

WITCHES AND FISH

A PARABIE of DREAMS



WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY
DUNCAN LONG

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A PARABLE of DREAMS

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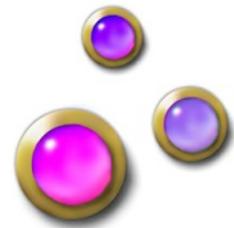
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Duncan Long's online portfolio can be viewed online at: DuncanLong.com.

Be sure to purchase the [high-resolution print version of *Witches and Fish*](#).

Dedicated to dreamers everywhere and every when,
and to those who make the dreams come true.





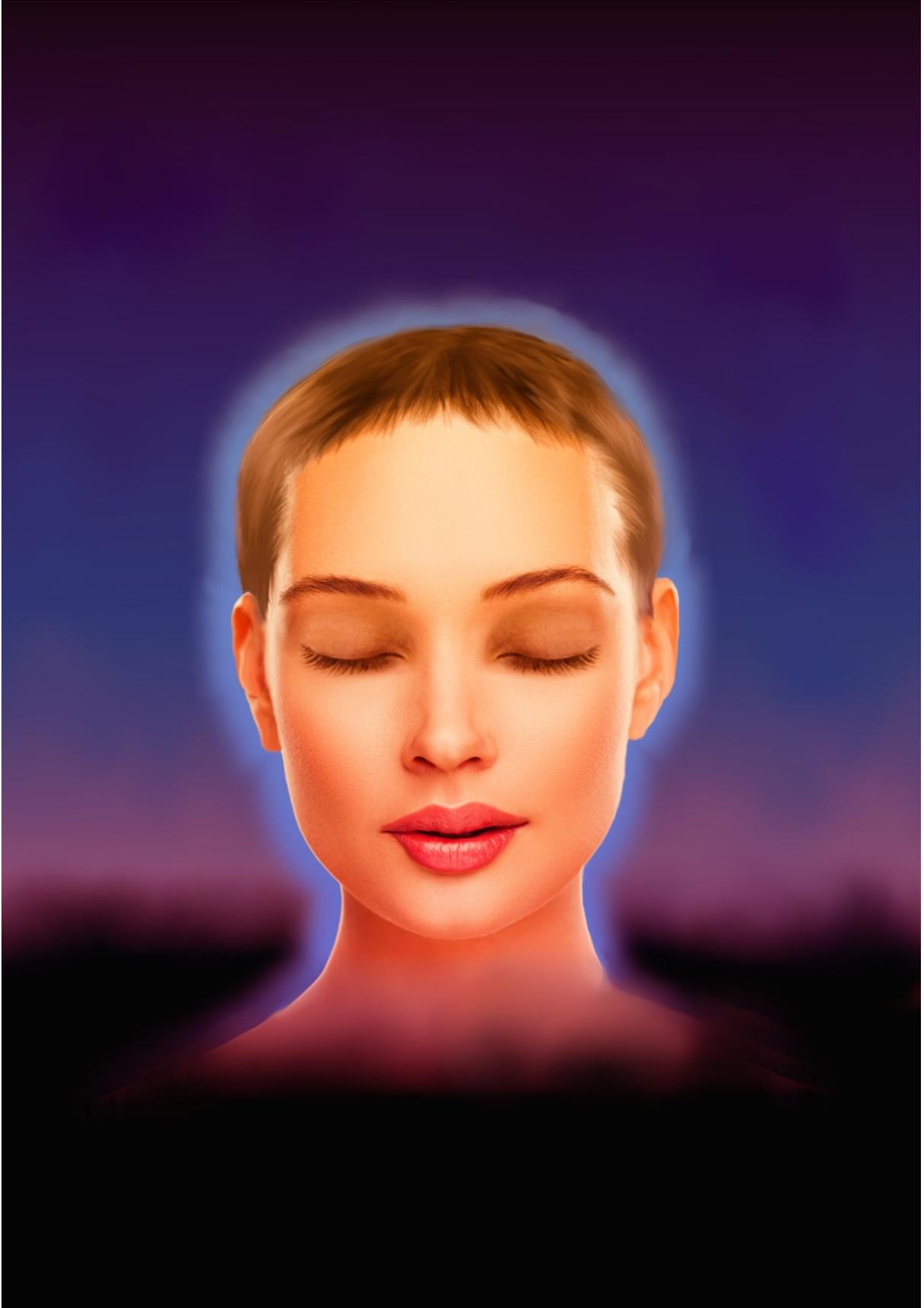
BEFORE DAYS OR MOONS, Great Father spoke the skies and created the Earth from star dust. He hung the Earth and Moon on nothing. He breathed across the land and made the plants. He blew again, and formed the animals.





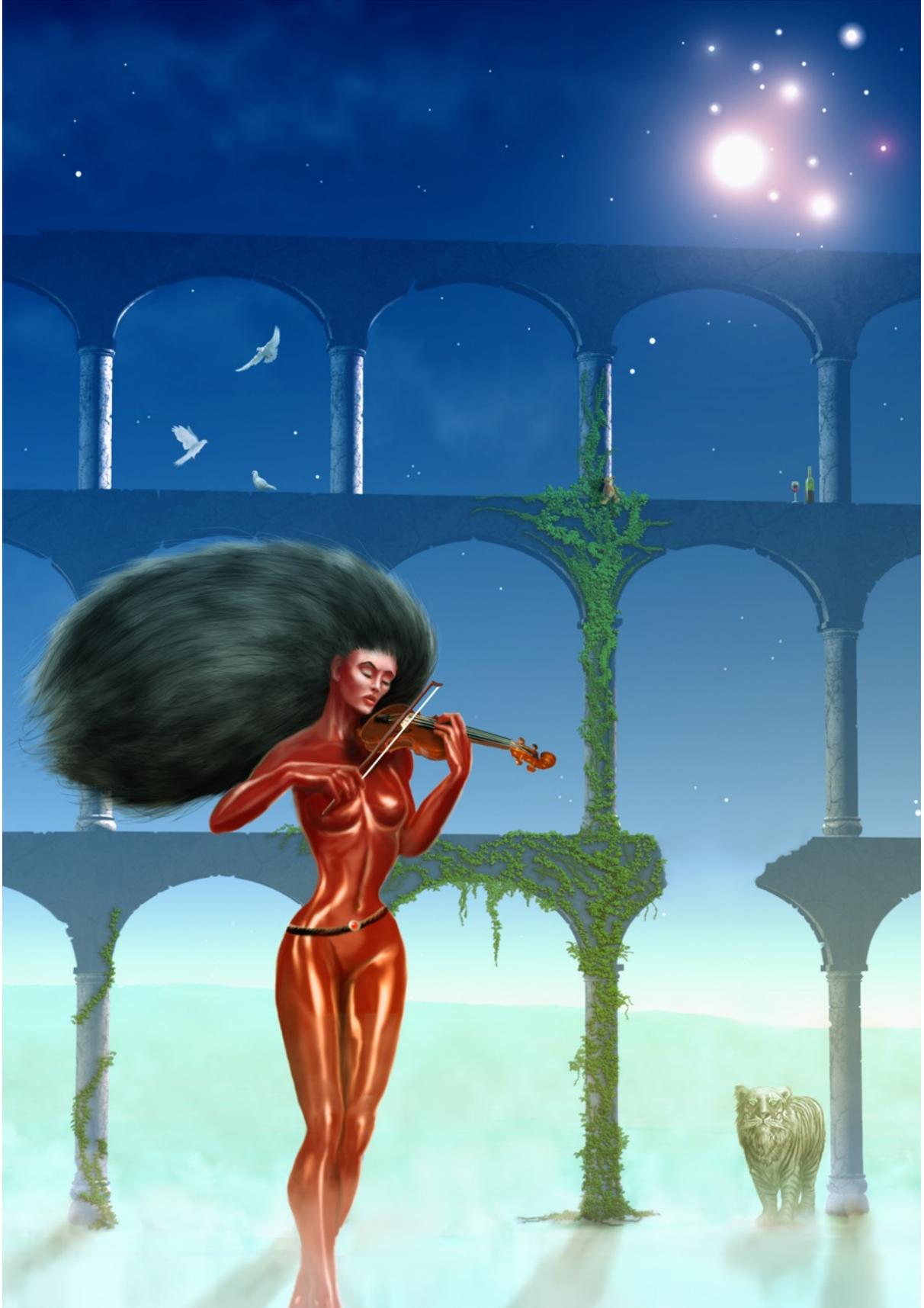
And he puffed like one extinguishing a candle and created the first man.

