

# Prologue

The Park neighborhood, once a thriving middle-class community in big city America, is coming to terms with the stark reality of the dire economic climate. Boarded up houses dot the streets like chicken pox. Low income families, struggling to make ends meet, now find refuge in government funded housing. Gone are the days of block parties and book clubs. Almost overnight, the once tranquil community has transformed into a warzone. Teenagers roam the streets like packs of wild dogs; the children of transients who've known only the harsh reality of street life. The new kids on the block, the *new blood*, are only concerned with their reputation, fueled by their egos. Even the revered park, once the recreational hub and epicenter of a blossoming art scene, is tainted with graffiti and filled with gangs of ruthless, disrespectful hooligans. But a handful of families who have endured soldier on, despite the worsening circumstances.

Today's youth are a constant disappointment to the older generation. The disapproval of the elders is no deterrent to the allure of thug life. Not all, however, are as disrespectful and hapless as these bullies, drug dealers, and hustlers who now roam the shadows. There are still good-natured kids around, those who appreciate the value of friendship, and have fond memories of barbeques, trips to the zoo, and little league games. These *old school* kids know each resident's name and every alley like the back of their hands. They resent the *new blood*, whose goal is to make everyone's lives as miserable as their own.

The battle between the *old school* and the *new blood* is coming to an impasse. The confrontational attitudes of the recent transplants are only intensifying as peer pressure rears its ugly head. Parents, teachers, nor even the police, dare interfere in the inevitable quarrels of these factions. The cash-strapped town lacks sufficient funding to provide afterschool activities and rehabilitation centers. The doomed children hold little chance of overcoming the insurmountable odds of rising above the chaos to a better life.

However, the Park neighborhood presses on, as it always has. A handful of residents have moved out, unable to cope with the shifting social landscape. But the majority of families have stayed, refusing to abandon the only home their families have

known for generations. Despite the bleak times, these faithful citizens are determined to bring the community back to its former glory.

A new generation looms, doing what they please and listening to no one. The struggle between right and wrong, good and evil, moral and immoral, begins anew each day. It is waged by those who live within the boundaries of the embattled Park neighborhood.