as per his station in life of an English aristocrat, born to wealth and a lineage that dates back to King Henry's illegitimate son, Henry Fitzroy, his demeanor is out of character causing Silo and Toni concern.

All three of them slowly move toward the burning body when it suddenly sits up causing the three to fall back against the sand, at first scared, then fascinated. As the crispy, burning head

slowly and meticulously turns toward them, the mouth opens and the skull falls away from the body, crashing to the ground below. As it hits the ground, it begins to roll toward them, causing them to quickly jump to their feet and move away. When they are a safe distance from the rolling head, they stop, breathing heavy, as they patiently watch the ashes of the flesh disappear into the wind. As the smell of the burning flesh reaches them again with the wind change, Walter takes out a red silk handkerchief and holds it over his nose and mouth. Toni wraps her hands together feeling cold suddenly. Silo takes of his coat and puts it around Toni.

“I am not exactly sure what to believe,” Walter says in his Welsh accent. “I know what I want to believe, but I’m not sure if I should believe it.”

“If Damien comes back, I will kill him again,” Toni says in a voice full of deep, round tones. She steps forward and stomps on Damien’s skull. “If he comes back a million times, I will kill him a million times.” She then turns, walking away from them into the night, holding Silo’s coat around her shoulders for warmth.

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January 15, 2007

In the Knysna-Amatole Montane forests in South Africa, bush pigs grunt past the deciduous trees as the trumpeting of elephants echo through the rainforest. Underneath the full moon, the hum of the generators unsettle the African leopards and blue duikers.

Next to the generator sits a white, weather-proof church tent. The tent, 60 feet by 150 feet, could easily house 1,000 people and is illuminated by fluorescent lights. It is covered on all sides, except at the entrance, where 18 black gunmen dressed in jeans and tee-shirts, stand inside the tent, sweaty and on the edge, as they point sub-machine guns at the entrance. Within the tent

stands a majestically carved pulpit and, beside it was Absalom Zuma, a muscular 17-year-old boy. As he faces the gunmen, you can clearly see his bulletproof vest and camouflage trousers. However, it is the two massive 140 pound Rottweilers that he holds by their straining leashes that first draw attention. The dogs, named Kane and Abel, bark ferociously at the pitch dark night as saliva rolls from between their sharp teeth and out of their mouths. The dogs are hungry, hungry for human meat. They were trained to kill men and respect Absalom and only Absalom, who loved them more than anything in the world.

Derek Zuma, a heavysset 53-year-old black man stands behind his son. He has been called the reincarnation of Christ because of his miracles. He was featured on *60 Minutes* and interviewed by Katie Couric after science attempted and failed to disprove his miracles. In front of his congregation, he preaches that God is not a poor man's God only and always has room for the rich in his congregation. Never afraid to show his wealth, some call him shamelessly flashy, especially after purchasing his 747 jet five years previously. Now, Derek stands expressionless in his yellow, tailored suit. The tent was dead silent, except for the generator.

A mosquito buzzes into the tent, flies past the 18 gunmen and lands on Derek's hand. As he slaps it dead, the gunmen turn to face him. Seeing them turn, he screams in a raspy voice, "Face the entrance, you fools!" They turn away from the entrance, each knowing that they are going to die in the middle of the jungle. Derek continues, "Shoot anything that enters, even if it's your mother. You shoot it!" Spit flies out of Derek's mouth as he emphasizes his point in his South African accent.

"Father-," Absalom speaks softly in his high pitched voice, holding tight to the dogs' leashes.

“Shut up and listen,” Derek says as he cuts him off. “We have only a small window here. If we miss it, we die.” Derek turns to face the soldiers, who are pretending to not eavesdrop, “We all die.”

The dogs bark louder, pulling Absalom forward as they hunger for what is in the darkness that surrounds them.

A dark smile comes to Absalom’s mouth, “Talking of death, Kane and Abel are hungry.” The teenager gently strokes the beasts and asks, “Let them have their dinner?”

Derek sighs. “Release your pets.”

“Now, we finish this.” Absalom says as he releases the ferocious canines into the night.

They let out thunderous barks, scaring the gunmen, as they run into the night. “Kill them! Kill them all!” Absalom screams after the animals.

Moments pass and the thunderous barking of the dogs turn to whimpers and then silence. Once again, the only noise comes from the generator.

Absalom stares at the entrance. “I can’t hear my babies,” Absalom says, scared and confused.