Last of all he sneezed, and formed the woman who was the mother of all those to come.





The stars sang for joy and the Crimson Beabma played her ode of peace.



All things were in harmony because Jealousy had no face or arms, and therefore was unable to stalk the hearts of humankind.



BEFORE HUMANKIND KNEW its mind, each day the spirit Lilith danced in the Earth, driving warmth to the surface of the orb.





Great Hexe grew envious and threw her cloak across the sky so humanity would be in darkness. But the cloak failed to cover all the heavens. So some daylight remained and a few stars and the Moon still ruled the night.



The bat-winged Owl Tovenaar stood in the moonlight working his evil as well, locking the sky so humans could no longer fly (except when children dreamed).

AND THE SPIRIT of Lilith rose to the surface of the earth and stole magic from the fields, forming her body from blades of grass. And then she tempted humankind.

The Great Father grew angry and threw her back into the center of the Earth for another time and another season.





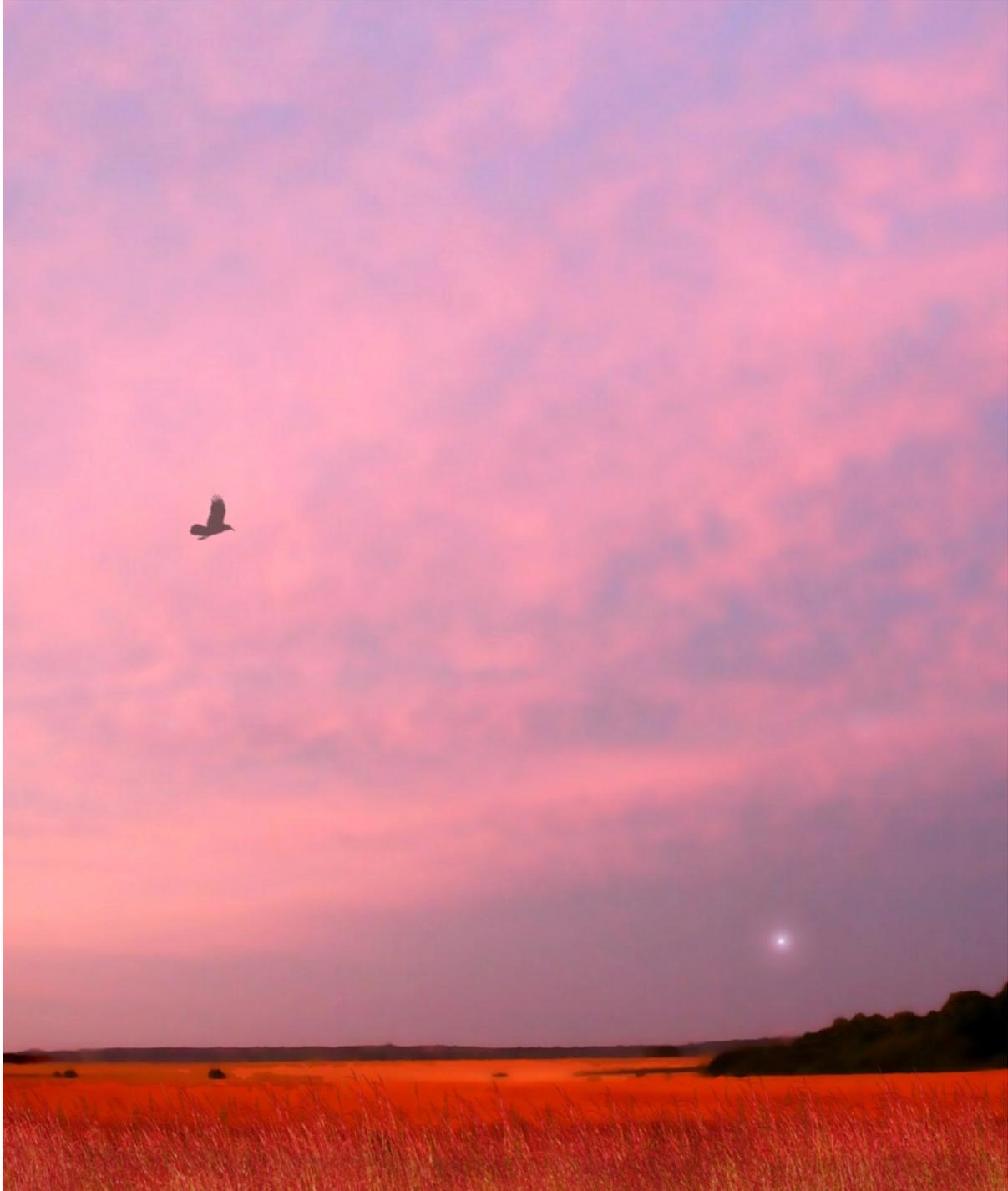




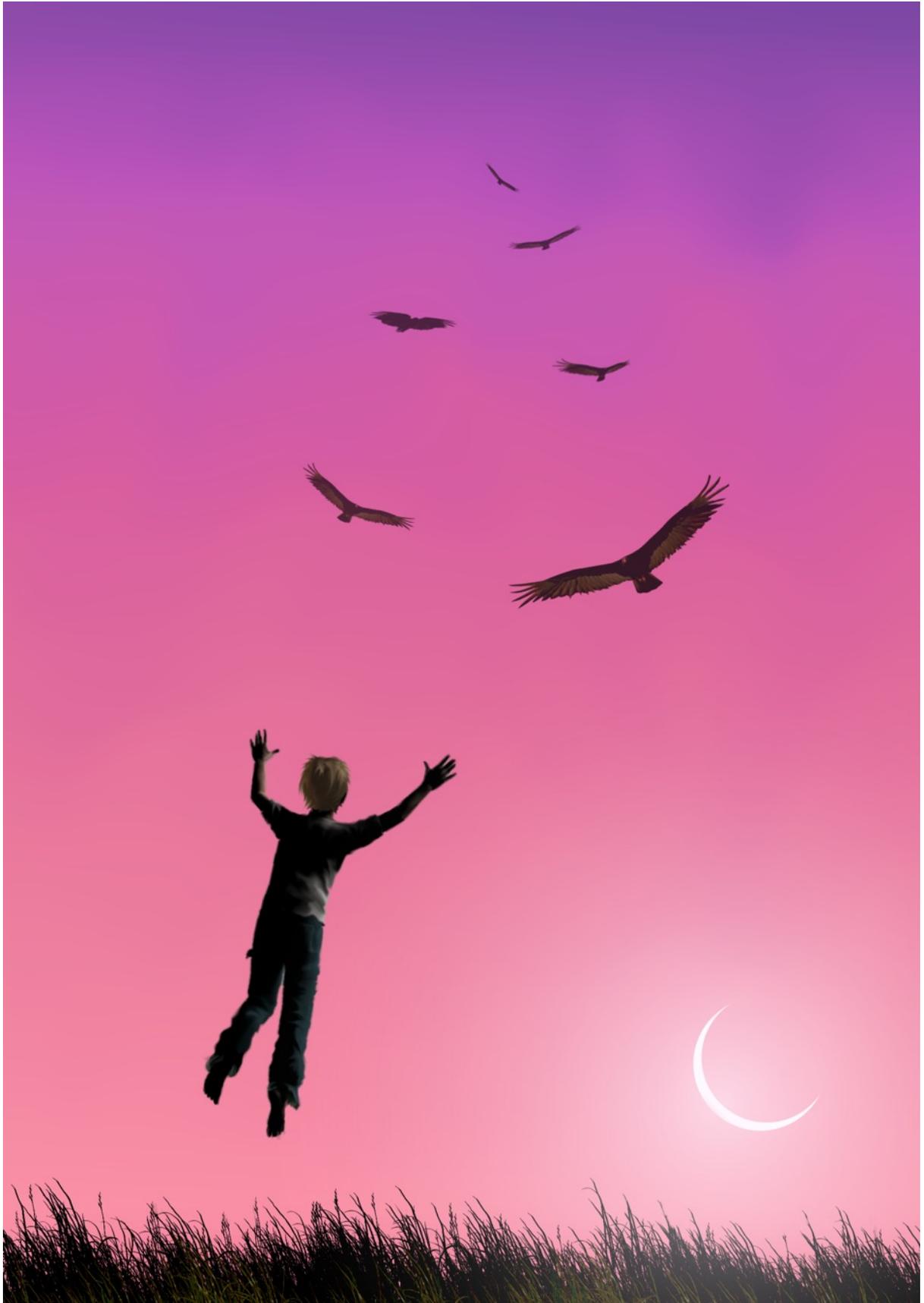
GREAT FATHER SAW ALL that Lilith, Owl Tovenaar, and Great Hexe had done. So he took pity on mankind and formed a key to unlock the sky; he entrusted the key to Storm Witch.

