THE WHITE SHIP

I AM BASIL ELTON, KEEPER OF THE NORTH POINT LIGHT THAT MY FATHER AND GRANDFATHER KEPT BEFORE ME.



...I SOMETIMES FEEL STRANGELY ALONE, AS THOUGH I WERE THE LAST MAN ON OUR PLANET.



...OCEAN IS MORE ANCIENT THAN THE MOUNTAINS, AND FREIGHTED WITH THE MEMORIES AND THE DREAMS OF TIME.



...THE DEEP WATERS OF THE SEA HAVE GROWN CLEAR AND PHOSPHORESCENT, TO GRANT ME GLIMPSES OF THE WAYS BENEATH.



OUT OF THE SOUTH IT WAS THAT THE WHITE SHIP USED TO COME WHEN THE MOON WAS FULL AND HIGH IN THE HEAVENS.



...I WALKED OUT OVER THE WATERS TO THE WHITE SHIP ON A BRIDGE OF MOONBEAMS.



...THE LAND OF ZAR, WHERE DWELL ALL THE DREAMS AND THOUGHTS OF BEAUTY THAT COME TO MEN ONCE AND THEN ARE FORGOTTEN.



BUT WE DID NOT SET FOOT UPON THE SLOPING MEADOWS OF ZAR, FOR IT IS TOLD THAT HE WHO TREADS THEM MAY NEVERMORE RETURN TO HIS NATIVE SHORE.



THIS IS THALARION, THE CITY OF A THOUSAND WONDERS, WHEREIN RESIDE ALL THOSE MYSTERIES THAT MAN HAS STRIVEN IN VAIN TO FATHOM.



INTO THALARION, THE CITY OF A THOUSAND WONDERS, MANY HAVE PASSED BUT NONE RETURNED. THEREIN WALK ONLY DAEMONS AND MAD THINGS THAT ARE NO LONGER MEN...



...BURSTS OF SONG AND SNATCHES OF LYRIC HARMONY, INTERSPERSED WITH FAINT LAUGHTER SO DELICIOUS THAT I URGED THE ROWERS ONWARD...



...THE LETHAL, CHARNEL ODOUR OF PLAGUE-STRICKEN TOWNS AND UNCOVERED CEMETERIES.



THIS IS XURA, THE LAND OF PLEASURES UNATTAINED.



...THE HARBOUR OF SONA-NYL, WHICH IS GUARDED BY TWIN HEADLANDS OF CRYSTAL THAT RISE FROM THE SEA AND MEET IN A RESPLENDENT ARCH.

