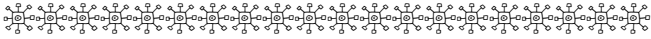




The Adventures
of Rupert Starbright

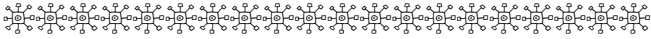
The Door to Far-Myst

MIKE DICERTO



*Imagination is the station
Where the train of life begins,
It's the ocean where the notion
Of a talking fish can swim,
It's this and that, and that and this,
Not exactly what it seems,
It's that place inside your mind
Where you can manufacture dreams!*





The Adventures of
Rupert Starbright
Book 1

THE DOOR TO FAR-MYST



Mike DiCerto



This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons or events is purely coincidental.

THE DOOR TO FAR-MYST

© 2011 by Michael DiCerto

ISBN 978-1-936144-68-6

Cover art © Brad W. Foster

Cover design © Chris Cartwright

All rights reserved. Except for use in review, the reproduction or utilization of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means now known or hereafter invented, is prohibited without the written permission of the author or publisher.

“Zumaya Thresholds” and the dodo colophon are trademarks of Zumaya Publications LLC, Austin TX.

Look for us online at
<http://www.zumayapublications.com>

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

DiCerto, Michael, 1965-

The door to Far-Myst / Michael DiCerto.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-1-936144-86-0 (trade pbk. : alk. paper) -- ISBN 978-1-936144-98-3 (electronic/multiple format) -- ISBN 978-1-61271-031-0 (electronic/epub)

I. Title.

PZ7.D546Do 2011

[Fic]--dc23

2011022905

For Valentina, Jillian and William

Three sparkling little humans who call me “Crazy Uncle Mike.” I hope this book helps to inspire them to not seek the easy paths but the paths of wonder.

Imagination
is more important than
knowledge.

– Albert Einstein

Chapter 1

A Grand Bagoon

A great gust of chilly wind greeted Rupert as he stepped from his house and onto the walk. The crunch under his feet told of a heavy nighttime fall of leaves.

His gray-and-white rake perched on his shoulder, he stepped to the curb and glanced up and down The Curving Road. Other children were already up and raking. Rupert hated raking leaves, but it was of great importance to the adults of Graysland.

He let his head fall back to enjoy the cool breeze that scampered across his street. That's when he saw the strange object in the sky. It was like a giant leaf bag filled with air, but had none of the dull, faded colors his eyes were used to. These colors seemed to be alive, pulsing like fire. They made him squint.

The object drifted high above the trees, a few blackbirds nosily flying around it for a look. It moved west and sank slowly, and he saw a swirling pattern on its round surface made up of a mixture of unknown shades.

Some of the colors seemed hot, while others appeared as cold as the coldest winter day. Some of them screamed out like a grumpy baby while others seemed to sing with a wonderful feeling of peace. A few reminded Rupert of the way certain fruits tasted.

He dropped his rake and stepped out into the middle of The Curving Road, his eyes never leaving the thing. It was a monster – as large as two houses.

“Squeem! Look at this!”

Squeem, his best friend, was a short, somewhat flabby boy with hair the exact same shade as a winter sky. He looked up from his raking.

“What’s the matter, Rupert? You lose a leaf in a gust?”

A scream turned Rupert’s head. His mother stood in the doorway of their house with her mouth open so wide one of the nosy blackbirds could have flown in and nested quite comfortably.

“Rupert! Get inside at once! Don’t look at that!” Olga screamed.

Rupert wasn’t scared by her warnings. He was too busy looking at the amazing sight.

Squeem, rake still in hand, stepped up beside him and gazed where Rupert was looking. His mouth fell open even wider than Olga’s.

“Wow.”

More screams filled the air on the normally quiet street as more parents emerged from their homes to

see what the fuss was about. They watched in fear as the floating thing shifted direction and headed south, up and over the nearby hillside.

Rupert's heart pounded, and a strange feeling filled his body. He was fascinated by this object. He had to see it up close.

