

## Praise for books by **ASHLEY THORPE**

“Phenomenal! Magic, myth and history woven  
into a heart-pounding adventure.”

**Sophie Anderson, author of  
*The House With Chicken Legs***

“I enjoyed it immensely. It’s a deep dive into Jamaican  
folklore, belief systems and vivid storytelling.”

**Alex Wheatle, author of *Crongton Knights***

“A gripping, vivid magical action adventure that taps  
into deeper themes of grief, identity and power...  
Also, an excellent talking cat in a hat.”

**Louie Stowell, author of *Loki***

“Tremendous, nail-biting action filled with brilliant characters  
you can’t help but root for; this is children’s fiction at its finest.  
Thorpe is a talent to watch!”

**Lizzie Huxley-Jones, author of  
*Vivi Conway and the Sword of Legend***

“An electrifying adventure that will leave you breathless.”

**Tolá Okogwu, author of  
*Onyeka and the Academy of the Sun***

“An amazing, fast-paced adventure filled  
with action...had me at the edge of my seat.”

**Alex Falase-Koya, co-writer of  
*The Breakfast Club Adventures***

*For Noel, Cislyn, Ivy and Justin with love and gratitude.*

First published in the UK in 2025 by Usborne Publishing Limited, Usborne House,  
83-85 Saffron Hill, London EC1N 8RT, England. [usborne.com](http://usborne.com)

Usborne Verlag, Usborne Publishing Limited, Prüfeninger Str. 20,  
93049 Regensburg, Deutschland, VK Nr. 17560

Text copyright © Ashley Thorpe, 2025

The right of Ashley Thorpe to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted  
by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988.

Cover illustration by Gashwayne Hudson © Usborne Publishing, 2025

The name Usborne and the Balloon logo are trade marks of Usborne Publishing Limited.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or used in any manner for  
the purpose of training artificial intelligence technologies or systems (including for text or  
data mining), stored in retrieval systems or transmitted in any form or by any means without  
prior permission of the publisher.

This is a work of fiction. The characters, incidents, and dialogues are products  
of the author's imagination and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance  
to actual events or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 9781805075653 9585/1 JFMAMJ ASOND/25

Printed and bound using 100% renewable energy at CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY.