“Hold onto this until the right moment to unbind the sky,” Great Father told her. “Don’t release it until the time is ripe.”

Storm Witch transformed her other self into Thunder Crow, swallowed the key, and flew away.



ARISTO LIVED WITH HIS FAMILY in the middle of a sea of grass, far away from the real world of steel and plastic. At night, Aristo often dreamed of flying.





ONE DAY LILITH LURED ARISTO into the sea of grass, hoping the approaching storm that blew waves across the flatland would harm him.

With his dog chasing behind him, Aristo raced across the plain, flying the fish kite his parents had given him for his birthday.

Thunder Crow saw what was happening and knew Aristo might be hurt. So she attacked the kite, swooping down and tearing it apart in the air with her claws and beak.

Her claws became entangled in the fabric of the kite, and it dragged her to the earth. The long fall broke Thunder Crow's neck, killing her.





Aristo stroked the dead bird's feathers and breathed warm air across its yellow beak. To his surprise, the bird came back to life.

Thunder Crow ruffled her feathers into a hundred tiny crows, and reassembled herself into Storm Witch.





“Even though you didn’t know why I destroyed the kite you loved,” she said, “You saved my life anyway. Now I’m giving you the silver key to the sky.”

Aristo took the key. When he held it, he saw the keyhole in the sky.

He inserted the key into the hole, twisted the key, and unlocked the sky. And sky door opened.

Storm Witch said. “Go ahead. Step in. Regno del Cielo lies beyond. It’s a wonderful place to visit.”



ARISTO STEPPED THROUGH THE OPENING, keeping one foot planted in his world and his other foot in the upside-down Regno del Cielo. But he became dizzy and fell into Regno del Cielo and the sky door slammed shut behind him.

He could no longer see a keyhole, so he pocketed the key.

Night was falling inside Regno del Cielo, but people strolled the well-lit streets, greeting him as they passed.

He explored avenues filled with food and treasure. No one asked for money because everything was free.





SEVEN HOURS later, Aristo sat on a golden bench watching the fish float by. He yawned and said to himself, “It’s all nice, but also quite boring.”

Then he noticed Old Tu, wrapped in a shroud, standing beside him.

“Aristo, don’t be tempted to leave Regnaj del Cielo,” Old Tu warned. “Some gates lead to danger.”

“What about the Land of Bdulia?” Aristo asked. “I’ve heard about its dreams of contentment.”

“Bdulia is the worst of all. Never go there.”

“But —”

Aristo said no more because there was no one to listen.

Old Tu had vanished in a wisp of smoke.



APPEARING BESIDE ARISTO, the rag doll Bambola said, “I would never trust Old Tu or believe anything he says.”

“Why would he lie to me?” Aristo asked. “And how do I know you’re truthful?”

“He’s jealous. He has wasted his time in Regno del Cielo and has grown old. He doesn’t want anyone to go anywhere that’s fun or exciting.”



Aristo had no reason to trust either Old Tu *or* Bambola. Aristo wanted to leave Regno del Cielo and explore, so he went to the Sorciere of Right and Left and asked, “Where’s the passage to the Land of Bdulia?”

“It’s right here,” Sorciere said. “You can open the lock with that key Storm Witch gave you.” So Aristo unlocked the portal and entered the Kingdom of Bdulia.



UPON ENTERING the Kingdom of Bdulia, Aristo found his mind dulled by the thick smoke of forgetfulness that hung in the air. He quickly fell asleep and was transformed into one animal after another until he became a golden snake.

Soon sky fish were swarming around him, singing their siren songs. As they sang, he spun a web around himself.







THE FISH SANG about when the night sky was dark without stars or moon. Back then Himmel König loved Nachthimmel his wife. Nachthimmel died in childbirth, and her offspring becoming the children of the night.

Bone Thief stole Nachthimmel's skull, and used it for a candleholder. Bone Thief's children knew this was evil, so one night after their father had retired, they placed a day lily and a magic crystal next to the skull and relit the candle atop it.

Sparks climbed from the candle, penetrating the thatched roof, and (continuing upward) formed a star cluster above the house. Seeing what they'd done, the frightened children ran and hid under their beds.

In the distance, Himmel König spied the star cluster that lit the night and followed it until he reached Bone Thief's home.



He burst through the door and found his wife's desecrated skull. Full of rage, Himmel König killed Bone Thief and then slaughtered his children.

Himmel König cast Nachthim-mel's skull into the sky so no one could steal it again. Her skull struck the dark cluster, scattering sparks that formed the sacred constellations. Nachthimmel's skull became the Moon to remind all mankind of the undying love Himmel König had for his wife.





THE FISH SANG of a man who went to war, leaving his wife with child. He fought for nineteen years, remaining faithful to his wife.

In the village, suitors called at his wife's door. "He has been gone for many years," they said. "He must be dead. Time for you to remarry." But she didn't listen and remained faithful to her husband.

One day the soldier returned home and chased away the suitors gathered at the door of his house. The wife welcomed her husband, introducing him to his son.

Yet the soldier had been changed by war and was a different person from the man who had left. His wife had suffered want and hardships and had become a different woman. His son had never known his father and was now a man himself. So the three were no longer a family, and they went their separate ways, never to meet again.

THE FISH SANG of a vain woman who stood beneath the Yule mistletoe to be kissed by the perfect suitor.

A banker approached. “You’re much too fat,” she said, pushing him away. “You’d eat more than I would ever care to cook.”

A handsome dullard stepped forward to kiss her. “You’re too shallow,” she said, shoving him aside. “You’re already the laughing stock of the village and you’ll make your wife the same.”

The village’s wisest scholar approached her. “You’re too deep,” she said, stamping her foot. “Your droning voice would bore me day and night.”

On it went as one suitor after another stepped forward only to be rejected with scorn.

So the woman stands there under the mistletoe to this day, waiting impatiently for the perfect man who never was and never will be.



THE FISH SANG about a village where Death regularly visited late at night, snatching victims. One night the villagers decided to hide from Death so he could steal no one. They extinguished fires, put out candles, and bolted doors.

Sure enough, Death passed through taking no one. Night after night the villagers hid; Death became far behind in his harvest quota.



So Death removed his shroud and threw away his scythe, and instead picked up a fiddle and went to the village where he struck up a merry tune.

One by one the villagers came out to dance and Death caught each one, leaving the village without a single soul.



THE FISH SANG of a magic pearl necklace that made any woman wearing it the most beautiful person in the world. For the magic to work, the woman wearing the pearls had to remain alone and unseen. No woman wore the pearls for more than one night, and then quickly gave them to another, thankful to be seen again, even though as less than perfect.



ONE FISH SANG a solo about a banker who loved his job so much that he always went to work, rain or shine. One day he died. To everyone's surprise, the banker arose from his deathbed and went to work. Day after day, he continued to go to his job. But his dedication destroyed the bank he loved because no one wanted to enter a building where a dead man worked.



THE FISH JOINED in a chorus about an old woman who owned an inn. One evening her guests ate nearly all the soup, leaving only one tiny portion which, after they had gone to bed, she sat down to eat. But before she could put the first spoonful into her mouth, the door burst open and a traveling conjurer stepped into the hall. “Woman, I’m famished!” he cried.



Even though the old lady was completely deaf, she realized he was hungry by the motions he made toward his mouth and stomach. So reluctantly, she shoved her bowl across the table to him. "Help yourself," she said. The conjurer wolfed down the soup and retired for bed, leaving the old woman alone and hungry.

The next morning the conjurer discovered the old woman asleep at the table. Seeing the empty pot over the embers in the fireplace, he realized that she must have gone hungry. "How selfish of me to eat the last of an old woman's food."

