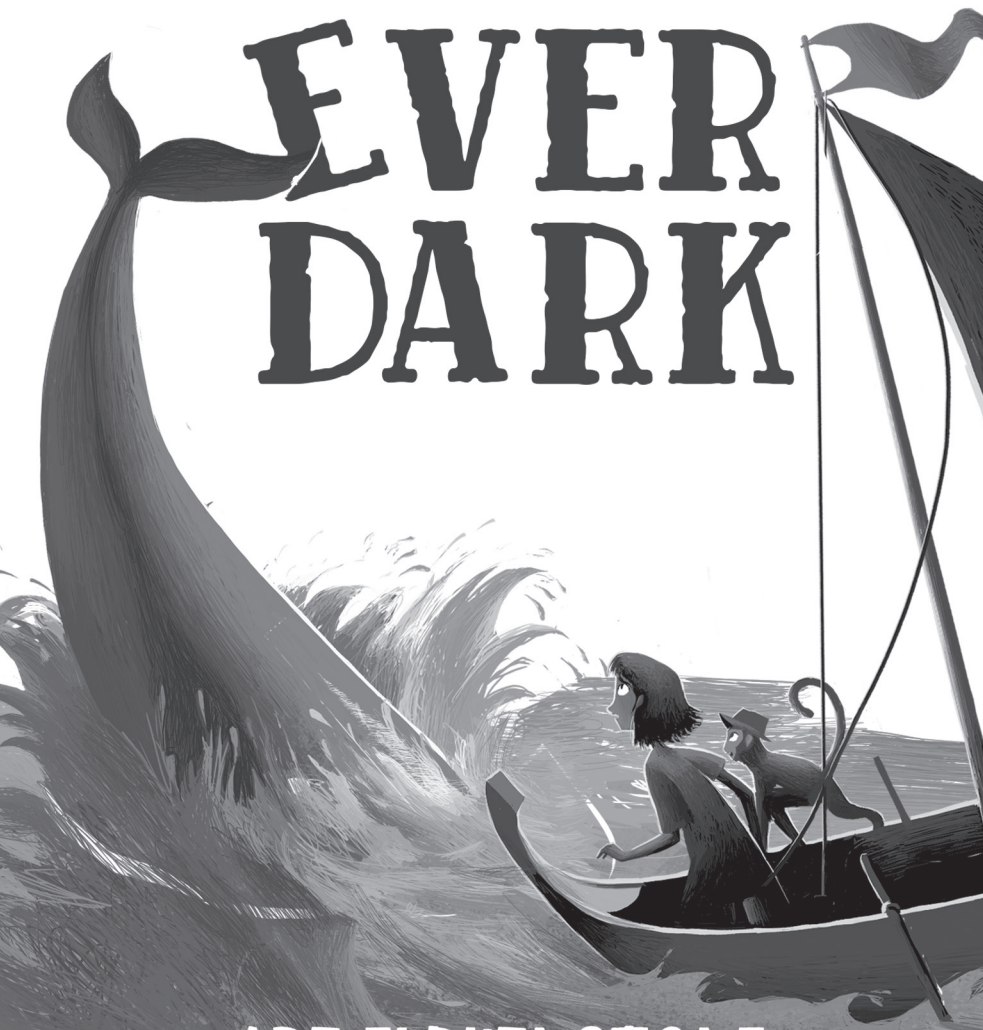
EVER DARK



ABI ELPHINSTONE

SIMON & SCHUSTER

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The Dreamsnatcher
The Shadow Keeper
The Night Spinner