His rake clanged on the asphalt as he let it fall. He took off down the road faster than he had ever run before. Squeem's rake clanged, too, and he followed. The adults on The Curving Road screamed some more, but not one of them chased after the two daring boys.

All over town, as the balloon passed, rakes went clanging onto the streets and sidewalks as children ran. Parents screamed in horror. For the first time ever in Graysland, many, many rakes lay unattended and many leaves were left to blow in the breeze.



There were nothing but open fields of dirt and prickly shrubs on No Homes Avenue. Three dozen or so kids had gathered, many of them still out of breath from chasing the floating thing.

Hanging from the great air-filled ball was a basket made of thick braided wicker, which Rupert could see as the balloon came to rest in a field full of old paving stones and weeds. In the basket stood a man with a beard that hung down to his waist, its color another Rupert had never seen before. And his clothes—well, they were a spectacle all by themselves.

His clothes fluttered in the slightest breeze like a flock of birds. From the toes of his striped boots to the top of his tassel-covered stove-pipe hat, he was

ablaze in colors that had never existed in Rupert's world.

The bearded man unlatched a door on the basket and stepped out, waving and beaming a smile.

"I greet you, children of Graysland! My name is Pie O'Sky, and this is my Grand Bagoon!" the bearded man said in a voice filled with a sparkly sound very different from the bland drone of all the adults Rupert knew. His voice was like water flowing over rocks in a stream. Or like the wind through trees that had all their leaves. The man's voice seemed to have more than just a sound. It had a taste, a feel and a smell.

"Who among you has the greatest imagination?"

Like falling dominoes, expressions of utter confusion fell over the faces of the gathered kids. Hulis Brugla, a tall, skinny lad with large teeth, stepped forward.

"What is imaja dination? Is it a new kind of rake?"

"Imaja dination? Rake?" Pie O'Sky repeated with a smile. "The word is *imagination*, and the one of you with the greatest shall take a wondrous trip!"

A chorus of confusion filled the air. Pie O'Sky stroked his long beard and looked at their baffled expressions. He smiled wider and held up his hands.

"What is imagination, you ask? Well, gather around, my kiddies, and let me explain."

The children formed an imperfect circle, and the bearded man with the odd clothes made his way to the center. He cleared his throat, produced a shiny pitch pipe and blew a note. There were gasps, chuckles and sounds of surprise. He then began to sing.

Imagination is the station
Where the train of life begins,
It's the ocean where the notion
Of a talking fish can swim,
It's this and that, and that and this,
Not exactly what it seems,
It's that place inside your mind
Where you can manufacture dreams!

"Well, that's not boring," Rupert said with a wide-eyed smile. Pie O'Sky winked at him and continued the song.

Do you want to roam the sky
Like a flying pumpkin pie?
Or swim in streams of butter cream
As a yellow dragonfly?
Would it be odd to be a frog
Who travels out in space?
Or to share a cookie with a clock
With gumdrops on its face?

The kids just stared, stunned into silence. Pie O'Sky seemed disappointed that there was no applause but smiled wider and continued with his song.

I can take you to a place
Where there's no such hue as gray!
Elephants are blue and gold,
If you prefer your 'phants that way!
It's a place where "It can't be"
Is something never said.
It's a place where all the colors
Start inside your head!

"Where is this place?" Vena Krug wondered.

"Far-Myst!" Pie O'Sky said, folding his arms.

"Far-Myst?" repeated a number of voices.

"Far-Myst!" confirmed the bearded man. "Far-Myst has imagination dripping off the trees like sweet sap. It flows in great rivers and coats everything as far as the eye can see like a fresh snowfall. There is so much imagination you have to kick it out of your path when you walk down the street!"

"Like leaves?" Squeem wondered.

"Like ultra-berry, super-merry, color-blasting, ever-lasting wild and wily leaves!"

"Do you have to rake it twice a day?" Vena asked with a frown of disappointment.