He awakened her and withdrew a magic skull from his travel bag. "Your kindness must be rewarded. Anytime you need food in your pot, drop this skull into it and say, 'Antabarragobba' so the soup won't be bitter. When you need a fire to heat the soup, rub the skull and say, 'Annabarragabbo' and a blazing fire will burn in your hearth. You'll never again want for food or warmth." With that, he put the skull into the surprised old woman's hands, turned, and left, unaware that the deaf woman hadn't understood a single word he'd said.

The old woman thought, "He motioned toward the soup kettle. He must have meant for me to place this skull into the pot. It's a strange thing to do, but he looked like a learned man, so let's see what happens." She placed the head into the pot, went out and collected wood, and built a blazing fire beneath the kettle.

Soon her guests came down and demanded some of the deliciously smelling food. Without tasting the soup, the old woman ladled it into bowls and set it in front of her hungry guests. Because she didn't know the magic word, the soup was so bitter that upon tasting it, they all cried out and ran from the inn without paying their bills, telling all they met about the terrible provisions at the inn.

No one would stay at the inn because of the bitter soup. With no business, the woman had no money to buy food. She couldn't eat the bitter soup, so she starved to death for want of money to buy food, all because of the conjurer's kindness toward her.



THE FISH SANG of a violinist and her magic glass violin. On this instrument, the musician could stroke a note so pure that it made her husband faint. The violinist played this trick often; her husband became the butt of many jokes.



When she was asleep one night, the man crept from their bedroom to where the instrument lay.

“What are you doing?” the violin trilled.

“Taking care of the one who has made me a laughingstock.”

“It would be a mistake to smash me.”

“We’ll see.” The man hammered the glass violin to pieces. Then he returned to the bedroom where his wife still slept. He climbed into bed, certain his crime would remain a secret.

The next day, the violinist went to the music room and found each of the shards had become a new glass violin. She shouted with joy and packed the extra violins onto a cart and gave one to each family in the village, keeping only one for herself.

Soon every household had a player who could perform on a glass violin. And whenever a player spied the husband coming down the street, the violinist stroked a pure note, causing the husband to lose consciousness.

In the end, the husband's plight was worse than it had been before he had destroyed his wife's glass violin.



THE FISH TRILLED about a witch who lived by a lake. She loved to watch the water when the beast that dwelt in its depths churned the deep. One day, the witch saw a small boy drowning. She lusted for his blood so, rather than see the young man eaten by the beast, she threw herself into the lake and dragged the boy ashore before the monster could reach him.

But the water soaked her heavy dress and its weight pulled her backward into the lake. The beast rose to the surface and snatched her, carrying her away.

What the witch had mistaken for a boy was really Magic Stork who had tricked her. Magic Stork coughed up all the beautiful children the witch had eaten and sent them home to their families.

But the families believed the youngsters that reappeared in the village were really demons posing as their children. So the parents herded and drove the crying children from the village into the lake where they all drowned and were eaten by the beast, joining the witch in Tumma Maailma.



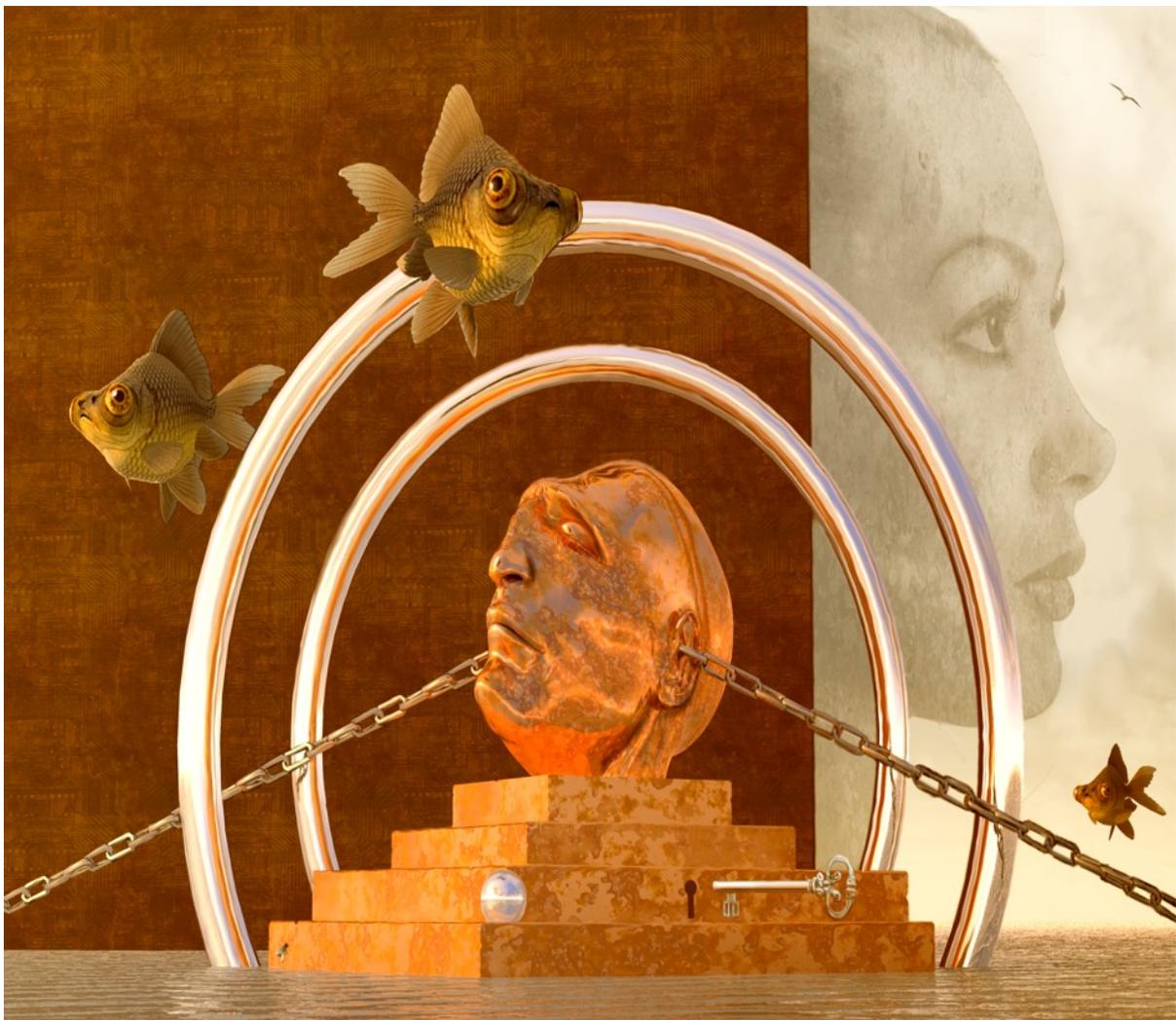
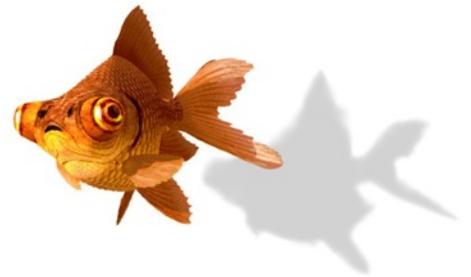




THE FISH SANG many more stories, short hymns, and epic ballads, humoresques, and tragic dirges. Some of these took only moments to perform. Others stretched on for years.

Each fed Aristo's mind with troubling dreams that gradually transformed his protective cocoon into a mausoleum of mirrors.

The tales continued year after year, chaining Aristo in slumber.



AFTER ARISTO'S MANY years asleep, a fly crawled across his eye. He tried to blink it away, but it kept coming back. "Go away," he cried. "Shoo."



The fly came back again and again. Finally the fly stopped buzzing and settled at Aristo's feet where it transformed itself into Storm Witch.





At first Storm Witch seemed only a phantom; but soon Aristo realized she lived within his head. She planted an acorn in his mind. Nine months later, the seed sprouted and quickly grew into an oak that crowded his dreams and awakened Aristo.





He opened his eyes and stretched tired muscles that had slept for 80 years. He was surprised at how old he had become as he looked at his reflection inside the mirrored mausoleum surrounding him.

“Stretch again,” Storm Witch ordered as she stood in the archway of his mind. “Stretch.”