# SPIRIT WARRIORS

ASHLEY THORPE



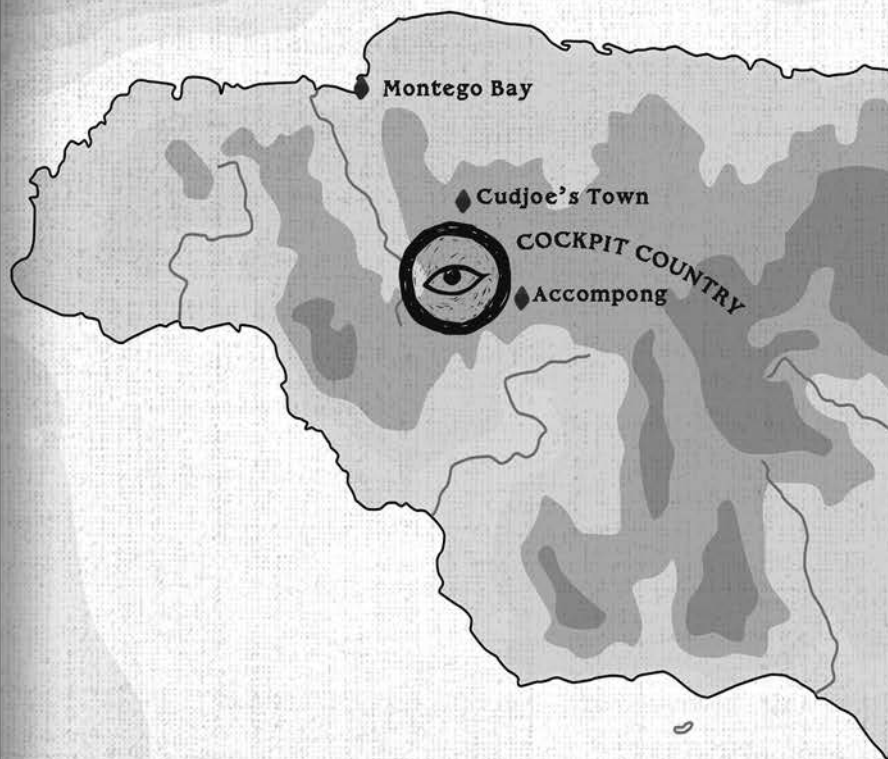
# CONTENTS

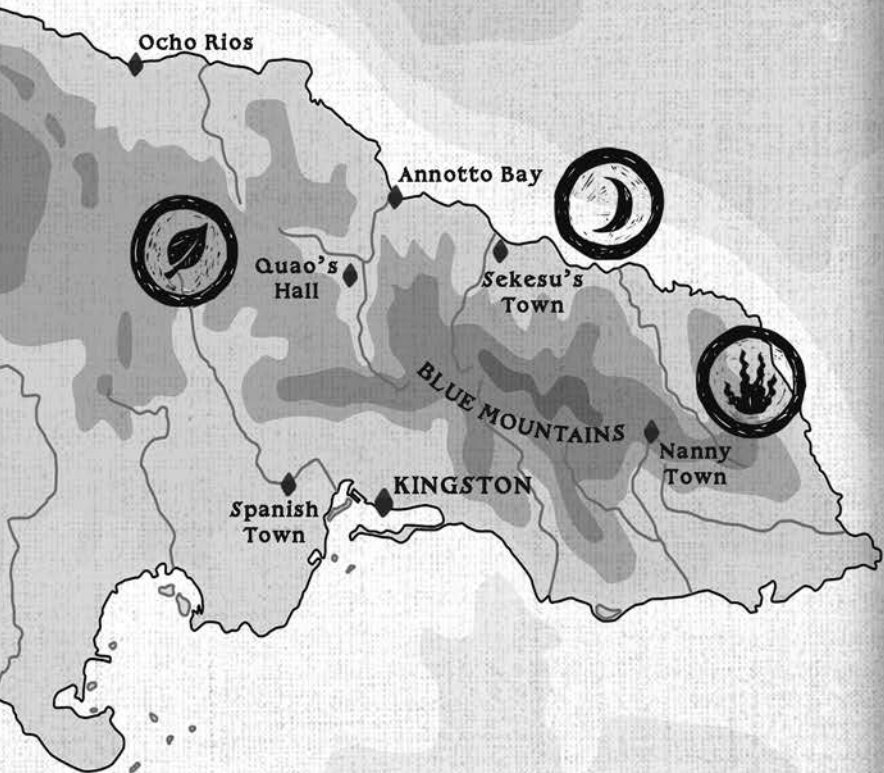
Map of Xaymaca	6
Prologue	9
1. The Magical Mangrove Hotel	15
2. The Enchanted Larimar	20
3. Midnight Magic	26
4. Spirit Waker	33
5. A Deluge of Duppies	39
6. The Space Between Worlds	48
7. Cat in a Porkpie Hat	55
8. A Long Day Ahead	61
9. Picking Up the Pieces	67
10. Three Questions	71
11. Jancrow	80
12. The Summoning	85
13. The Soulless Sailor	91
14. The Xaymaca Express	101
15. Cerasee Tea	113
16. Those Who Live For Death	121
17. Spirit Sight	127
18. Night Watch	136
19. The Safehouse Siege	144
20. Fractures	153

21. Sekesu's Town	159
22. Sankofa	165
23. Spirit State	175
24. Undone	182
25. The Library	186
26. Betrayal	193
27. The Blue Mountains	200
28. Ambush	206
29. Blackheart's Shroud	215
30. Nanny Town	223
31. Cai's Lament	229
32. Deeper Than Blood	234
33. Visions of the Past	240
34. Ghosts of Xaymaca	247
35. Proposition	258
36. Brothers	267
37. Battle for the Blue Mountains	277
38. Spirit Waker Vs Spirit Waker	282
39. Darkest Light	286
40. A Reckoning	290
41. Return of the Heroes	295
42. Memento	303
Epilogue	308
Author's Note	315
Acknowledgements	317



# Map of Xaymaca (/ zah-my-kuh /)





0 25 50 km





# PROLOGUE

## Accompong Town, Xaymaca 1953

In Accompong, Obeah magic ran deeper than the roots of its Kindah Tree, the leafy giant that stood sentry at the heart of the town. On an evening of ritual celebrations, the townsfolk gathered under its branches. Dressed in rich kente cloth, and with feet bare to feel the earth between their toes, they danced in the fading light of the sun. Giving thanks to their African ancestors for the gift of magic, they waited excitedly for the youngest generation's powers to awaken.

