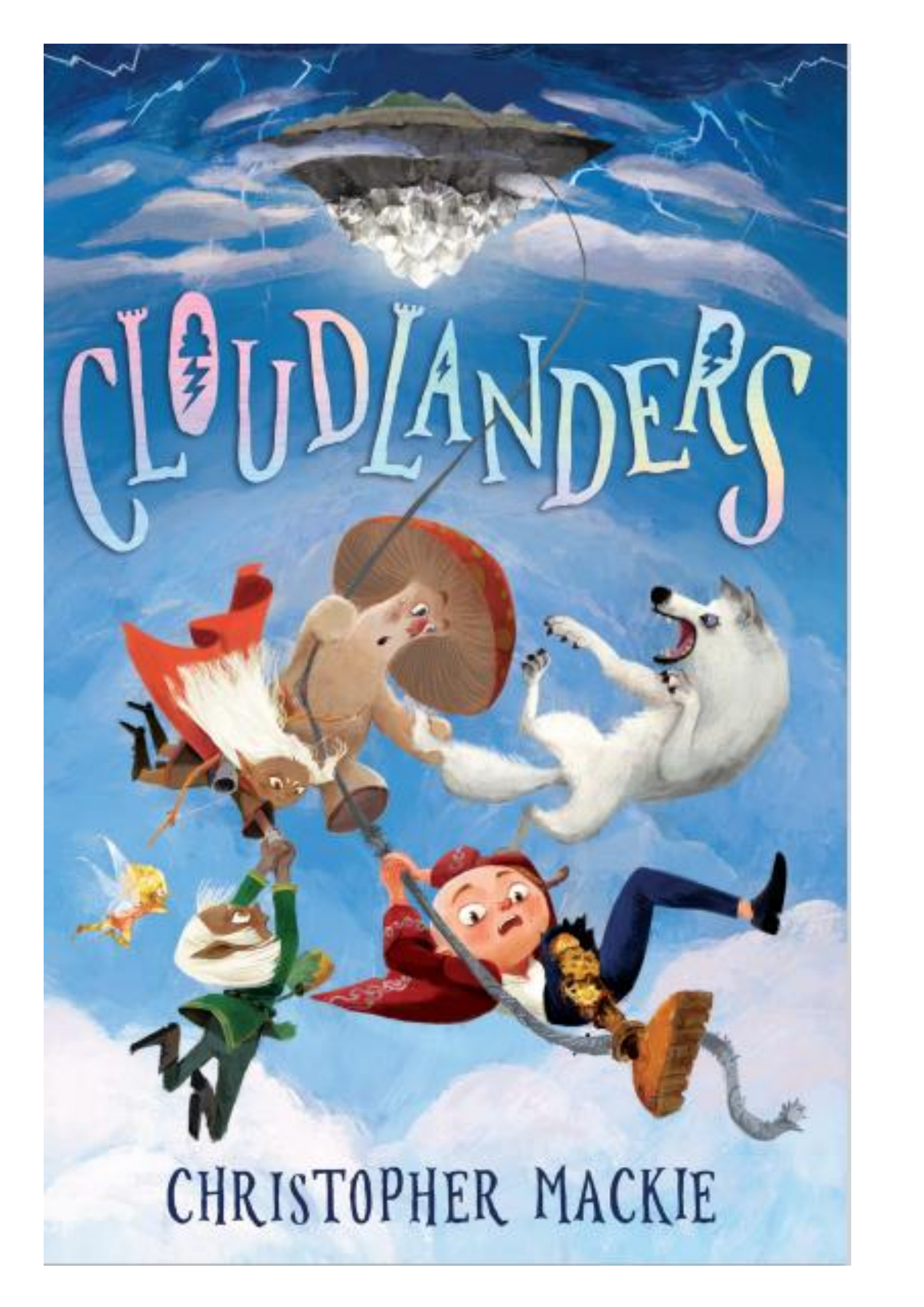




CLOUDLANDERS

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PROLOGUE

Years from now, in a strange place where strange things tend to happen, the world as we know it is changing. The waves are rising, the clouds are falling, and a frightful, nightmarish monster is sinking country after country beneath the sea, until only one is left.

Years from now, in some far-off, flooded future, time is running out for the people of Bastion: an island nation in the middle of a deep and endless ocean. The monster is coming, and they know they cannot fight it. All they can do is build a wall.

They need stone. Enough to build a fifty-foot barrier around their land. They start digging, deeper than anyone has dug before, through earth that has not been disturbed since the days of a long-forgotten magic, and they uncover something that was never meant to be found: a shimmering seam of silvery stone that glows in the darkness. And when they take it out in the open, it floats up into the air.

They call it

lightstone.

With this miraculous discovery, the islanders build with a newfound purpose: they hope that the lightstone wall will lift their land free and float it high into the skies above, out of the monster's reach. Each day the monster

draws a little nearer, and each day their wall grows a little higher. And as the islanders dig with fear-fuelled ferocity, a gleaming, ancient magic seeps out from the cracks in Bastion's soil, breathing new life into mystical beings of a bygone era, buried deep within the earth. They shake off the dirt of their thousand-year slumber and crawl to the surface in time to see the monster appear on the horizon.

CRRRAAACCKK!

The inhabitants of Bastion are thrown off their feet as the lightstone wall floats up into the clouds, carrying their entire country with it, lifting away from the world below. All manner of newly awoken magical creatures, from nymphs and gnomes to faeries and fin-folk, stand with the humans at the edge of their airborne ark. This is their home too, and it must be protected at all costs.

Before the blanket of clouds closes around them, they catch a glimpse of the sea swallowing the last remains of their past. The inhabitants of Bastion have become Cloudlanders: untethered, drifting wherever the wind blows them, above the clouds and beneath the stars.

Years from now, in a strange place where strange things tend to happen, an entire land is wrenched from the earth at the eleventh hour, while a monstrous creature roars in bitter disappointment.

There is a country that floats above the clouds: a magic-

soaked, magnificent place where the land is lighter than air and the weight of impossibility ceases to exist. It skims like a stone across sea-blue skies, and its people believe they will float on forever. Over time, they forget about life before the Lifting, about the monster that sought to sink them, and they learn to live behind the lightstone wall that has become the beginning and end of their world.

But the creature does not forget. And it does not forgive. It waits patiently in the depths below for the day when their magic fails and their country falls back beneath the clouds. There is a change coming for the people of Bastion, one they cannot possibly imagine, and it crackles like an electrical storm on a silent night.

There is a story to be told, and it begins here, in the last country in the world.

It begins, as it must, on the brink of a windswept wall, above the clouds and beneath the stars...