He stretched, and his body grew within the mausoleum until the shell became too confined and the mirrored walls shattered into shards that slashed his skin, cutting him to pieces.

For a time there was nothing, and then the pieces reassembled into Aristo. And for the first time, he saw Bdulia as it truly was: A vast wasteland populated only by dreams.

“Do you wish to leave?” Storm Witch asked.

“Yes,” Aristo said.

“Then you must travel to the Cathedral at World’s End, and it’s a hard journey to get there.”







STORM WITCH FLEW ARISTO to the top of a mountain. “You must travel across the desert below to the land of Himmelmeer. Do you see the north star?”

“There,” Aristo answered, pointing into a sky full of swirling pinwheel stars.

“Follow the North Star until you come to the house of Crimson Beabma. She will show you the path out of Bdulia. The way is dangerous and you must do exactly as Crimson Beabma tells you if you’re to survive the journey.

“At the end of the desert you will meet Water Mayiooa who will send you on your journey through Himmelmeer. At the end of your travels, you will find the Last Cathedral.”



“Will you come with me?”
Aristo asked.

“You must make this journey alone,” Storm Witch replied. And then she left.

Aristo set out, traveling many months. One by one the fish that had been following him turned and left.



AFTER WEEKS OF FOLLOWING the North Star, Aristo finally neared the home of Crimson Beabma. Her precariously leaning house watched in all directions. “What do you want?” the home asked.

“I must speak to Crimson Beabma.”

“You seek a path to the Last Cathedral?” Crimson Beabma asked.

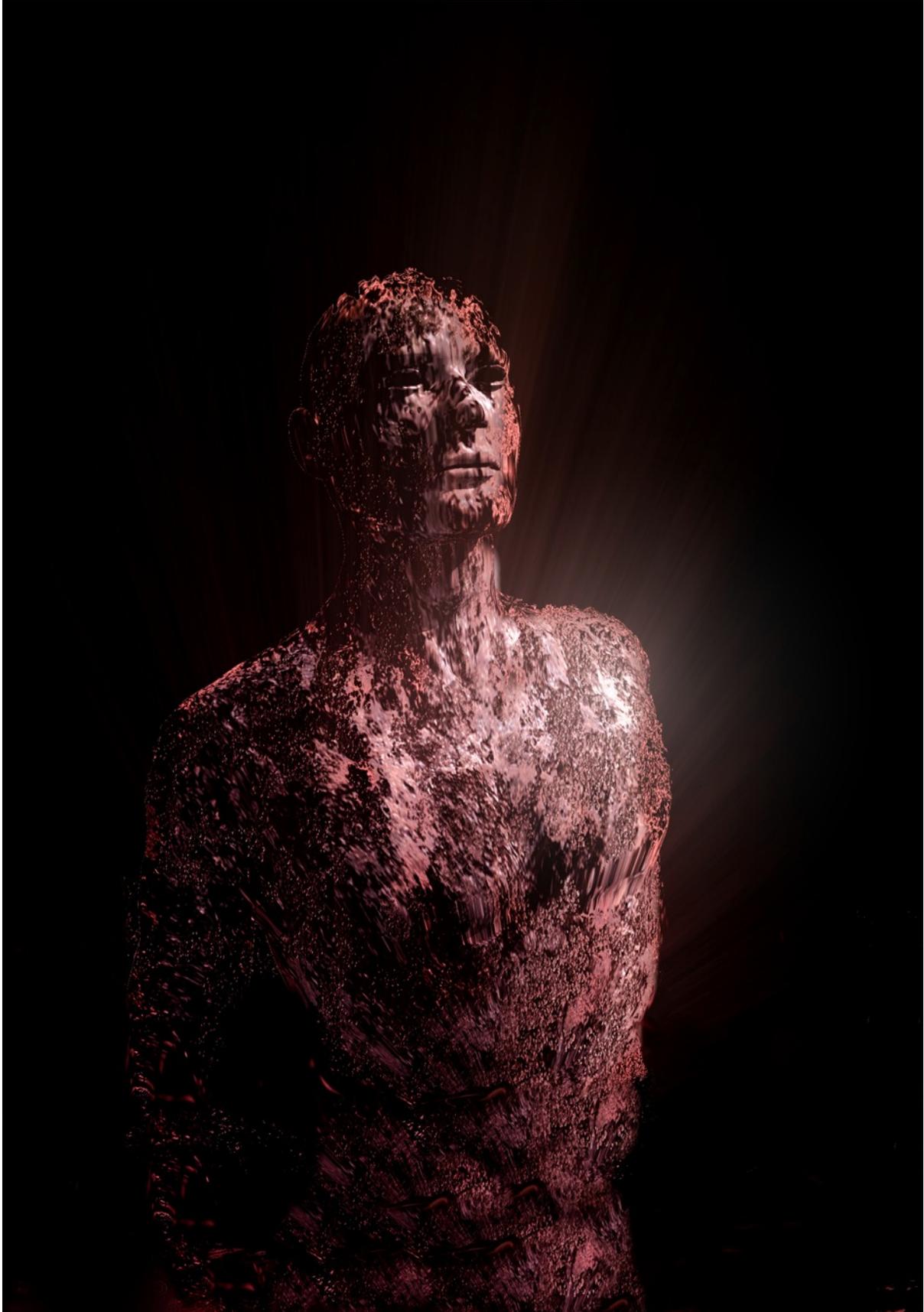
“Yes.”

“The way is long and painful. Many have failed and most of those who continue eventually turn to rust or float away. But here’s the route. Take it if you dare.”

After thanking Crimson Beabma, Aristo started down the trail she had indicated.







ARISTO WALKED MANY DAYS before coming upon a rusty man, buried up to his waist in the sand. “Can I help you get free?” Aristo asked.

“There’s no helping me,” the rusty man replied. “I lost my way and stopped to rest. Now I’m stuck. Be sure you never make my mistake. And always head toward the sun during the day. I only wish someone had told me these things before this happened to me.”

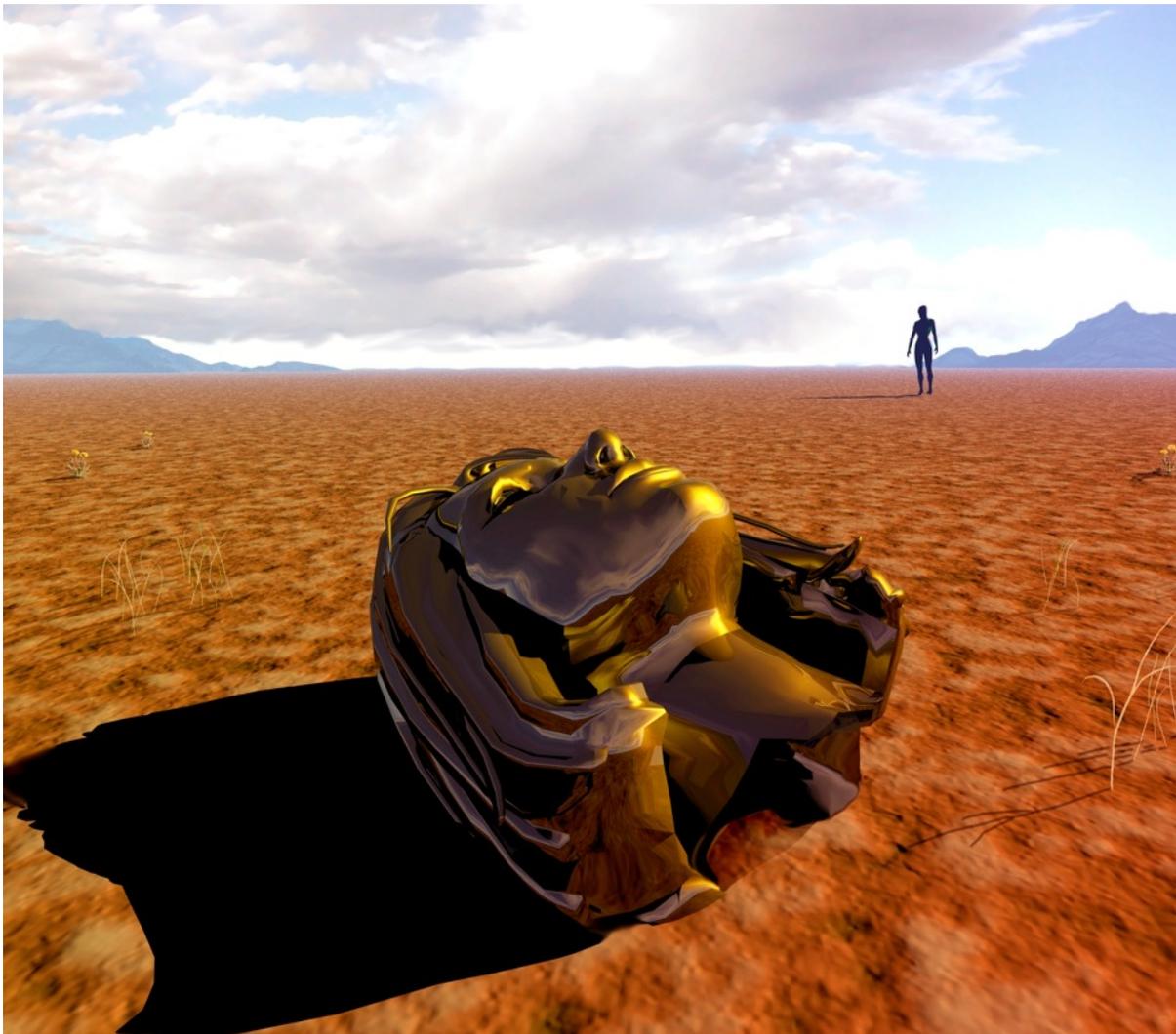
With that, the man disintegrated into a pile of rust, leaving only the outline of a face, grimacing toward the sky. Aristo shed a tear and traveled on.