Would their child become a diviner and receive visions of the future? Would they become a healer, able to cure people by absorbing the qualities of plants and herbs? Perhaps a gifted enchanter, able to control objects or an element? Or perhaps that rarest of all abilities...they might become a spirit waker, a living link to the spirit world, able to communicate with the ancestors themselves and awaken latent magic in others.

A young woman in a blue headwrap sat apart and watched the celebrations from a distance. Unlike the revellers she was an outsider, born in Xaymaca's capital city, Kingston. She'd arrived in this remote Maroon township only a year ago, during a time of great personal loss and heartache. The wound, unhealed, opened up again at the sight of the village children, dancing without a care. Because she knew that her daughter would have been old enough to awaken her magic here too.

No more than six years old, the children moved instinctively, losing themselves to the melody and rhythm. The drums called to a voice deep within them, urging them to wake up. Their first sparks of magic appeared – born from the great energy called Obeah.

As they leaned into these flashes of magic, the sparks became colourful auras, encompassing them, as though the spirits of the children manifested outside of their bodies. They realized with glee what kind of mage they would become. There was the rich blue of the enchanters, the deep red of the diviners, and the placid green of the healers. However, there was no majestic purple of the spirit wakers among them.

The hand drums and singing crowds grew louder, more jubilant. The young woman, though, felt more distant. She blinked away tears for the daughter she'd lost. A shadow fell at her feet, along with two long black feathers. A large turkey vulture – or jancrow as Xaymacans called them – loomed by her side. The white tip of its curved beak looked deadly, and a beady eye glared amidst the grisly pink skin of its head.

“Are you going to follow me everywhere I go?” asked the woman, turning away from the bird.

“You never told me to go away,” answered the jancrow. “Because you know mi can help you. We can help each other.”

In the humid, breezeless air, somehow the young woman felt a chill. Her fists clutched her dress at the knees. The jancrow wasn’t a bird, not truly. Just the vessel for a spirit waker, who secretly controlled it to do their bidding.

“Your daughter and your husband, you can have them back, my dear. In this life. In a new world of our creation. But to do that you know what we ha’fi do. We ha’fi harness the great magic of the Four Heroes of Xaymaca.”

The woman’s knuckles grew paler from gripping her dress so tightly. “Why don’t you show yourself to me? Your real self.”

The jancrow cawed. “Mi will reveal everything to you as we build a new world.”

The young woman hesitated. “Can I trust you?”

“I awakened your magic, nuh? You sought a spirit waker to commune with your lost family, and you found one. *I* am the only one who truly understands your pain.” With the instincts of a predator, the jancrow shuffled even closer in the woman’s silence. “I will help you turn that pain into power, the likes of which you’ve never seen. Now is our chance to steal the magic of the Four Heroes and reunite you with your family. Your heart and spirit, entrust them to me – your spirit waker!”

Tears dropped from the woman’s face to the backs of her hands. She watched mothers and fathers embrace their

daughters and sons, welcoming them to a new life of magic, a world of boundless possibilities. She would never know that joy. Not unless she acted now. “A-all right,” she assented, barely a whisper.

“Say it!”

“I entrust my heart and spirit to you!”

The blue of the young woman’s enchanter aura, now peppered with black, fizzled at her skin. What was this feeling deep in her chest? It felt too bleak to be hope. The jancrow hopped away and spread its long dark wings. “Use your magic as soon as the coral stone is revealed. Do that and I’ll take care of the rest. This is just the beginning.”

To her ears, the young woman’s heart pounded as loudly as the hand drums being played.