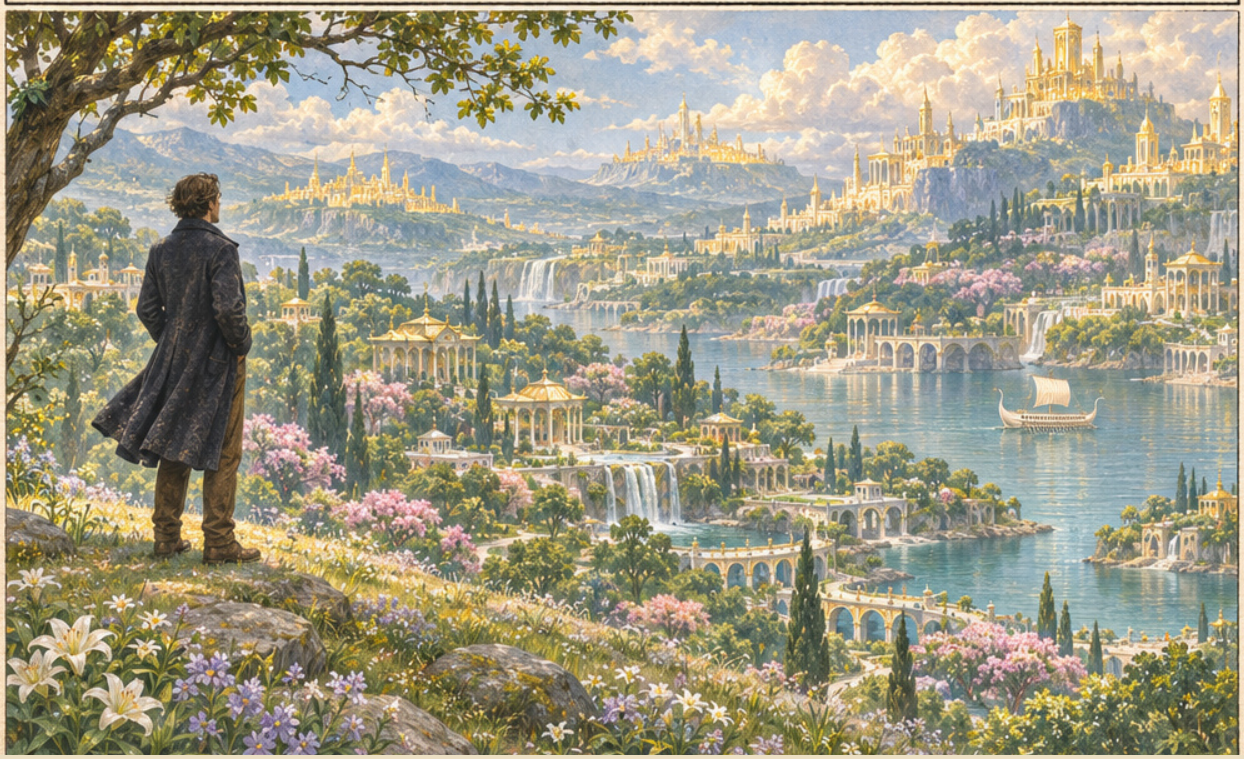


THIS IS THE LAND OF FANCY...

IN THE LAND OF SONA-NYL THERE IS NEITHER TIME NOR SPACE, NEITHER SUFFERING NOR DEATH; AND THERE I DWELT FOR MANY AEONS.



...STEEPLED TOWNS NESTLING IN VERDANT VALLEYS, AND... GOLDEN DOMES OF GIGANTIC CITIES GLITTERING ON THE INFINITELY DISTANT HORIZON.



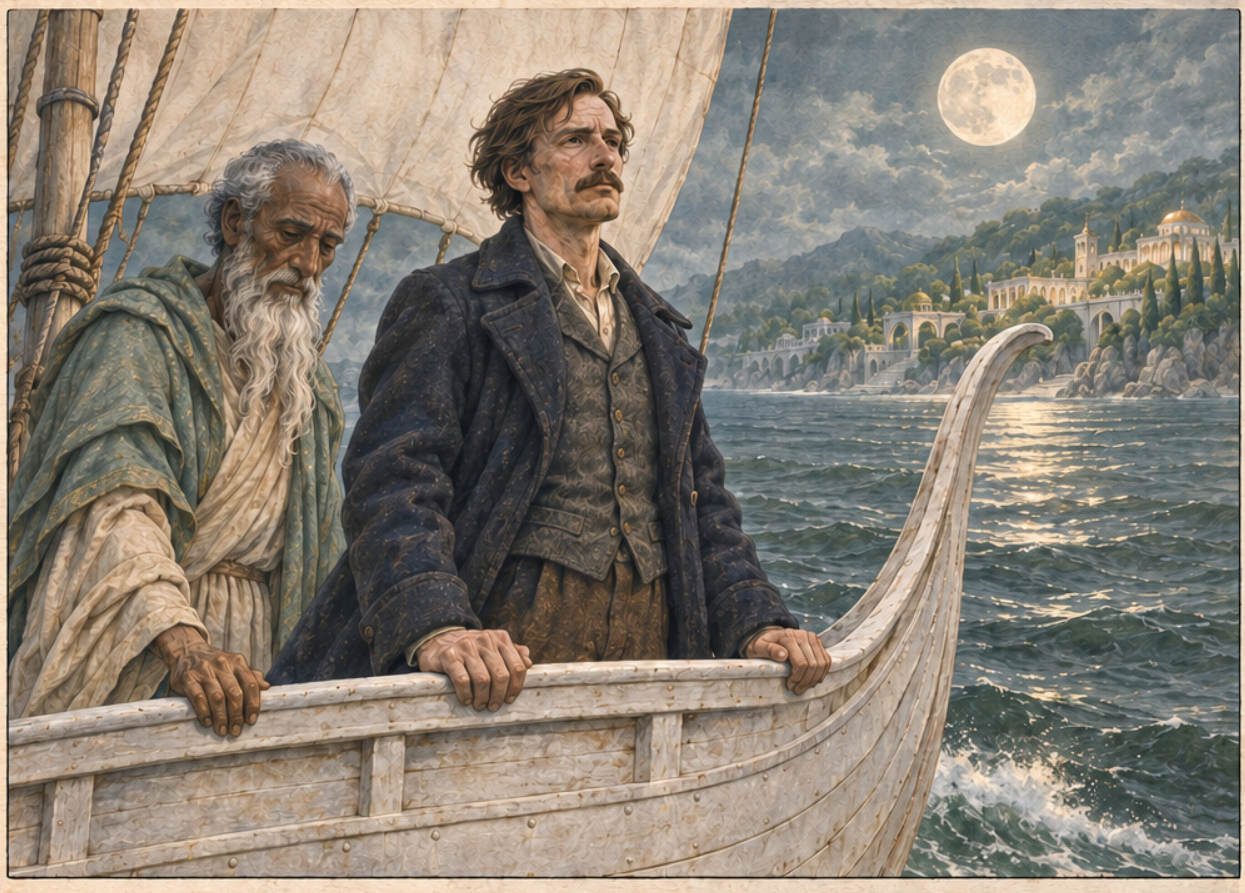
...I SAW OUTLINED THE BECKONING FORM OF THE CELESTIAL BIRD, AND FELT THE FIRST STIRRINGS OF UNREST.