SOME OF THOSE traveling before Aristo had started his journey had been so sure of their success that their heads had turned to bronze, causing them to become top heavy and topple over. Occasionally, Aristo would pass one of these bronze heads as it slept, its body rusted away.

Other travelers became so proud of the progress they'd made in crossing the wasteland, that their heads turned into brick, filled with hot air, and rose into the sky to vanish forever.

Aristo resolved to avoid becoming too proud or too sure of himself, lest a similar fate befall him.





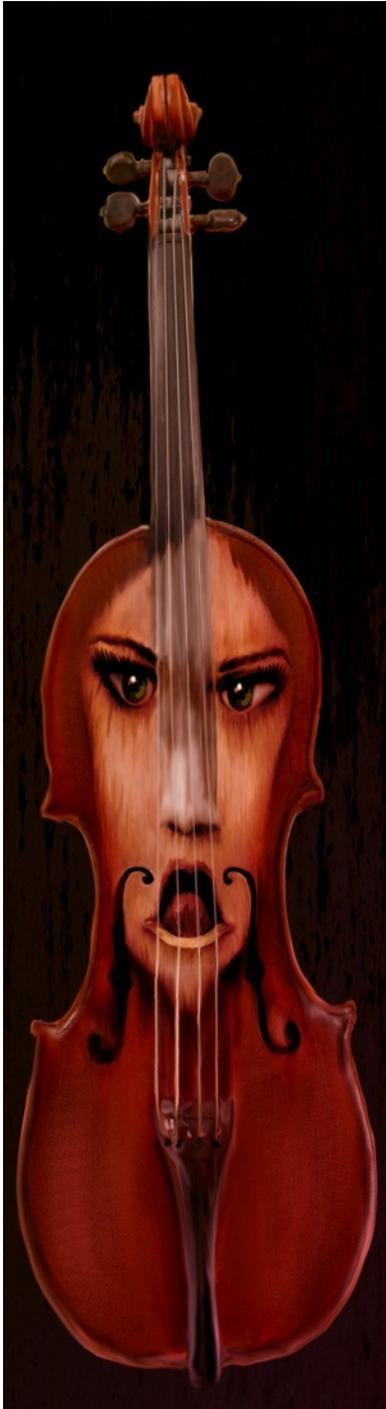


ARISTO CLIMBED A HILL to discover a jeweled sword, its point buried in a stone. He started to tug on the weapon to free it, but then thought better of it. “Perhaps one day its rightful owner will claim it.”

“You’ve done wisely,” a voice from the rock said. “I was once a knight. I betrayed my king and stole this sword just when the blade was required to slay an attacking dragon.

“My castle was destroyed while I brought this sword here to hide it. I so coveted the blade, I couldn’t let go of it, and now I’m only a bloodless stone unable to depart from this place.”



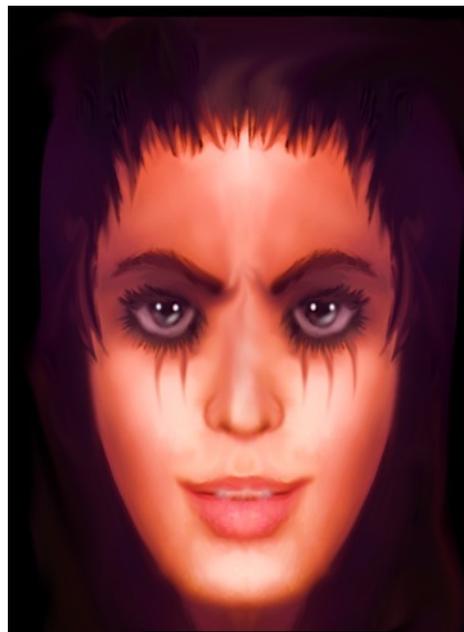


THAT NIGHT, Aristo heard a mournful, almost human voice. He approached the clearing from which the melody emerged.

“Come and warm yourself by my campfire,” a violin sang. As Aristo sat, the instrument commenced its ballad:

“Once a woman, I came into the wilderness to flee my sorrow. But as I traveled, I discovered I enjoyed my sadness while playing the fiddle. So I embraced both, never to give them up. Now my music endlessly fills this barren place.”

The violin continued her music, but Aristo found it too depressing to endure; he rose and escaped into the darkness.





THE NEXT DAY, Aristo continued toward the sun and came to a huge stone heron standing in a lake. “Who are you and how’d you get here?” Aristo asked.

“I’m Mumjumbo. I feared dying, so when Elephant asked me if I wanted to last forever, without thinking I answered, ‘Yes!’ He turned me into granite. Now I sit forever, lifeless yet lasting forever. Beware of elephants granting wishes.”

“I will!” Aristo promised before continuing on.





AFTER A TIME, a mob of rusty people approached Aristo. “Where are you headed?” he asked them.

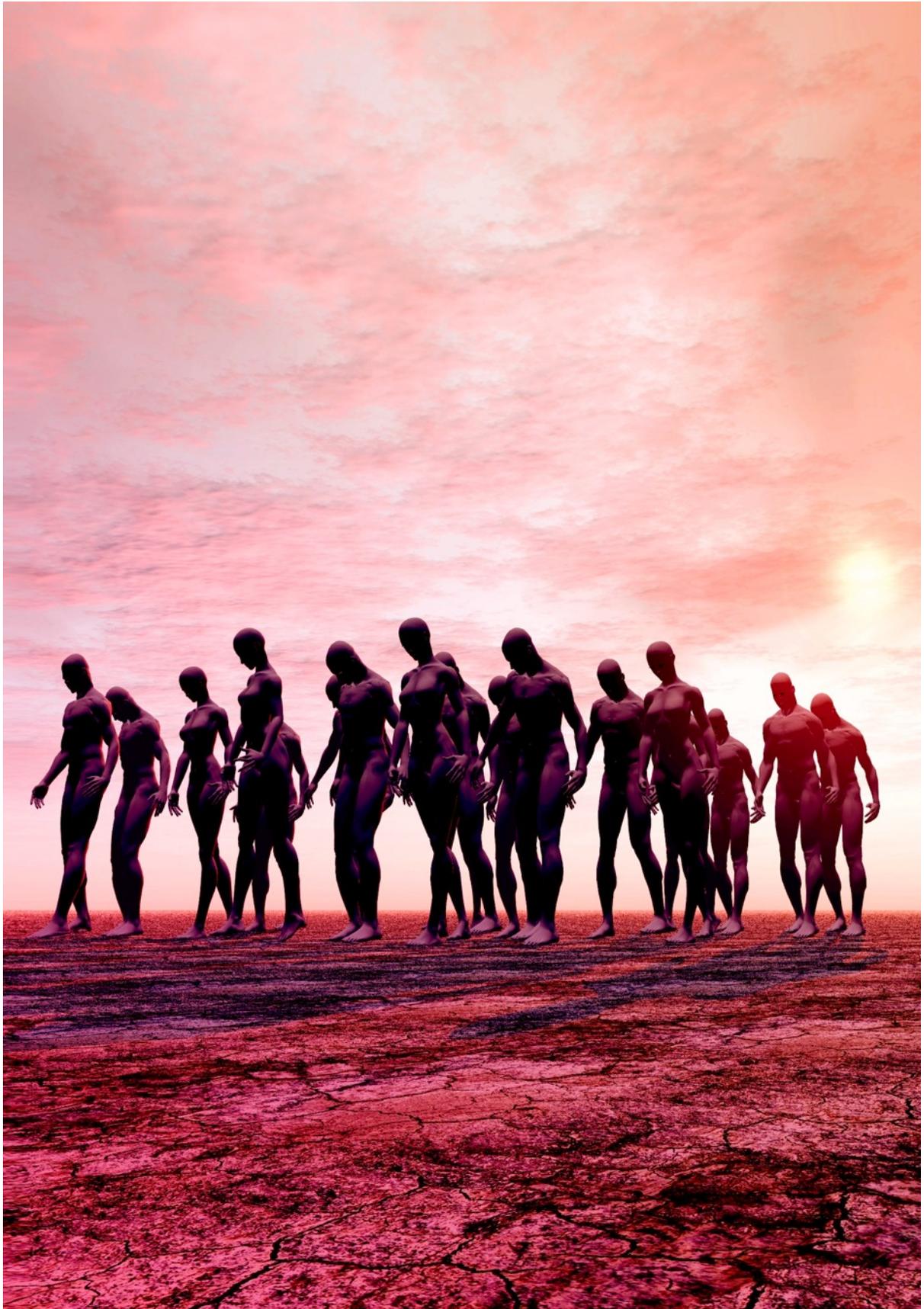
“To the Cathedral at World’s End,” the leader of the crowd answered.