“If we are lucky, they are dead,” his father says from behind the pulpit.

“How many are they?” Absalom asks, confused.

“Three,” Derek answers without looking at his son.

“Just three!?” Absalom speaks more to himself than his father. As Absalom regains his confidence, he picks up an AK47 and heads toward the entrance.

“Stay in here, you arrogant fool!” Derek shouted at him.

“Not everyone enjoys being a coward, father.” Absalom says as he marches out of the tent, pushing a gunman out of his way. He sprints into the darkness, spraying bullets from his gun into the jungle as he advances. “Where are you?! Where are you?!”

A gunman with a scar across his face approaches Derek, "Should I follow him?"

"He's already dead. Man your stations." Derek maintains his gaze on the entrance, but sees nothing but darkness and shadows from the lights within the tents.

Abruptly, the dogs begin to bark once more and an echo of Absalom's high pitched scream vibrates through the gunmen's spines, "No, no, no! Please, no! Help! Please help! Father help!"

In the silence that follows, the gunmen's hands begin to tremble.

Derek shouts with the authority of a general, "Stand your ground and shoot anything that enters this tent."

Again, the tortured voice of Absalom drowns the room in fear. "My babies... my babies. Help! Help! Father, help me!" No one in the room moves a muscle as Absalom stumbles into the tent, his bullet proof vest missing, his left hand holding his bleeding neck and his right attempting to hold in his guts as parts of his intestines slip through his fingers.

Horrified, the gunmen are unable to move. For hired thugs, this act was beyond any of their experience.

Taking control, Derek screams, "Fire!"

The gunmen aim their guns toward the entrance, but no one fires.

"What are you waiting for? I said shoot him!" Derek screams again.

The gunmen remain still as statues, as Absalom takes two more steps into the tent before dropping dead. Just then, Kane and Abel stroll inside in the room like lions walking in their pride, blood dripping from their mouths. They lay at the entrance.

Derek sighs, straightens his suit and steps onto the pulpit. As he moves, he recites words as though paraphrasing the bible. "I am the angel of God. I am not scared of the three of you!" He

stands with his fist on his waist. “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”

Walking from the darkness into the light of the entrance of the tent, Silo appears in a black, tailored suit. The dogs rise to greet him, as his strokes them exactly the way Absalom did. The gunmen remain like statues, pointing their guns at the entrance as he walks passed them. “What type of man of God needs armed men to protect him?”

“A man of God with evil enemies,” Derek replies, knowing that he will shortly die.

“The only evil here is you,” Silo replies, taking a handkerchief from one of the gunmen’s pockets and using it to clean his shoes.

“I have healed the sick. I have fed the poor. I have made the blind see. I have made cripples walk.”

“You drowned your entire congregation,” Silo says.

“I don’t know what you are talking about,” Derek responds defensively.

“You hypnotized 89 people and had them walk into a river and drown themselves. All the while, you were inside their heads, savoring their agony as they died.” As he speaks, Silo maintains eye contact with Derek.

Derek, suddenly desperate, is unable to look into the younger man’s eyes, “It’s not what you think. They believed the water was shallow.”

Walter strides into the tent, an aura of a king around him. “Lying is beneath you, Derek. Show some class and confess. You drowned them all.”

Derek looks up at Walter, irritated by the sight of him, while Walter plays with a gunman’s bushy black hair, as the man continues to remain still.

“Maybe I did,” Derek says with renewed vitality. “The hunger is like a fire in your head. It burns. It’s a hole that I had to fill up. I’m alright now. Their sacrifice-”

“Sacrifice! It was murder. You killed them all, women and children,” Silo says as he cuts him off.

“I am cured. I swear to you. I am cured. I no longer crave the death of dying minds,” responds Derek.

“Sure, you are,” Walter says sarcastically, dusting dirt from his blazer with his silk handkerchief.

The gunmen abruptly turn and aim their guns at Derek.

“I feel great. I feel like I have a virgin mind, I swear. In the last two days, I haven’t killed... I mean, had anyone... you know what I mean,” Derek says as sweat pours down his face.

“No, I do not know what you mean, but what I do know is that you are unstable,” Walter says as he rubs his hands with his handkerchief

“I’m unstable?!” Derek laughs boisterously, “I’m alive!”

“Alive?” Walter walks past the gunmen, “You are an untamed heterogeneous beast.”