BEWARE OF THOSE PERILOUS SEAS WHEREIN MEN SAY CATHURIA LIES.



...AT THE NEXT FULL MOON I BOARDED THE WHITE SHIP, AND WITH THE RELUCTANT BEARDED MAN LEFT THE HAPPY HARBOUR FOR UNTRAVELLED SEAS.



...THIS TIME THE OARSMEN SANG NO SOFT SONGS UNDER THE FULL MOON.



IN MY MIND I WOULD OFTEN PICTURE THE UNKNOWN LAND OF CATHURIA WITH ITS SPLENDID GROVES AND PALACES...



AND THE FLOOR OF THE PALACE IS OF GLASS, UNDER WHICH FLOW THE CUNNINGLY LIGHTED WATERS OF THE NARG...



...SONA-NYL IS KNOWN OF MEN, WHILE NONE HATH EVER BEHELD CATHURIA.



AND ON THE THIRTY-FIRST DAY THAT WE FOLLOWED THE BIRD, WE BEHELD THE BASALT PILLARS OF THE WEST.



...I FANCIED THERE CAME THE NOTES OF SINGER AND LUTANIST...SOUNDING MINE OWN PRAISES...



...THE WHITE SHIP SAILED INTO THE MIST BETWIXT THE BASALT PILLARS OF THE WEST.



...NOT THE LAND OF CATHURIA, BUT A SWIFT-RUSHING RESISTLESS SEA...



...A MONSTROUS CATARACT, WHEREIN THE OCEANS OF THE WORLD DROP DOWN TO ABYSMAL NOTHINGNESS.



THE GODS ARE GREATER THAN MEN, AND THEY HAVE CONQUERED.



...I OPENED MY EYES AND BEHELD MYSELF UPON THE PLATFORM OF THAT LIGHTHOUSE FROM WHENCE I HAD SAILED SO MANY AEONS AGO.



...THE LIGHT HAD FAILED FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE MY GRANDFATHER HAD ASSUMED ITS CARE.



...A CALENDAR WHICH STILL REMAINED AS WHEN I HAD LEFT IT AT THE HOUR I SAILED AWAY.



...A STRANGE DEAD BIRD WHOSE HUE WAS AS OF THE AZURE SKY, AND A SINGLE SHATTERED SPAR...



AND THEREAFTER THE OCEAN TOLD ME ITS SECRETS NO MORE; AND THOUGH MANY TIMES SINCE HAS THE MOON SHONE FULL AND HIGH IN THE HEAVENS, THE WHITE SHIP FROM THE SOUTH CAME NEVER AGAIN.