“Then you’re traveling the wrong direction,” Aristo said. “You must go toward the sun to reach it.”

“That’s silly,” the leader replied. “The sun rises in the east and sets in the west. If you traveled toward it all day, you’d be constantly going back and forth across the desert. Come with us.”

Aristo was tempted to follow them until he noticed how rusty they’d become, and he realized they must have been wandering lost for a long time. So he went his own way toward the setting sun.







AFTER TRAVELING MANY MONTHS, Aristo found a woman's face lying on a rock. "What are you doing here?" he asked.

"I grew so concerned about how long my journey was taking that all I could think about was the time I'd wasted. Little by little my body turned to clockwork and then it fell apart, cog by spring, and I could go no farther. Now, I ask each traveler to carry a bit of me so that, eventually, piece by piece, I'll reach Water Mayiooa so she can direct me to the Cathedral at World's End."

"I could carry a gear from your chin, perhaps," Aristo ventured.

"No, that's my other problem. If I give up any more of myself, my jaw won't work and then I'll be unable to explain my story and no one will know to carry the last of me to my destination. So here I lie, a worrier with all the time in the world and no way to travel."

Aristo could think of nothing to do to save her, so he waved good-bye and left her face lying in the desert.



A YEAR LATER, Aristo became discouraged and sat in the desert, resigned to turning into rust rather than continuing on. Sorciere of Trials came and weighed his sorrow in her scales and announced, “You can’t quit now, you’re not discouraged enough!”

So Aristo rose and stumbled toward the setting sun. As he pushed on through the last daylight, grass and leaves started to cover the ground and he realized he must be near the edge of the desert. And then he nearly stumbled over an elf-in princess lying in a pile of leaves. Fearful she would turn to rust, Aristo tried to awaken her.

“It’s no use,” Sorciere of Trials told Aristo. “She’s given up.”

Aristo went on, sorrowful that the beautiful princess was lost.





THAT NIGHT, Aristo hid to avoid Strega Di Morte who raised souls to enslave them. Each night she assembled piles of rust (that had once been travelers) into skeletons.

She sent these poor creatures racing into the darkness, running until the morning hours when the first rays of sunlight struck them, turning each back into a pile of rust.







WITH DAWN APPROACHING, Aristo traveled toward the sunrise. The vegetation grew thicker and he could smell water in the breeze. As he neared a lake, at its edge he found a warrior frozen like a statue, holding his sword in the air.

“Never mind him,” Water Mayiooa called, rising from the lake. “He celebrated his success too early, and his conceit paralyzed him. Your journey is only half done. Now you must use your key to unlock the door to Himmelveer and travel its murky depths before you reach the Cathedral at World’s End. During your trip you must never stop until you reach the undersea lighthouse that



points toward the submarine that will take you to the cathedral. If you stay in one place for more than a few minutes, you'll remain there forever.”

Aristo thanked Water Mayiooa as the day turned into night. He unlocked the door, and was on his way.



HIMMELMEER WAS A MURKY PLACE. Aristo had not sloshed through it for long when he met a pirate, gunsmoke swirling around him as he hummed to himself. “Like to hear a story, mate?”

“Only if it’s short,” Aristo replied. “I can’t stay in one place for long.”





“Long ago,” the seaman began sauntering along the dock, “I left port aboard a three master. On my first watch, I started whistling. My captain burst from his cabin. ‘Never whistle on a ship,’ he bel- lowed. ‘Ye’ll whistle up a storm.’ So I waited until he went back to his quarters and hummed to myself, not knowing humming on a ship calls forth dragons.”

“It does?” Aristo asked.

“Indeed it does. A dragon came and sank our ship and I alone sur- vived. Now, because of my arrogance, I sail the waters of Him- melmeer forever, humming day and night. Here’s my ship now.”

A galleon floated down from the clouds. Before the pirate climbed the gangplank, he turned toward Aristo. “Why don’t you come along, lad. I’ll show you all sorts of excit- ing locales.”

Aristo politely declined and continued on his way, as the humming sailor’s ves- sel rose toward the moon.



OVER THE HILL,
Aristo met a woman
riding a tiger. “Hello,”
the lady said. “I bet
you’d like to hear my story.”

“Indeed I would.”

“I rode my pet tiger everywhere
and we became good friends.
But I forgot he was a wild beast,
and he forgot his instincts. So
one day when I left my parasol
behind, I went running back
into my house to fetch it. As I
ran, my tiger mistook me for a
gazelle and leaped upon me,
slaying me before he realized
what he was doing.

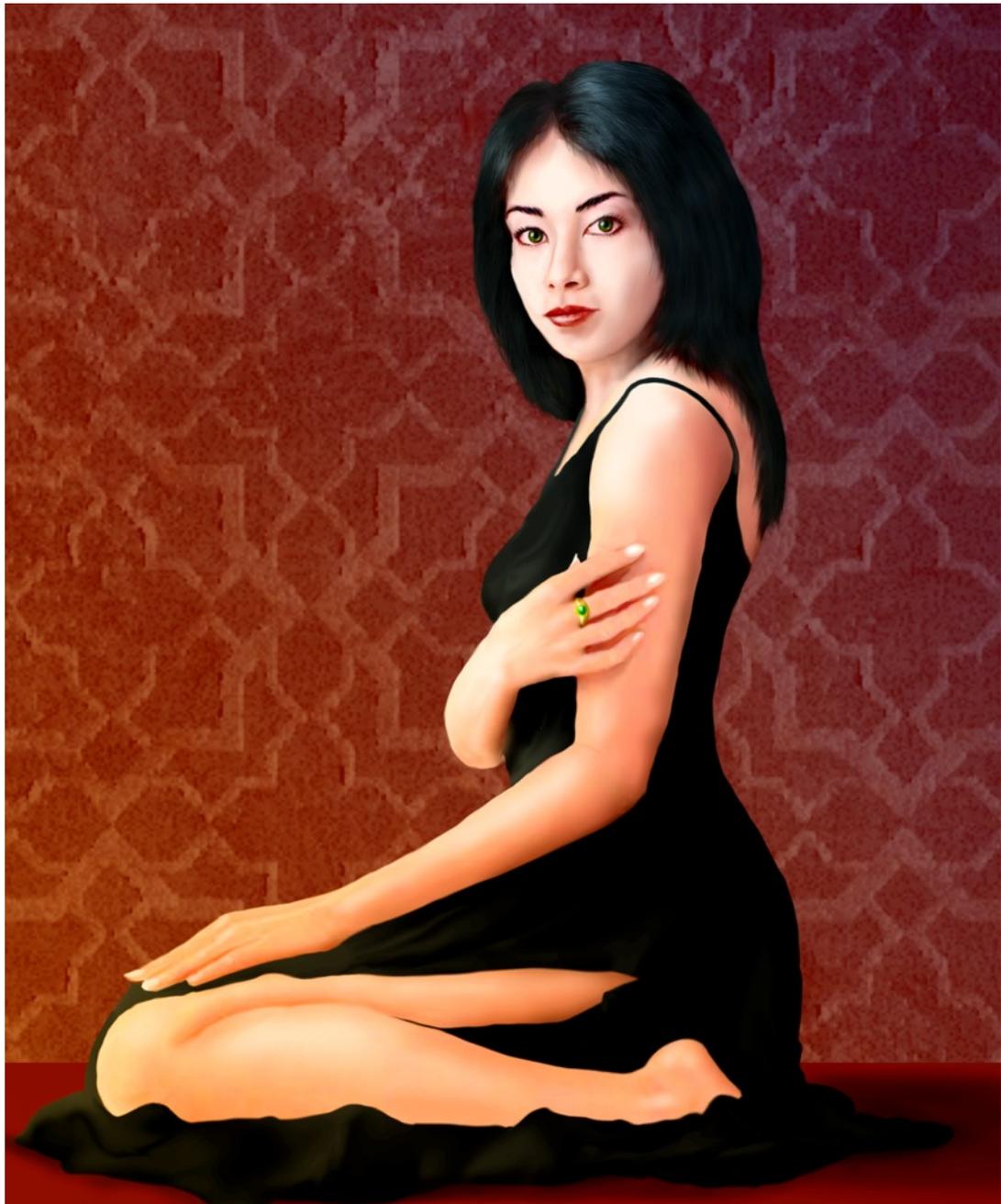
“Now he and I must travel day
and night through the land of
Himmelmeer. Come with us –
you can ride along behind me.”