The elderly chief of the Accompong Maroons arrived at the Kindah Tree and signalled her blessings to the revellers. Then, as was tradition, she removed the bright red coral stone from underneath her headwrap to welcome the new mages to the fold. The gemstone contained the powerful magic of one of the historic Four Heroes of Xaymaca, and it gleamed in the waning light. Now was the young woman’s chance.

She rose to her feet and unleashed her magic, sparking sapphire. Her shadow stretched and spread over the ground like spilled ink. It reached the shade of the Kindah Tree, and the deed was done. Each person’s shadow had merged with the tree’s under the setting sun, which meant that now the shadow enchantress was connected to them – had power over them.

They froze in time, no longer able to control their bodies. The fear in their eyes was the only tell that something was earth-shatteringly wrong.

The jancrow swooped down towards the stricken chief who held the magic gemstone. The chief could only watch in horror as the bird swiped the red stone from her open palm and escaped to the sky once again.

From beyond the edges of the young woman's shadow, two air enchanters hovered above the ground where she had no chance of reaching them. She panicked as they unsheathed their swords and charged at her. But before they could act, they themselves were cut down by a figure cloaked in black.

The two air enchanters crumpled in a lifeless heap. The tall man who had attacked them wore brilliant white robes under his black cloak, and a startling ram's-skull mask covered his face. Long silvery locs of hair suggested an old age that belied his youthful movements. The jancrow glided back over, dropping the coral gemstone into the masked man's hand. This was the real spirit waker. The spirits of the air enchanters seeped into him like steam reversing into a boiling pot.

"It appears mi ha'fi reveal myself sooner than mi wished," he said, the whites of his eyes just visible under the dark hollows of the mask. "Do you know who I am?"

She knew, all right. The one who had sold his soul to the devil. The one who summoned duppies – evil spirits of the dead. The one who sought to control the hearts and minds of those who had lost their way.

“Blackheart Man.”

“Yes,” he said, lifting a hood to cover his exposed locs. “Which means that *they* all know who I am as well.” He gestured to the revellers still frozen under the young woman’s shadow enchantment. “Our plan has to remain a secret from the other Maroon towns for it to succeed. Do you understand? There can be no survivors.”

The young woman forced herself to look at the townsfolk who she’d lived among for months. Those who’d tried to bring her back from despair and given her a home. A darkness of spirit that wasn’t there before crept in to strangle her emotions. But one incessant feeling consumed it all. The memory of her child, and the chance to bring her back.

“Yes,” she answered. “I understand.”



## Chapter One



# THE MAGICAL MANGROVE HOTEL

Ocho Rios, Xaymaca 1962

Evie

It was a wonder that The Mangrove Hotel was standing at all. The charming mustard-yellow building with a terracotta roof was nestled in the gnarled branches of mangrove trees like some overgrown Eden. The cluster of trees burst from the sea, suspending the hotel in the air like a gleeful child in the hands of a parent. And this marvel was only possible because The Mangrove Hotel was brimming with magic.

The mangrove branches even reached inside the hotel, dangling vines and fragrant flowers finding homes along the colourful walls and ceilings. The Mangrove had been Evie Bell's home for nine of her thirteen years. She adored it. But on this particular evening, all that was on her mind was escaping the place.

A walnut grandfather clock in the lobby chimed eight times, reverberating to the hotel's two upper floors. Evie peered from behind her rickety linen cart, over the balcony of the second floor, down to the lobby below. The brilliant white of her maid's uniform was somewhat grubby from wiping off her dusty hands. Beside her, Arthur, one of the porter boys, snuck a peek down too. The hotel owner and Evie's adopted mother, Ms Bell, had just handed over keys to two of the many guests who'd arrived especially for tonight. The couple gasped in astonishment as enchanted vines crept from the balconies, wrapped around the handles of their brown leather suitcases and lifted them up to the first floor.

Evie watched the guests with a frown. So many visitors and hardly any were mages themselves. They had no magic. They just wanted the thrill of being close to it. Okay, so maybe *she* didn't have any magic either, but certainly not for lack of trying.

"All right, make sure you follow the plan to a T, you hear?" Evie commanded Arthur. "If we mess up, Ms Bell's not going to lay back and give us another chance at this."