"No. There are no rakes in Far-Myst. Unless, of course, you imagine one," Pie O'Sky said. "I would like to invite the one of you with the best imagination to come with me to Far-Myst as my special guest."

Hushed tones of excitement and utter fear washed over the children of Graysland.

"But we don't have imagination!" someone shouted.

"Our parents would never let us!"

"I still don't know what imagination is!" cried someone else.

"How can we know who has the best something if we don't even know where to find such a something?" Squeem wondered aloud.

"Excellent question," Pie O'Sky said, patting Squeem on the head. "I will put you to the test."

He stepped up to the bagoon's basket and took from it a wooden door in a frame. It was like most of the doors in Graysland, although it was painted

bright red and had shiny golden hinges and a large, polished gold knob and plate around its keyhole. He set it down before his audience and gestured dramatically.

"This, my imaginationless young'uns, is a door."

Vena rolled her eyes. "We can see that."

"Oh, can you? But can you see a way to open this door? I do not have the key. It will be up to you to come up with a suitable replacement."

"Why bother?" Rupert said, folding his arms. "All you have to do is walk around it."

"Well, you can if you're a boring, pumpkin-faced banana! On the other hand, going around the door will simple take you to the other side of the door," Pie O'Sky said, demonstrating. "It will not take you to Far-Myst. One must step *beyond* this door, not just through it."

"Why can't you just take us there in your balloon?"

"That's *bagoon*. Because, my wise-nosed friend, this is my test. I will give you two days. Two days to imagine. Two days to create a clever solution. Two days to dream up a way to open this door and visit Far-Myst."

All these curious words bounded around their confused little minds: *create, clever, dream, imagine, Far-Myst*.

Their thoughts were rudely interrupted by a screeching, frightened voice.

"Vena Krug, you get home right this minute!"

All faces turned to a bony-faced woman. Velkra Klug stood amid a pack of parents. Some held

rakes. Others waved fists and scowled angrily. All of them were wide-eyed and scared.

Vena rushed to her mother, bubbling over with excitement.

"Mom! If I can find an imagination I can go to Far-Myst with Pie O'Sky!"

"Home! Right now!"

Velkra grabbed Vena by the wrist and dragged her off down the road. Other parents sought out their own as the kids moaned and protested.

Pie O'Sky stood back and smiled at the show. He picked up the door-in-the-frame and strolled back to the basket on his bagoon and stepped aboard.

"In two days, kiddies, I will return. Two days! When the fat-faced moon is overhead. Dream away! Dream away!"

The Grand Bagoon gently lifted off the ground.

Rupert never moved as the wondrous spectacle rose ever higher until it vanished into a gathering fog.

Chapter 2

The "I" Word

"Not in a million years, Mr. Rupert Dullz. Not even in five million."

Rupert's father waved his fist in the air to help make his point. Rupert, sitting on the edge of his bed, rested his chin in his palms like an egg in a cup.

"But, Dad, no one from Graysland has been to Far-Myst."

"Nor have any of us been to the underside of a compost heap. I will not have a son of mine associate with horrid demons who fall from the sky like poison rain."

"Pie O'Sky isn't poison rain!"

Polgus Dullz smiled briefly then sat beside Rupert and rested one of his doughy hands on his son's shoulder.

"Rupert, this creature—his strange balloon. All of those terrible shades. It is all very unnatural!"

"Where Pie O'Sky comes from its all color. Colors and imagination. And it's a *bagoon*, Dad, not a balloon."

"Bagoon, balloon, fashnoon," Polgus sneered. "Imagination? What good can something be if we have never heard of it before?"

Rupert's face lit up, and he jumped to his feet.

"It can make pies fly and frogs go into outer space."

"And what good would that do? Frogs in space? And as for pies, I prefer mine sliced and sitting on my plate like pies are suppose to do."

"It can do more. Imagination can do anything."

"Anything is a *dangerous* thing, boy. I've sold many a coffin for folks who toyed with *anything*."

"It's not dangerous. All I need to do is figure out how to open the door. I have two days."

Polgus stood up and wobbled. He always got dizzy when he stood up too fast.