Aristo was tempted because
he’d never ridden a tiger before.
But the two were headed in the
wrong direction, so Aristo made
an excuse and went his way,
being careful not to move too
quickly so he wouldn’t be mis-
taken for a gazelle.



A WEEK LATER, Aristo was walking on a lake where he met a beautiful woman. “What’s your story?” he asked.

“I pined for a home by the sea,” she replied. “I complained to my children and pestered my husband until finally we moved to a house by the ocean. But soon my husband rowed away and drowned in the depths, and my children rode their



bicycles across the waves for the mainland they loved. Now I'm alone in this ghostly house. Please stay with me. You'll be happy here."

Aristo continued walking across the lake without another word.



THAT NIGHT, Aristo spied a man floating beside a mansion. “Once,” the man explained, “I worried about what others thought of me. So I built an expensive home and eventually I died alone. Now I spend my days and nights all by myself, admiring my house.”



DAYLIGHT WAS BREAKING when Aristo came to a hideous man standing knee-deep in ice. “What happened to you?” Aristo asked, fighting back his fear.

“I sold chemical weapons. Little by little my body turned into a protective suit, and now I stand here forever in ice that’s cold as my conscience. Planes drop my own weapons on me day and night. Go away now before the jets return on their next bombing run.”

Aristo raced away as fast as he could, heading toward the lighthouse that he had spied in the distance.





ARISTO NEARED THE LIGHTHOUSE, and the fish and seagulls sang, “You’re almost to the Cathedral. The submarine will take you there.”

So Aristo boarded the boat that cruised between sky and sea. The submarine eased through the Wall of Fragments containing the shattered image of Great Bruxa, and then the vessel docked. Aristo disembarked and followed the path leading to the Cathedral at World’s End.





WHEN ARISTO REACHED THE CATHEDRAL, he found it in ruins. “So much time wasted getting here,” he said. “In fact, my whole life has been squandered.”

Then he remembered his mother and father, and wondered what had happened to them in the decades that had passed. What of his pet dog? They must all be gone, like the kite he had flown long ago. He sat on the pavement and wept.



In his sorrow, Aristo realized with the passing of so many years, the proud car that had once carried his family now lay in rust....



...and that the home where he had lived now sat abandoned on the sea of grass.



ARISTO MOURNED HIS CHILDHOOD for many years, often brooding in an old chair he had found. He sat lost in thought for so long that he eventually became a part of the chair, walking with its four legs.



Growing tired, he stopped to rest beside a stream and dreamed of the days when he had flown his fish kite above the sea of grass.

As he dozed, Storm Witch fell from the clouds and awakened him. “You have one last task to undertake. You’ll become Old Tu. You must try to persuade a young man to stay away from the Land of Bdulia.”



And so Aristo played the part of Old Tu, surprised to see that the young man he spoke to was also a head upon a chair. “Is that how I looked when I was a boy?” Aristo asked.

“No,” answered Storm Witch. “What you see is what he will become.”

Aristo warned the young man of Bdulia. But Aristo could see the doubt in the boy’s eyes, and knew he would ignore the warning just as Aristo had.



This saddened Aristo so that his chair body disappeared leaving only his head which rested on a marble slab in a sea of grass.

A year passed as Aristo gazed upward, enjoying the ever-changing view: Storms and snow, sunshine and rain. “How beautiful,” he often thought. His spirit reflection rose and danced among the stars. Then it returned to hover over him, staring down. “How old I have become.”



After six more years, Storm Witch returned. “I’ve come to take you home.”

“I’ve been gone too long,” Aristo said, “I no longer have a home.”

“You’ve always had a home. Listen.”

Aristo listened, and heard a barking dog chasing a laughing boy.



Aristo turned to see a fish kite in the distance, and he smiled at his joyful memory of a similar moment he'd enjoyed long, long ago.

“Time to go,” Storm Witch said. “I’ve been saving your silver key. Your home’s prepared for your arrival.”

A golden tear fell from Aristo’s eye. “I’ll miss this place.”



“In your new home, you’ll have all this — and more.”

Aristo took a deep breath. “Then I’m ready to go.” Closing his eyes, he rose into the air. Storm Witch followed him upward, the two flying without effort. Aristo’s spirit reflection became the moon and it watered the Earth with tears shed at the passing of Aristo. In the distance, lightning flashed, ready to summon Thunder Crow to attack a fish kite.



But before Thunder Crow could appear, the kite broke free of its string and followed Storm Witch and Aristo upward. So all three went to Aristo's new home.

On the ground below, another boy named Aristo watched his new kite vanish into the sky, chasing after the crow and what looked like a distant boy.



The young man on the ground waved good-bye to his kite and to the two shadows it chased after. Then young Aristo returned home with his dog.

The boy lived with his parents for many more years, and he never wandered far from home.







About the Author

Duncan Long has authored nearly 100 books including 13 novels (published by Avon Books and HarperCollins), and over 80 technical and how-to manuals, most of which he illustrated.

As a professional illustrator, he has created over a thousand cover and interior illustrations for HarperCollins, PS Publishing, Pocket Books, Moonstone Books, Enslow Publishers, ILEX, *Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, and many other presses and self-publishing authors.

Learn more about Long, his artwork, and his books at his web site: <http://DuncanLong.com>. And be sure to purchase the high-resolution print version of *Witches and Fish* (available at books stores or [Amazon](#)).

WITCHES AND FISH

A dazzling feast for both the eye and the mind, *Witches and Fish* treads strange worlds where fish sing siren songs, a magic key unlocks doorways in the sky, and those too proud or too slow are transformed into piles of rust — or worse.

Nothing is quite what it seems in this visionary saga that starts with an odd account of creation, transitions to a pivotal moment of childhood kindness (that transforms a crow into a witch), and the quest of a boy for an Oz-like sky city. On his adventure, the boy changes into a man — and then into something else altogether. Finally, his journey ends with the perfect (if unexpected) twist.

The story has a fascinating collection of secondary plots woven throughout. And with its odd perspective and unexpected twists and turns, it's a tale that quickly captivates the reader with archetypal, breath-taking pictures providing the perfect counterpoint to the sparse yet witty text, creating a dreamlike narrative Lewis Carroll (or Carl Jung) would have appreciated.

Witches and Fish is an oddly sophisticated story in oral tradition's clothing, both amusing and apocryphal, unfolding into a one-of-a-kind tale you'll want to share and explore time and again.



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