

## Prologue One

*Fishhook Island, The Bahamas - 20 Years Ago:*

The night was dark and humid, storm clouds homing in on the island from the southwest. Lightning danced in forks on the horizon, thunder grumbling like an awakening beast. The island lay in wait, no wind; just eerie calm.

A scarecrow stood in the middle of a cornfield, lifelessly gazing out over the ocean. It had wooden arms and legs, with a coat and trousers packed with straw. But its head was once a living thing; a human skull with the vacant eye sockets of a long-since decomposed face. On top of the skull hung the tendrils of an old mop, over which rested the traditional straw hat. Its coat began to flutter as the breath of the storm finally reached the island.

Lightning cracked closer to shore, the thunder louder. The high moon and stars were quickly blotted out as the storm consumed them.

The scarecrow continued to stare inanimately out to sea, as if watching the storm approach, waiting for it.

A gust of wind hit the cornfield, blowing the stalks to forty-five degree angles. The wind brought with it the first drops of rain; big drops that spread to the size of a baseball when they struck the dirt. The scarecrow was quickly drenched, its coat and trousers now hanging limply with the weight of the water. Sheet lightning flashed high above. A random bolt struck the water a hundred yards offshore. Thunder boomed. The water hissed and sizzled. Another bolt struck, this time on the beach; getting closer.

The scarecrow still stared ahead. Still waited.

A third bolt of lightning struck the ground, this time in the cornfield two hundred yards from the scarecrow. Dirt and cornstalks exploded. Thunder cracked like a thousand whips at once.

Two lightning bolts shot down simultaneously, joined together like a Y and hit the scarecrow between the eyes. There was another crack of thunder, but the scarecrow wasn't destroyed. Instead, it glowed with an aura of white light. It seemed to fill out, take on a more human shape, but at the same time remained a scarecrow: Made of wood and straw and that human skull.

The air around it crackled with static. The aura began to undulate as the scarecrow slowly, stiffly, began to move. It uprooted its legs from the ground, took one step, two. Then it was walking freely, most of the stiffness gone.

In the jungle two hundred yards to the east, an old man hid in the darkness, the rain pelting into his face. He looked on in disbelief as the scarecrow walked through the cornfield. His heart hammered and a pulse beat rapidly at his temple. Then he fled into the night.

The scarecrow continued to walk, the storm raging around it. A barn loomed at the southern end of the cornfield, a farmhouse adjacent to it. The scarecrow moved purposefully toward the barn and entered its open doors. It searched inside. The

interior was dark, but it could see. Its eyes were alive now and glowed like red-hot coals.

When it found what it was looking for, it left the barn and moved toward the farmhouse, a scythe in its hand.