"You have two days to get some sense back in your head. I catch you within two miles of that balloon, and your backside will become a few new shades."

Polgus huffed and puffed and wiped a quart of sweat from his forehead with his shirtsleeve then stormed out of the room. Rupert plopped back down on the bed and stared at the door. His forehead was wrinkled like corduroy pants.

"It's a bagoon!" he repeated.

He fell back onto his bed and stared at the ceiling. *A door with a lock, but a lock with no key.* Where can the key be? Rupert pondered the puzzle until he had to rub his temples with his palms to keep his brain from exploding.

A terrible coughing noise interrupted his thoughts. His grandmother Folka was having another fit of the coffus. Rupert got up and paced. He hated to hear her cough. He placed his ear against the wall and listened as she hacked and hocked and coughed some more. He frowned and left his room.

"Grandma?" he whispered as he tapped gingerly on her door. "Are you okay?"

A soft, tired voice fought against the coughing.

"Come in, Rupert."

He entered as quietly as the creaky hinges would allow. The bed was empty. His grandmother sat in an old creaky rocker, and the slight breeze that squeezed through the poor excuse for a window made the top of her hair dance.

She was a hefty woman, short and squat. With her gray blanket drawn around her, she looked like a baked potato, her snow-white mop of hair a dollop of sour cream. Her face was like the road map of a busy city, with a great collection of lines and wrinkles surrounding her warm eyes and a smile that was at once happy and sad.

She turned to him and cleared her chest with a few more hacking coughs before she managed to say "Hello, Rupert."

"Do you want some dripsludge? Maybe it would help," Rupert offered, picking up the large glass bottle of horrible gook.

"Oh, I think I have had enough dripsludge in my life. Thanks for thinking of me, though."

Rupert offered her a poor excuse for a smile and stepped closer.

"What's the matter?" she asked him. "You lose your real smile on the way in here?"

He shrugged and wasn't sure what to say. Folka extended her withered hand and placed it gently atop his.

"What's wrong? My ears may be old, but they can still hear an angry father, even through solid brick."

"Have you ever been to Far-Myst?"

"I never heard of such a place."

"It's a place that has a lot of imagination."

Folka mouthed the strange word a couple of times before giving way to another coughing fit. Rupert stood by, feeling uncomfortable, and after a moment, she cleared her throat with a wet, gurgling sound. She looked up to him.

"Imagination?" she repeated, as if trying to recall the word like a long-forgotten face in a crowd.

"It's something that can make weird things happen. Funny things. Like turn the ocean into butter cream or stick gum on a clock's face and stuff."

"Well, that is odd." Her smile twisted and widened, and she got lost in her memories for a moment. Then she smiled again. "Imagination. Yes..."

She closed her eyes to gather the old memories.

"When I was a young girl, I spent the summer with my auntie and uncle who lived in the southern hills of Graysland. It was time for the noon raking. I was looking around the basement for a leaf bag when I came across a strange book

"It was not a schoolbook or a book of telephone numbers or a catalog of leaf-collecting accessories. It was what my auntie Broga called a *storybook*, and she got very upset when I showed it to her."

"A storybook?" Rupert wondered.

"She said it was written by the mysterious old man who had lived in the house before them. He had a peculiar name – Mookie Starbright."

"That's definitely not a boring name like Rupert Dullz," Rupert decided.

"She had found many of the storybooks hidden in closets and under floorboards. She said they were dangerous and had to be burned."

"Wow."

"My uncle Nobby took me aside that night and said these storybooks were written just because."

"Just because why?" Rupert didn't understand.

"Just because just because. Mookie Starbright created stories about things that had never really happened."

"If imagination could make fish fly or launch frogs into space, I bet it can easily make just-because stories about stuff that never happened," Rupert said with growing excitement.

"Maybe it could, indeed. Anyway, they insisted there would be no more talk about such nonsense as stories and storybooks and old Mookie Starbright. And especially, there would be no talk of *imagination*."

