

*Rainbow City  
and the  
Edge of Dreams*

# I

The king was pacing back and forth, candles flickering in his wake, the roaring jubilation of the crowds soaring, swamping his brain as he struggled to find words that would subdue their horror, could rouse their greatest courage to face the evil approaching in one hideous wave. Dread rose to his throat that wouldn't swallow, the moon already slipped too far as he scanned his chamber one last time and found himself staring, sadly lost, into the eyes of the sylph-like cherubs, so exquisitely carved in memory of his beloved Elderflower. Tears stung his eyes to think how they, *no* – how *everything* could soon be lost, the shattered shards of the case smashed in his rage now leering, *sickeningly* pretty in the candlelight, *oh taunting him that the betrayal was just the start of what would come*. And he'd barely let out a heavy sigh when her sweetest face sprung to his head, at once now brighter, *warmer* – why, he could almost taste her berry lips, was sinking into her velvety eyes, the fragrance of her golden curls lacing the... *oh, he could feel her, right there!* “Elderflower!” he cried out, passion gushing. “I shall rouse the hearts of all to shine our common purpose! That we may still all fight the good fight... whatever the muddle of it! Is there still a chance for us, for many of us?” From nowhere, a sharply whistling wind blustered in a blast so

sharp against the window glass that the king started, his eyes wide as it now whirled into the chamber, ruffling the scrolls piled high, the one atop the rest wobbling, toppling to the floor. He stared at it, face white as milk, lips trembling as he whispered now, "*Oh, my dearest, wisest one!*" But the air at once was empty; she had gone. He gulped, *truly HOW had things come to this?* Sorrow searing, the king took out an eagle feather, the golden, dolphin dyewell and two fresh sheets of parchment. And just as he had spilled his heart upon them it came, as vivid as hell, the sorest of his life's regrets. The feather fell, his senses saturating, his eyes reflecting billowing, blackest smoke.

## 2

“The end of the world is nigh! 20:12 in the book of Revelation, ‘And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and *books were opened*’.” Sable paused, for emphasis. “‘*Another book* was opened, which is the book of life. *The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books*’...” His mightily booming voice ceased momentarily, allowing the stillness of the warm air to sink softly over people’s heads as they walked by. Sable watched them all ignoring him, knowing full well that they could hear him – frankly they had no choice but to, what with his new, exciting ear-mike attachment – reminding himself with a sigh that he *mustn’t* judge them, no – only God would do the judging soon enough and he, Sable Frost, *would* be saved just as long as he kept up the pace of spreading His word, remained betrothed to his divinest of callings. Sable reaffirmed this continually, it eased the fears in his mind, the darkness that was seeping, disconcertingly into the day. It was there now and worse, it seemed to be growing heavier. He wondered: if his ability to channel the power of God was increasing, well maybe receiving more of the doom was all part of the package, like an ‘all-seeing eye’ now opened within him? Sable shuddered, the fear engulfing, squeezing his heart. “*The culling of the sinners is nigh*”

*I tell yers!*” he cried out hurriedly, the pressure easing. “Repent your sins to God, or face yers fate and punishment. Revelations 20:15, *‘Anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.’* Save yerselves, before ’tis too late, for he who knocks at Heaven’s gate will not be left abandoned, need not be afraid in these coming times of great woe. Turn your hearts to God, I tell yers, *for the end of the world is upon us all!*” And as he heard the oracular voice of God propelling from his lips, resonating throughout the whole towncircle like a clarion call, Sable felt the incessant yearning start to swell, *oh that just one of these sheep would rush to him with open arms, would fall at his feet in gratitude for the salvation filling their soul!* He looked at the blank and carefree faces, the backs of heads and sighed, salving a soggy tissue to dab the slimy sweat on his bald head where it was dripping, wishing now he’d picked up more from home. He always left in such a rush these days, so driven was he to fulfil his destiny, to be saved from the oncoming disaster of which he dreamt nightly now, frighteningly so. It was, in fact, at the very onset of these alarming dreams, a few months back, that he’d been divinely, miraculously called to service and on that day he’d hung up his butcher’s apron for good. He remembered it now, gasping so horribly awake, heart palpitating, struggling to breathe, still glimpsing the half-slunk, ghastly shadow that had sucked right through him, draining away all life amidst suffocating smoke and raging flames. And as he’d lain there, staring at the ceiling, utterly horrified at all he’d seen, it’d suddenly felt like an invisible hand was beckoning, motioning to his dreams, telling him that they were visions, his gifts to share – calling him forth to rise, go save as many souls as he was able – before it was too late. But every morning now he rose up earlier than the day before,

