



## CODY HAWKE

### *Cody Hawke and The Secret of Freya Manor*

A wispy form rose from the ancient graveyard, floating on the suddenly chilly breeze. Cody glanced at his siblings, frozen staves telling him they saw it also. Soon there were two, then three shadowy beings hovering lifelessly above the ground. The silhouettes were human, but with vacant black holes where the eyes should've been.

"CODY HAWKE!" Shelby screamed, as if it was somehow his fault.

Cody subconsciously began to back up, never taking his eyes off the apparitions. A rotten smell filled the air, something akin to old, wet sneakers. Slowly, and in unison, the wraiths began to move toward them, nebulous arms reaching indiscriminately outward.

"RUN!" Cody yelled.

With a few quick steps, he jumped the gate and took off down the hill, sliding on the wet grass. Shelby was right behind him. Suddenly Cody stopped. His feet wanted to run, but a lingering sense of obligation to his new family made him reconsider.

"Come on!" He ran back to grab Charlotte's trembling hand as she slid down the hill. Martin was last to make it through the gate.

"Get!" the teen yelled as he struggled along. "I'm fine."

"I'm not leaving you," Cody said.

"See, I told you guys," Martin mumbled with glib indifference. "You need me as the sacrificial lamb."

"Let's go, lamb," Cody muttered, grabbing his arm. "Haste would be a good idea right now."

Charlotte clung to Shelby as they splashed through the stream, seemingly oblivious to the impact on their shoes. The girls were nearly out of sight when something caught Cody's eye. He slowed, peering back over his shoulder.

An old man glared at them from atop the grassy knoll, his black robe billowing from a sudden gust of wind. He gripped a tall walking stick with long, crooked fingers. His other hand held a heavy jewel-encrusted wand, clutching the object tightly against his chest.

"What's wrong?" asked Martin, gasping for breath.

Cody stared at the man, transfixed. A long white beard covered most of his weathered face, but burning eyes conveyed his displeasure.

"There's a man..." Cody said, his words trailing off.

A crow circled overhead as if anticipating someone's imminent doom. It landed on the ground next to the old man. Suddenly the bird began to grow. Cody rubbed his eyes.

Folded wings compressed into arms that emerged from beneath a dark robe. Black feathers crept back from its beaked face, revealing another old man, also sporting a long white beard. The two looked the same, yet different as they stared back at Cody.

"Why are you stopping?" Martin panted.

"I uh, just saw that crow..." Cody stammered. "You wouldn't believe me if I told you." He grabbed Martin's arm. "Come on. Let's get out of here."