"Yeah man, relax yourself," Arthur replied. His small brown eyes were barely slits when he flashed a self-assured smile.

"But how you mean 'relax', Arthur, when we're about to pull the heist of our lives?"

Arthur snorted. "The heist of *your* life, sistah. This'll be child's play for me." He held his hands up like a mime and wiggled his thieving fingers playfully.

Evie rolled her eyes. “Cho!” she huffed. At least *someone* was enjoying this. Evie’s stomach was in knots.

The Carnival of Magic, or Myal as it was known to locals, took place one night a year, at a different location on the island each time. It only happened when the moon was full and the veil between the living world and the spirit world was at its thinnest. This year, Myal would take place on a golden beach in the town of Ocho Rios. And although Evie was forbidden from rowing across to Ocho Rios after sunset, she’d already made up her mind that she was going to the carnival to see her long-dead parents.

Evie stepped up onto the second-floor balcony railing, feeling the thrill as she glanced down at guests pottering around below her feet. The height didn’t bother her. The enchanted hotel was her playground, and although she wasn’t a mage herself, she had complete faith in Obeah – the divine energy linking the living world to the spirit world, and the reason magic existed in their world at all. A large plant stem unfurled itself from the railing, dipping to the floor below. Evie walked along it like a tightrope artist before hopping to a giant flower. Her added weight caused the pink flower head to wilt slowly, tilting her down to the ground floor and spitting her out with yellow pollen smudges to add to the dust marks on her uniform.

As she approached the front desk – where Ms Bell was deftly flicking at the rotary wheel of a telephone – Evie made efforts to brush off the worst offending dirt from her uniform and patted her plaits to ensure no hair was out of place (as it

often was). She was prepared for whatever the answer to her request to attend Myal would be.

“No,” said Ms Bell with only a cursory glance up. She swivelled slightly away from her adopted daughter, signalling that the conversation was over, and pressed the chunky phone receiver closer to her ear to further the point.

“But mi nah even ask you anything yet, Mama!” Evie had expected a chance to at least debate her case.

Ms Bell kissed her teeth. “Mi know when you want something, young lady, it’s written all over your face. And the only thing you could possibly want on Myal night is to be over there and to take the larimar with you.”

Bingo.

To fully embrace the Carnival of Magic you had to take magic with you, and the shiny blue larimar gemstone was the very source of the hotel’s magic. Evie was definitely walking out of there with it.

Ms Bell began her phone conversation, switching seamlessly to her posh, Anglicized voice rather than her natural Xaymacan patois. A shadow fell onto the floor behind Ms Bell, and Evie tried not to glance upwards and draw her mama’s attention to the source of it. Arthur appeared just behind the hotel owner, suspended on a long, enchanted vine, which hung precariously from the ceiling. Sweat seeped through his white hotel shirt as he shimmied his way down, tongue sticking out in concentration and small hands passing one beneath the other, halting only when Ms Bell gesticulated in her chair without warning.

The larimar was locked in Ms Bell's office, through the peeling lacquer door behind the front desk. Evie had entrusted Arthur's deft hands to make the gemstone heist, while her job was to do what she did best: talk. But Evie hadn't accounted for this phone call, which crucially took Ms Bell's attention away from her. Heaven forbid her mama needed to check a logbook or file from the office and caught Arthur in the act.

Ms Bell and Evie both jumped as a hotel cat leaped onto the desk. The phone receiver dropped from Ms Bell's plump hand like a slippery fish before clattering on the tiled floor and bungeeing back on its cord.

"Clinton!" Ms Bell screeched at the brown-black cat. "Lawd have mercy. You'll make me catch my death, and mi only forty years young!"

Clinton slow-blinked disinterestedly before narrowing his yellow eyes at Evie. He always had a grumpy-looking face anyway, but given Evie and Arthur were in the middle of their covert operation, she imagined that the Burmese cat was glaring with disapproval. Clinton mewed, switching his attention to Arthur, who was using the commotion to good effect as he picked the lock of the office door. Arthur glanced back and shot a look at Evie, with a furrowed brow and widened eyes. While Ms Bell apologized profusely to the person on the other end of the line, Evie cleared her throat and accosted Ms Bell again.

This next act would hold her attention for sure.