Sky Song

The Unmapped Chronicles series
Everdark
Rumblestar
Jungledrop

For Younger Readers
The Snow Dragon

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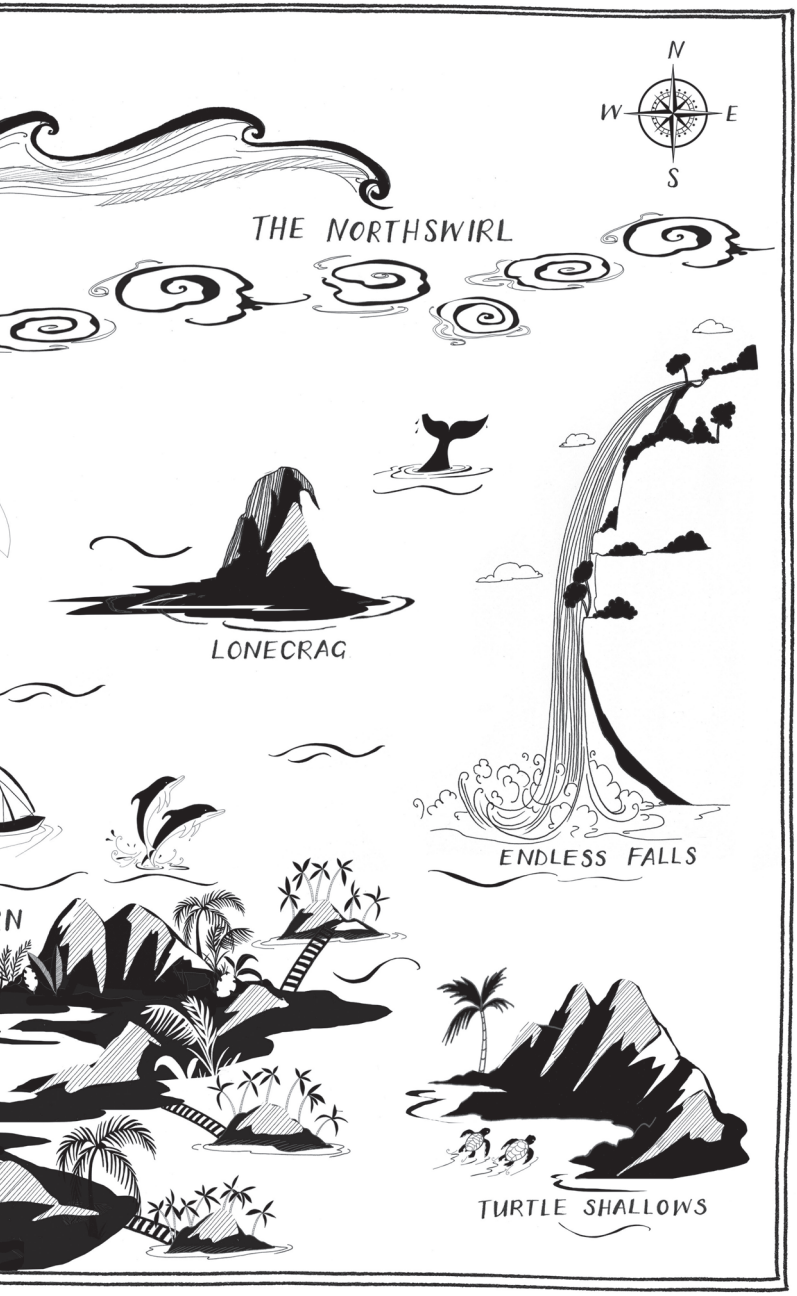
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fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual people living or
dead, events or locales is entirely coincidental.

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For Gilbert,
who is every bit as brilliant as Smudge.


CRACKLEDAWN
GHOSTWRECK
THE SIGHING CAVES
LITTLEFERN ISLAND
WILDHOR
GOLDSHELL COVE


N
W
E
S
THE NORTHSWIRL
LONECRAG
ENDLESS FALLS
TURTLE SHALLOWS



The maps you know hold well-known lines,
Shapes scored and inked in olden times.
Continents drawn and oceans named,
Peaks climbed and countries claimed.
But maps hold secrets yet untold
Of places we should ink in gold,
Up north, down south, far west and east
Kingdoms full of magical beasts.
Lands like these are hard to find
Unless you've got a curious mind ...

Prologue



The trouble with grown-ups is that they always think they're right – about bedtimes and vegetables mostly, but also about beginnings. And, in particular, about the beginnings of our world. They have all sorts of ideas about big bangs and black holes, but if they had come across the Unmapped Kingdoms (which they wouldn't have because secret kingdoms are notoriously hard to find), they would have learned that at the very, very beginning there was just an egg. A rather large one. And out of this egg, a phoenix was born.

On finding itself all alone, it wept seven tears, which, as they fell, became our continents. These lands, known as the Faraway, were dark and empty places, so, many years later, the phoenix scattered four of its golden feathers across the world and out of these grew secret – unmapped – kingdoms, invisible to those who would go on to live in the Faraway, but holding all the magic needed to conjure sunlight, rain and snow, and every untold wonder behind the weather, from the music of a sunrise to the stories of a snowstorm.

Now the phoenix, being the wisest of all magical creatures, knew that if used selfishly, magic grows strange and dark, but if it is used for the greater good it can nourish an entire world and keep it turning. So the phoenix decreed that those in the Unmapped Kingdoms could enjoy all the wonders that its magic brought, but only if

they, in turn, worked to send some of this magic out into the Faraway so that the continents there might be filled with light and life. If the Unmappers ever stopped sharing their magic, the phoenix warned, both the Faraway and the Unmapped Kingdoms would crumble to nothing.

The phoenix placed the Lofty Husks in charge of each Unmapped Kingdom – wizards born under the same eclipse and marked out from the other Unmappers on account of their wisdom, unusually long life expectancy and terrible jokes – and, although in each kingdom the Lofty Husks took a different form, they ruled fairly, ensuring that every day the magic of the phoenix was passed on to the Faraway.

The Unmappers in Rumblestar collected marvels – sunlight, rain and snow in their purest form – which dragons carried on to the other three kingdoms so the inhabitants there could mix these marvels with magical

ink to create weather scrolls to send on to the Faraway: sun symphonies in Crackledawn, rain paintings in Jungledrop and snow stories in Silvercrag. Little by little, the Faraway lands came alive: plants, flowers and trees sprang up and so strong was the magic that eventually animals appeared and, finally, people.