“Talking about heterogeneous beasts,” Derek clears his throat and continues. “Did you know that Grigori Rasputin was poisoned, beaten and shot, but still managed to sit up as his body was burnt to ashes?” An intense silence consumes the room. Derek stares at Silo with genuine interest, ignoring Walter. “Is it true? Did Damien sit up when the three of you... burnt his body?”

“When we burnt Damien, his tendons shrank, forcing his legs to bend, making it seem as if he sat up,” Silo replies trying to convince himself as he says it.

“Do you really believe that?” Derek asks, realizing he suddenly has an edge in the conversation.

“We are asking the questions,” Walter bellows.

“Is the great Silo scared that the big bad Damien will come back from the grave for revenge?” Derek asks as he ignores Walter.

“We are asking the questions,” Walter yells again, louder and more irritated this time.

“Questions? I thought this was an execution,” Derek says as his confidence returns. “The beautiful thing about being a mind crawler is that we know what the most valuable commodity on this selfish planet is: knowledge. The type of knowledge that changed Eve from a wandering animal in the Garden of Eden to a goddess.” Derek stares at the scared gunman as they continue to point their guns at him. “I will tell you everything you need to know about Damien, but I need all three of you to guarantee me my life.”

“We tracked you to the middle of the jungle and you think we’re going to let you just waltz away?” Walter asks.

“Every mind crawler has his secrets. I’m the only one who knows what happened with Damien. Let me live... just for today and you will know everything.” Derek’s confidence grows as he speaks. “You will have all of my secrets.”

“Show some dignity, Derek. We killed your first born son. You should be thinking about revenge, not escape,” Walter says, enjoying every word that comes out of his mouth.

“What’s the point?” Derek turns his back on them. “Against the three of you, I am a dead man. Absalom chose his faith.” The words are heavy for him for him to speak. “He chose to die like a man and not a coward... like his father.”

“That, my friend, is a fallacy,” Walter says, still fascinated by the gunman’s bushy hair; digging his hands into it, while the hypothesized man stood, pointing the gun at Derek.

“Why die now when I can hunt and kill the three of you another day?” Derek says, giving into a portion of his rage.

Walter, slightly shocked, says, “That’s quite audacious of you, but I appreciate the honesty.”

“You have our word. Walter and I will let you live today and today only, if you tell us everything we need to know,” Silo responds.

Derek enjoyed the subtle jab to Walter’s pride, as Silo inadvertently exposed the pecking order.

“Nice to know, but I need to also hear it from Toni Malone’s lips,” Derek says looking out of the white tent.

“She isn’t here,” Silo replies.

Derek peers at them in shock as his rage boils over. “She’s not here?” The intensity in the room grows. Derek’s hands fold into fists, his eyes turn bloody red and tears slide down his cheeks. “When Absalom first opened his eyes, I was the first thing he saw. He had his eyes closed shut until I walked into the room. The boy always knew his father and I failed him as a father. He cried for my help and I stood here, like the coward I was.” He wipes the tears from his cheeks, “I let my son die for nothing.”

“He was an animal, like his father,” Walter says cautiously.

Derek begins talking to himself, as he stares at Walter and Silo. “How dare they attack me without Toni Malone? I am a level four and these cockroaches attack me without Toni Malone.”

The gunmen suddenly arch their guns toward Silo by a radius of 45 degrees. The guns and their arms weigh on the gunmen like boulders as their minds are controlled by others.

“And I’m a level three,” Silo replies softly. “You can’t defeat us. We-”

“Shut up!” Derek roars out cutting him off. “I am the angel of God, more powerful than you. Once their bullets splatter your brain like spaghetti, I will repeat your last words at your funeral.”

“You will die today,” Walter attempts to reinsert himself into the conversation.

“Which one of you killed my boy?” Derek asks in a whisper.

Walter responds with a bland smile, “It was the dogs.”

“I promise you a very slow and miserable death, Walter,” Derek says as he maintains his gaze on both men. His gunmen begin arching their guns closer to Silo; their hands were moving as though being pushed from both sides.

“I am Sir Walter Helmsley, you unstable monster!” Walter screams out, genuinely angry that Derek chose to ignore his knighthood.

“Walter, Walter, Walter. You are a miserable parasite, still hiding under the skirt of your protégé,” Derek responds expressionless.

“You will refer to me by my full appellation!” Walter spits out, believing it more disrespectful to not call him by his full name than killing Derek’s son.

“I promise you a slow... painful... death, Walter,” Derek whispers.