"Maybe imagination could even open a locked door without a key," Rupert said as a real smile found his mouth. "And maybe...maybe it could even help you with –"

Folka began coughing again. Rupert decided not to finish his sentence. Instead, he wished his grandmother goodnight and left the room.



Rupert tossed and turned all night. His mind raced as fast as he and Squeem had run chasing down the Grand Bagoon of Pie O'Sky.

He thought about the strange old man with the coolest name he had ever heard—Mookie Starbright. Just like old Mookie, he would think of a way to use imagination. And if he did open the door, if he did go to the colorful world of Far-Myst, certainly he would find a way to cure his grandmother of the coffus!



Pie O'Sky and his special door to Far-Myst was all the buzz around Rupert's neighborhood, and an even bigger sensation at school the next day. All the kids gathered to discuss the puzzle where their worried parents couldn't hear.

Mrs. Drumpsitter forbade her fifth-grade class to even mention such things as weirdly colored balloons, oddly dressed strangers who descended from the sky and, especially, the I-word. No one was to even spell I-M-A-G-I-N-A-T-I-O-N, let alone discuss such nonsense. They were to focus their minds on the subject at hand—the history of storage cabinets.

Mrs. Drumpsitter was busy scribbling important dates on the blackboard. Hiding behind the squeaks of the chalk were whispers around the classroom. Notes were passed. Sketches drawn. The minds of Rupert and his classmates were busier than they had been in a long time.

A secret meeting was set. The kids would gather and compare ideas. Compare plans each had concocted to open Pie O'Sky's door.



Huge mountains of leaves sat like giant bison on the open lots of the East Graysland Leaf Processing Plant. These leaf piles would have been the envy of any kid who had ever dived, jumped and wrestled in piles of fallen foliage. They were a hundred feet high and covered with thin netting to protect them from the wind.

They awaited being placed in the great fire chambers—deeply buried pits where all the leaves gathered from all over Graysland were burned in never-ending fires that created steam that powered lights and heated homes.

Rupert, Squeem Bissel, Hulis Brugla, Vena Krug and ten or so others stood outside the main fence that caged the leaf piles. They huddled in the chilly air. The sun was just a dim light beneath the haze of clouds and smoke from the burning leaves that billowed from the tops of great smokestacks like giant cigars.

“It’s easy,” Hulis said with perfect confidence. “All we need is a huge log. Do like they used to do to the castle walls in olden times. We just bust right through it!”

A noisy mixture of moans and shouts of approval erupted. Tweekus Borm, an axe-faced boy with greasy hair who lived on The Easy Road, the richest street in all of Graysland, stepped up.

“My father is the number-one keymaker in all of Graysland. He has a trunk in our attic with a million hundred keys. One of them will open this door. Did you notice the keyhole? It was a primitive model. Probably a standard SK-one hundred.”

Again, more moans and shouts.

Through it all, Rupert said nothing. As ideas were tossed about, none seemed to have the imagination Pie O'Sky had sung about. Even though he was still rather unsure what that word meant, he could feel it in his bones—none of the solutions seemed right.

"There's no way my mother's gonna let me out at night to go see that bagoon," Vena said with a scowl.

"Me, neither," Squeem agreed.

There were more shouts and moans. All the shouting and moaning were making Rupert's ears throb. He cleared his throat and stepped forward.

"You're all eating a lot of air and giving me a headache. Pie O'Sky said to meet him in two days, when the moon was overhead. That's what I'm going to do. Anyone who wants to join me, meet me on the corner of The Curving and Bee Line. Tonight. When the moon is overhead. Bring a jacket, a flash-lamp and a way to open that door. And be quiet when you're sneaking out. We don't need a bunch of nosy parents making a mess of things."

With that, he marched home as more moans and shouts erupted.



It was ten minutes past nine, and the moon was climbing the sky slowly but surely, the way moons like to do. In his bed, Rupert lay on his back, his hands clasped behind his head. He knew that when the moon peeked in through his tiny window it would be time to leave.