more desperate to avoid the dreams, too terrified to know what lay beyond the strangling shadow, *must not remember*; his pillow drenched – so disconcerting – and, increasingly perturbed by the growing number of preachers being called, he'd make swift haste to the fountain, pushing the horrid darkness, all his fears, far from his head. Competition for good spots was fierce, on a few occasions he'd had to settle for somewhere less prominent and it was *essential* to keep a sharp eye out at all times for spot-converting eyes. Why, just that morning he'd scarcely beaten Jacobee Bartholomew to the fountain steps, he'd caught him out of the corner of his eye trying to cut him off at the converted mission halls. And it seemed that Jacobee had made a sign to wear today as well, *'For I am the Light of God, follow me!'* Hmm... maybe he, Sable Frost, should have a sign. Yes, he'd set about making one that evening.

He sighed, acutely – suddenly – aware of that tremble in the air again – not that anyone else seemed to notice it – but yes, *he could feel it* and he was sure that it had been there, lingering since the last tremors a week ago, as if the earth was now shuddering at what was to come. So far there had only been a few old buildings condemned and, thankfully, no casualties – well that was just here in the Cove – elsewhere in the country the quakes had spelled disaster with a capital D. Soon it would be their turn, he was sure of it – a big one due. It was, after all, the end of the year 2012, the time predicted by the long line of Ancient Settlers as a time of great planetary shifts, although they weren't the first to say so, 2012 had been documented through the ages as the 'End Times'. Not that many people were bothered about some old load of prophecies, but well the earthquakes everywhere confirmed it as far as he

was concerned, what with all the dreams and his supreme calling of course. It was plain that God was choosing him and like-minded others to get the message over loud and clear – no excuses – repent or die, simple.

Sable sighed heavily, realising that he was doing this several times a day now, the sound somehow reassuring, briefly releasing the tightness in his chest. *He would be fine.* A group of boys ran past him, laughing, and he shook his head sadly. How would *they* find God in time? He sighed again, the darkness creeping back over his brain, thicker now, a horrid panic rising up. Sable gulped. *He would be saved. How could he not be when he was a lightbearer?* Why, even the Ancient Settlers weren't any closer to God than he, even if they had known about the oncoming doom for longer. The Ancients were somewhat pagan after all, highly revered for their extraordinary and perceptionary powers yes, but still nonetheless the old rulers of Crystal Cove that had been ousted in the early seventies, unwanted for modern times. Strange story though, Sable's ma and pa had told him that the newly elected king from the then group of Ancients, a King Sage, or 'Celestial Seer of the Third Eye' as he was officially titled, just disappeared one night with a large number of loyal followers and some of the other Ancients. In the morning they had all simply gone and as far as anyone knew they had never, even to this day, been found. Maybe all the Settler types had died out these days? Although, no, there were supposed to be some Settler groups who travelled about, still following the Ancient ways – did they settle at all? But weren't most of them getting banged up over in Central Row nowadays? Aah, maybe *that's* why they moved about? The government was cracking down on those weird folk, more because they lived independently, refusing to pay taxes – some said they didn't use

money at all – than the fact that, well they just didn't fit into modern society today with their drippy ideas and strange customs. Most people just thought them all a daft bunch, 'the mentals' were what the young folk called them, yes, that was it. There was that one Ancient though, Moran, see he was the smartest. He began a political career some time after that King Sage and the others disappeared – joined the humble folk, did very well too until a couple of years back. Dreadful story that, in all the papers.

Sable looked up beyond the towncircle that was still all old and quaint, the only part of Crystal Cove that still resembled the days of Ancient rule at all, well apart from the palace – council soon nabbed that of course. Beyond the circle was a mess of modern architecture – newest addition, apart from the fairly recent completion of a new orphanage, built in the shape of cherry pie (as if that'd cheer the poor buggers up), was the huge, granite-pillared entrance down to the 'epitome of technology today' (pah) airblaster station. Yes, Crystal Cove had officially joined the highway through the sky, linking it up to Biggesmore and all the other major towns and cities and, quite frankly, every time one took off and whizzed over his eyeline in a moment flat it gave him the eeky-creeps. Oh, the children had been really excited about it, that's for sure, they'd all pointed up in glee as the first airblaster had shot up and away, smiling at the little white puffs of clouds that clotted the sky behind it – clogged the sky more like. There was something sinister about all this technology seemingly gaining rapid pace about their ears. It was all too much of a distraction, not just from God and what people should be focusing on, but from what they were *not noticing* because of it. Like why were all the councils and local governments being shaken up with but the