“I’m shivering in my boots,” Walter responds sarcastically as he pulls a wasp knife out from his belt. As he stretches to throw it, he freezes like a statue, his knife still in his hand above his shoulder.

Derek and Silo stand watching each other like hawks surveying their potential prey.

“And you, Silo... will experience the wrath of a level four... slowly,” Derek speaks with his voice rising back to its original vigor.

The gunmen move again until their guns are an equal distance between Derek and Silo.

“The last time I checked, having 18 men make a brain into human spaghetti is a pretty quick death,” Silo replies, not sure if he’s trying to be funny.

“Depends on what part of your brain their bullet hits.”

The gunmen once again arch their guns 45 degrees closer to Silo.

“Forgive me for not making it easy on you,” Silo responds.

“Which one of you killed my son?” Derek asks again.

“I did,” Silo responds as he holds Derek’s gaze.

“I will give Walter a quick and less painful death if you tell-”

“You how to escape the Time Warp?” Silo finishes Derek’s sentence.

“I’m not stupid. I know you are taking that secret to the grave,” Derek replies. “As I said before, knowledge is everything for a mind crawler. Our secrets are what define us from the next mind crawler. You share that secret, you’re as good as obsolete.”

“So, what do you want?” Silo asks, still composed.

“Tell Walter. I want to see his face when he finds out from you directly,” Derek smirks at Walter, who is still standing with the knife above his head.

“Tell Walter what?” Silo asks.

“Don’t play coy with me, Silo. He throws the word unstable around as though it’s dirty laundry.”

“No, we are done here.”

“No, Silo, I am done with you.”

All of the gunmen point their guns at Silo. The trigger finger of each is trying to pull back, but they won’t move.

Derek maintains his gaze on Silo, “How long do you think you can keep all 18 men from pulling the trigger?”

“Long enough,” Silo says and then he snaps his fingers. Kane and Abel run past Silo and jump at Derek with their jaws open, ready to tear into his flesh. Derek kicks Kane, while attempting to fight off Able, who is biting his arm.

As Silo whispers, “sleep,” The 18 gunmen fall to the ground asleep. Walter unfreezes and throws the knife, which plunges into Derek’s heart. Derek looks at the knife, surprised that he was hit. Then, he stumbles backward and collapses. Walter runs to him, pushes the dogs away and kneels beside him, grabbing his face as he screams, “Look at me! Look at me! Look at me!”

Derek grasps his chest, surprised that he is dying. Walter pulls him closer and removes the knife.

With his last breath, Derek says, "Your time will come."

Walter’s focus is locked on Derek, and as Derek takes his last breath, a force throws Walter backwards. He hits the tent, bounces back to the ground and blacks out for a moment. When he opens his eyes, he says, with a wide grin, “The ultimate climax.” He stands to meet Silo’s disgusted look. “I confess my methods might be a little uncouth at times.” Silo ignores him with a trace of anger and walks out the tent. Kane and Abel sit at the entrance watching Silo. Walter steps on the sleeping gunmen as he leaves the tent. Once outside, he turns around to look at Derek’s body, “Poor chap, his hopes rose when he realized Toni wasn’t in our team.”

“You mean on our team,” Silo responds without thinking.

“Are you correcting my grammar?” Walter says with gleam in his eyes.

“Sorry, I-”

“No, no, no. This is interesting.” Walter was in his element. “The last time that I checked, we owned the English language. So, if I choose to say ‘lorry’ instead of ‘truck’ or ‘bonnet’ instead of ‘hood,’ you, as an American should say,” Walter mimics an Texan accent, “Thank you so much for letting me speak your glorious language.””

Silo snaps his fingers and the dogs come to him. He scratches them below the ears as Walter lights a cigar.

“I’m tired, Walter. This isn’t the life I want to live,” Silo says.

“This is the only life worth living,” Walter quickly responds.

“I’m leaving.”

A sudden burst of loneliness creeps into Walter’s soul. “Leaving? Where to?”

“I don’t know and when I get there... I... don’t need company,” Silo says the words slowly so that they will sink in.

“This is about Toni. Listen... if she doesn’t want to get married, it’s for the best,” Walter grabs Silo’s arm as he tries to make his point; he lets go as soon as the dogs begin to growl. “She brought out the worst in you; don’t throw your life away because-”

“Goodbye, Walter,” Silo cuts him off.

“You mean goodnight.”

“I mean goodbye,” Silo ambles into the darkness with the dogs.