Years passed and the phoenix looked on from Everdark, a place so remote and out of reach that not even the Unmappers knew where it lay. But a phoenix cannot live forever. And so, after five hundred years, the first phoenix died and, as is the way with such birds, a new phoenix rose from its ashes to renew the magic in the Unmapped Kingdoms and continue to watch over its creations.

Time went by and the Unmappers grew to understand that every five hundred years a new era began and, as long as the phoenix showed itself to them on the

night of its rising, the magic would be renewed and all would be well. Everyone believed things would continue this way forever . . .

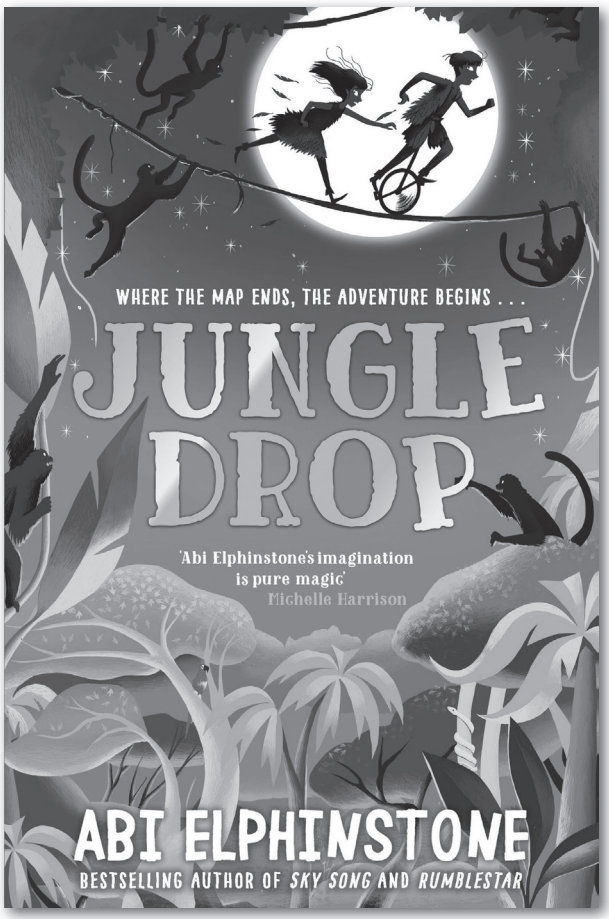
When you're dealing with magic, though, **forever** is rarely straightforward. There is always someone, somewhere, who becomes greedy. And when a heart is set on stealing magic for personal gain suddenly ancient decrees and warnings slip quite out of mind.

But that, I suppose, makes room for stories and for unexpected heroes and unlikely heroines. Because even those born in magical kingdoms can feel unimportant and overlooked, and sometimes it takes a story to show that the truly extraordinary people in this world – the ones who defeat monsters and save kingdoms – are, very often, the ones that nobody notices at first.

So grab your compass and roll down your sail – the first adventure in the Unmapped Chronicles is about to begin . . .

‘Nothing, and I mean nothing, is more powerful than a child in possession of a plan.’

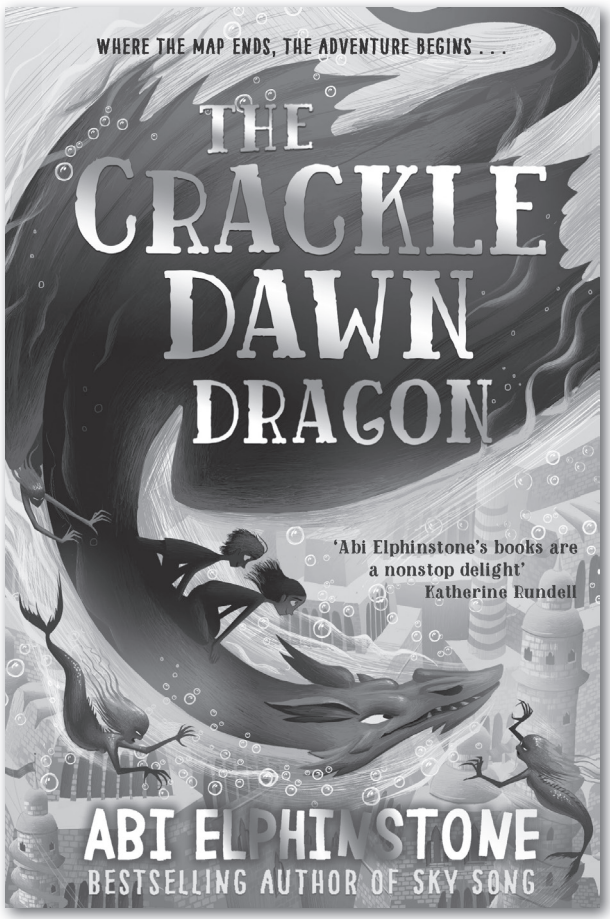
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Dive into a magical quest beneath the ocean waves in the final

Unmapped Chronicles

adventure . . .



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