briefest mention on the tectonic news waves? He reckoned they knew more about the impending doom and gloom descending than they were letting on. Or why were old and trusted members being ousted in such a hush-hush fashion and toffee-nosed scoffs from Dronedrudge, Central Office no less, being drafted in instead? And it wasn't just here in Crystal Cove, no, it was *all* the councils and governments across the country. Something just didn't smell right.

Sable stood up from the fountain steps where he'd sat, sipping water from his trusty flask – blimey this weather, in December! He felt dizzy and suddenly afraid again. What if this preposterous heat was because of the trembling, a volcano underground about to go? What if the end of the world was due at any moment? Or the end of Crystal Cove at any rate! They said that the nearest epicentre was far, far out at sea, on a line from Montague Bay, but *would* they tell everyone if it was nearer? Not that that wasn't close enough. Sable felt the panic rising up again, pressing on his heart. He sighed heavily and shook himself, focusing on his calling to serve, strengthening his will to believe *he would be saved*. “*Repent yer sins, the world is doomed...*” he began, sadly seeing a little girl smiling up at her mother as they crossed the towncircle from the little sweets and tobacco shop that he, too, had loved as a youngster. What about the innocents – with their pure hearts *surely* God would save them? Sable's head hurt, he growled in irritation, sweat now pouring down his back, too sticky. Grief! The sun had shone in the summer back when he were a lad, not on almost bleedin' Christmas Day! The world was all gone wrong.

Sable sighed again, a shiver passing up his spine as he caught the scintillating sunlit glint on the gleaming Skydream office cones that curved strangely up in plant-like clusters,

ruining the skyline. They were made of this IA Technology, the ‘information absorption la-de-pah know-how’ that was being incorporated into all new buildings everywhere and then they’d all be stuffed. All genetic-coding imprints, from workers and visitors alike, absorbed into some ‘hyper-intelligence network’ and sent back to some giant computer, said to be as thin as a slice of toast mind, up in that bleedin’ Dronedrudge.

Sable sighed wearily, realising now that he always raced to claim the fountain steps not just for their prominent position, but because the towncircle was actually the only place left that felt familiar to him and yes, he loved its pretty quaintness – perhaps he was just getting too old. Nostalgia touched his heart, moistening his eyes as he took in the cobbled stones. He remembered back to when he used to come there, why to almost that very same spot to watch, aah yes! The Ancient that, the only Ancient that *did* stay behind, what was his name? Of course, Wizard... Wizard Twinkly Fingers! Looks like a weathered old fool these days mind – if you ever see him that is – but yes, on almost every Sunday, Sable would come out to watch him! That Wizard did all these amazing feats and they *were* pretty damn magical! A wistful tear fell from his eye as he saw himself – *so long ago* – standing in anticipation, wearing his blue woolly hat and scarf. He imagined his face, surely as bright and excited as all the other children’s had been. Why, that Twinkly Fingers made fountains of shiny stars rain down from the sky that turned to water, then waves, such glittering waves! With dolphins, really smiley dolphins that leapt up and out of the clouds! Sable remembered the face of a girl now who was always there to see the wizard’s show. Holly, her name flew straight into his head, as too did a picture of her long, chestnut hair as sleek as a pony’s coat. Sable smiled. For

him she had always secretly been the girl with the sparkling, shining eyes that made his heart melt like warm fudge. She was a few years older than him and he never did quite get the courage up to speak to her, but how he used to love watching her fly off on one of their family swans! Not many left of that rare breed now, he realised, thinking wistfully of both Holly *and* the swans. Instinctually, Sable glanced up beyond the modern architecture to the top of Hairy Cliff, where lots of luscious grass had always grown so wildly that from out at sea the cliff looked like a chiselled face with spiky hair – so much so that the original name of Pilgrim’s Leap was abandoned, even on maps. And there, right at the very top, was one of the last remaining round and white-washed homes of the old style, that and the ones in the towncircle being all that were left now. His heart warmed as he stared at it. For once, now long ago, it was the home of Holly, the girl with the shining eyes.