Beside him sat a collection of items he was positive he would need once he had successfully entered the Land of Far-Myst—a flash-lamp, a candle,

a woolen hat, gloves, a package of stone-flour crackers, a half-empty jar of pickle-berry butter, a hunk of stinkcheese, two almost rotten pears, a lump of sugar that had hardened in the bottom of the sugar bowl, a roll of toilet paper, a change of underwear, a facecloth, a stick, a rock, a package of matches and a photo of him with his grandma. All of these items were wrapped inside his jacket, the sleeves tied together to form a handle.

There was, however, one thing missing—a key to open Pie O'Sky's door. Rupert closed his eyes and sang some of the silly words he had heard standing beside the grand bagoon.

Do you want to roam the sky/like a flying pumpkin pie? He had never even tasted a pumpkin pie much less seen a flying one. He had tasted a *brickberry* pie once and recalled it tasted like moldy dirt rags.

It *had* been a rather large pie, and Rupert figured if it had been bigger he could have sat atop it. But what could possibly make it fly?

It could be picked up by a bunch of strong folks and thrown into the air. Maybe a really strong wind could pick it up.

Watching the Great Bagoon drift down from the sky, he had wondered what his world looked like from so far up. Dashing around the clouds in a flying pumpkin pie would be fun! He could see himself cruising at rooftop level down Fairly Straight Road where Mrs. Drumpsitter lived and scaring the gray out of her hair.

Hmmm, he thought, I can see myself cruising at rooftop level...

It was odd, but for a flash of a second he had actually seen in his mind what Fairly Straight Road looked like from high in the air.

How could that be? He had never climbed a phone pole and peered across that street. He had never once stepped onto any of the gray rooftops on Fairly Straight Road and enjoyed the view. And Rupert Dullz was positive he had never taken a seat behind the wheel of a giant flying pumpkin pie and zoomed around Graysland.

So, where had that picture in his mind come from?

If he could see in his mind a place he had never been, then maybe he could also see in his mind a key he had never held. What sort of key could open a door like Pie O'Sky's?

Most of the keys he had seen were made of a silvery metal and pretty much shaped in a typical key shape. He wondered if maybe a key to a place like Far-Myst would have some of the peculiar shades he had seen on Pie O'Sky's bagoon.

What of its shape? It seemed to him likely that nothing in Far-Myst was like anything in Graysland. Would be shaped like a pumpkin? Or a frog? Or maybe a fish?

Yes! A fish with metal scales that weren't silver but rather that bright, happy color he had seen on the rings Pie O'Sky wore on his fingers.

Who knows? Rupert thought. *Maybe the key has a fish shape and can fly.* It seemed everything in Far-Myst could fly. Maybe the fish-key could talk, too. Maybe it could fly up to the door and ask the lock to please open...

Rupert found himself smiling at such silly notions. Then, he began to wonder why they were silly. Surely, if a key did exist for such an untypical door to such an untypical place it would need to be just as untypical. A key that looked like a metal fish of a strange shade that could fly and talk was, in Rupert's mind, very untypical.

He doubted that annoying Tweekus Borm, even with his dumb trunk of a billion keys, had one like that. He doubted anyone would have a key like the one he'd thought of.

A key that he'd thought of! Had he just used his imagination?

How could that be? I don't even have one.

Rupert opened his eyes and saw that his window was glowing with moonlight. With great excitement, he gathered up his bundle and got out of bed and crept out of his room.

TITLE: *[The Door to Far-Myst](#)*

SERIES: The Adventures of Rupert Starbright

VOLUME: 1

AUTHOR: Mike DiCerto

GENRE: Juvenile Fiction/Fantasy

PUBLISHER: Zumaya Thresholds

RELEASE DATE: August 2011

ISBN: Paperback: 9781936144686; ebook:
9781936144983 (multi-format), 9781612710310
(epub)

FORMAT: Trade paperback, perfect bound; \$12.99;
192 pp.; 5x8; ebook, \$6.99

Reviewers: publicity@zumayapublications.com