

EXCLUSIVE SNEAK PEEK

THE

"THRILLING,
ORIGINAL
and
INTOXICATING.
I can't
recommend
this
ENOUGH."

Isobelle
Carmody

rachael
craw

“Thrilling ... A standout in the fantasy genre. The romance between Cal and Meg blends envy, desire and uncertainty with a potent authenticity. Written with a sparse lovely poetry, *The Rift* demands an immersion that is intoxicating.

I can't recommend this enough.”

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Obernewtyn Chronicles and *The Gathering*

“Gripping, brutal, tender. You won't be able to put this book down.”

MICHAEL PRYOR, author of The Laws of Magic series
and *Gap Year in Ghost Town*

“Beautiful, dark and deliciously tense – an astonishing world that will hold you in its finely wrought claws.”

ALISON GOODMAN, author of the
Lady Helen series and the Eon series

THE RIFT

rachael crow

CHAPTER SAMPLE

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WARNING NOTES

Cal's too late. He knows it even as he leaps down the thickly treed slope, knees jarring with the impact of each footfall. Certainty like an iron clamp fastens at the top of his throat, making his breath short. The long oilskin hampers his stride. His rifle thumps, bruising his hip. Heavy rain slicks his hair to his face and he mops it back, hot with frustration and fear. Everything's working against him, weather, terrain, gear, the thunder of his pulse, obscuring the Voice of the Herd.

Clinging to the initial flare of instinct, Cal makes for the Western Spit. He strains to hear past the torrential rain. There's no howling. Not yet. Maybe it's too far from the Rift for the animal's distress signal to draw the Hounds. Or maybe that's wishful thinking. There's only four days until the moon grows full; the timing couldn't be worse.

Reeva's frantic cawing echoes above the treetops and he curses her – *useless bird*. He could have used the aerial support

to boost his night vision. His boots slide in the wet, mud and leaf mould threatening to wrench his ankles.

It must be a full five minutes since he first felt the alarm up on the Ridgeway. Perhaps he should be grateful he's too agitated to tap into it now – the signal must be roaring with grief. That first sign of distress had been a shock vibration in his mind – like the string of a fragile instrument, viciously plucked. If he'd been concentrating, he'd have caught the earlier warning notes of danger and deployed his raven to scout. But he hadn't been paying attention, too self-absorbed, obsessing over the news he'd heard in the mess hall this morning. Meg Archer is coming home.

Meg Archer.

When the signal from the Old Herd finally broke into his consciousness, panic cost him precious seconds *and* his link with Reeva.

Cal curses himself. *This proves everything they've ever said about you – you worthless piece of–*

An image flashes into his mind. A doe, tall, slender, strong. A sable coat with silver markings on her chest and flanks. Deep, brown, fathomless eyes. Ancient, knowing, wild. His gut plummets. *What if it's Fallon? What if it's Fallon and she's been killed by a trapper's snare?*

The unthinkable shame of losing the matriarch of the Old Herd ... it scrambles his brain. He pictures himself denounced by the Head Ranger before the whole community, cast out under the full weight of his failure, heralding the total collapse of everything the Black Water Rangers stand for. Thousands

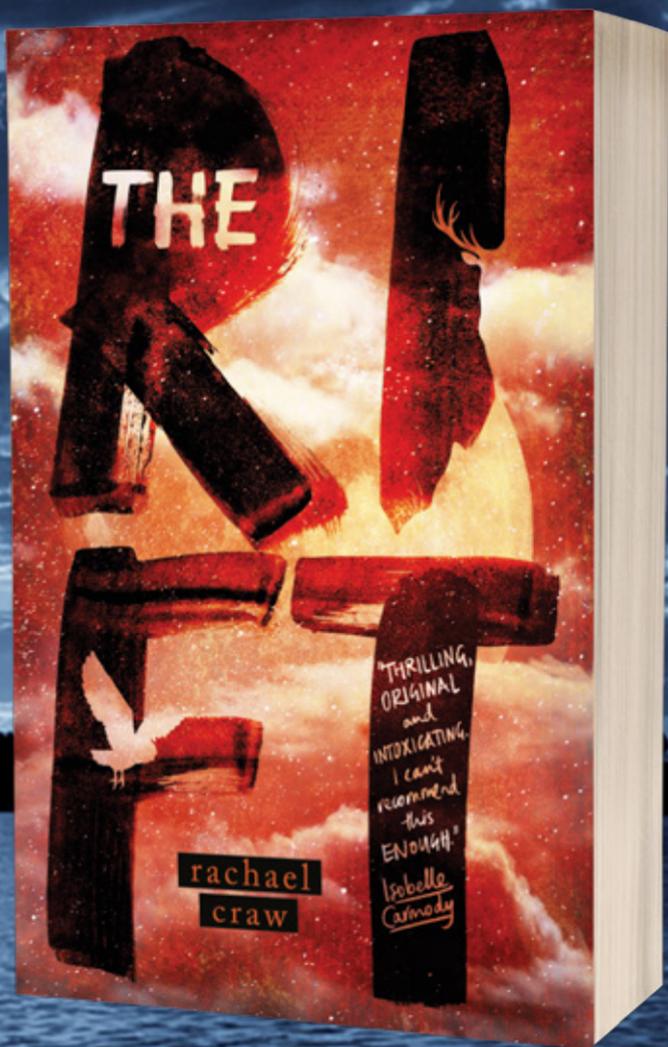
of years of toil, trials and tradition passed from parent to child, nullified in a single night's screw-up by a kid who never deserved to be counted among their ranks.

God. God. Please don't let it be Fallon.

As if her name in his thoughts summons it, the Voice of the Herd flickers in his mind. He gasps – or sobs – and skids to a stop. Chest heaving, quads and calves burning, the momentary relief of connection fills him, centres him. Oneness, wonder and longing for the mountain. Longing for the veins of living energy pulsing in the ley lines. He listens. Even that small flicker thrums with oppressive grief. Knowing fills him, confirming the location like an internal GPS. There, in the deep shadow, forty feet below where the narrow track twists back on itself, a light grey smudge swings from a noose. His skin contracts with goosebumps; if his hair wasn't slicked to his head, tendrils would rise at the nape of his neck.

He sees the antlers and his heart beats: *it's not Fallon, it's not Fallon.*

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