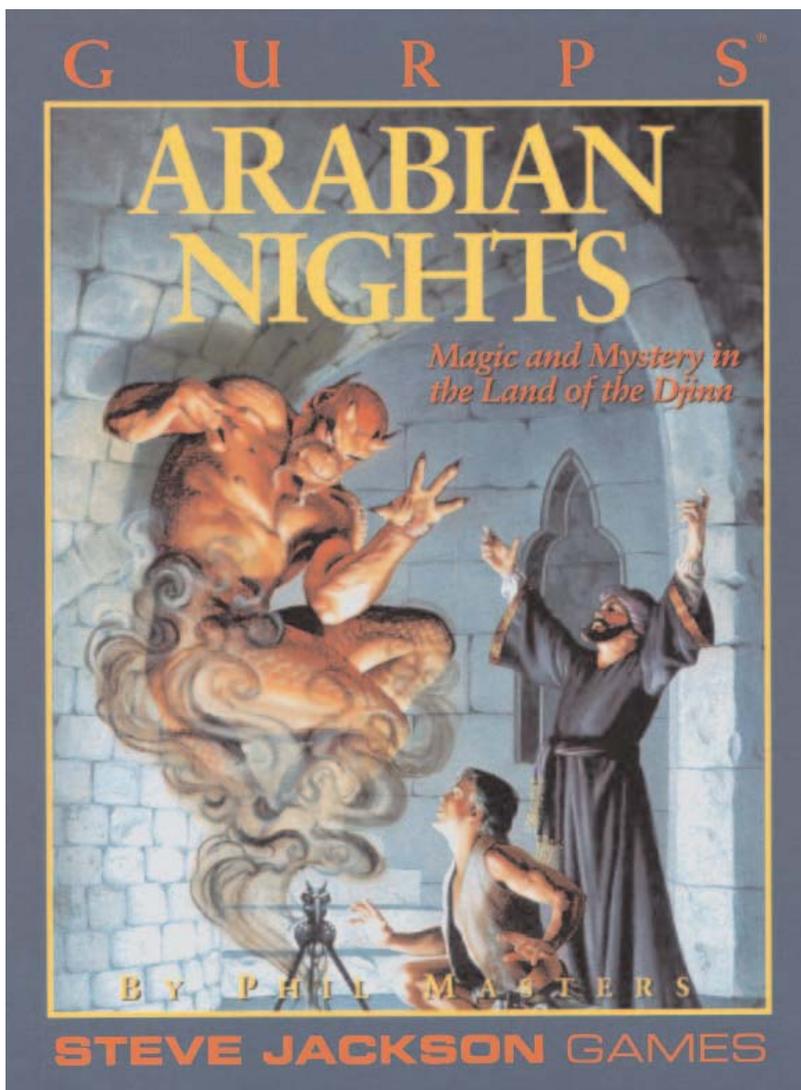


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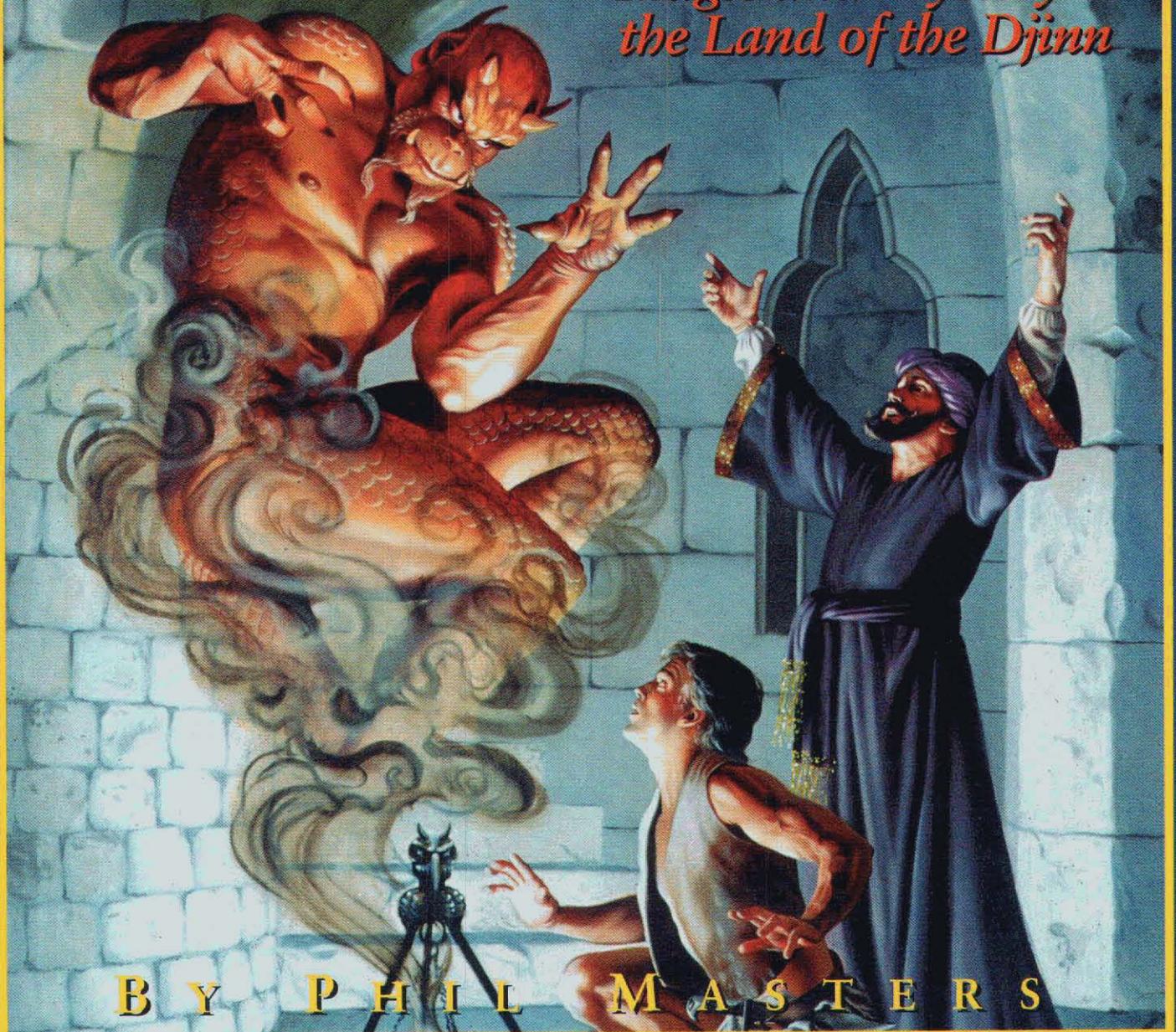


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ARABIAN NIGHTS

*Magic and Mystery in
the Land of the Djinn*



BY PHIL MASTERS

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

GURPS

ARABIAN NIGHTS

Magic and Mystery in the Land of the Djinn

By Phil Masters

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detailed comments.



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STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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INTRODUCTION

In the black, star-filled desert skies, a flying carpet is silhouetted against the moon. Beneath the waves, a djinni waits in a bottle for a mortal to release it and suffer the inevitable consequences. Far across the sea, a sailor stares in awe at an egg as big as the domes of the great mosques of Baghdad.

This book is about stories, and history. In the Middle East, a conquering religion, Islam, absorbed ancient empires. The result was a sophisticated culture, a center of trade and a target for more conquerors. All this brought together many tales, which writers and poets in other lands took up. The result is a vast tangle of fantasy and truth.

Roleplaying games have used both, but especially the fantasy; very few games have gone back to the source of what they portray, which is a pity. Part of the problem is that the myth-making has confused many facts. But that's not surprising; it's a great, rich myth, and no one can hope not to be a little seduced by it. The definitive word, appropriately, belongs to a poet:

*'Tis all a Chequer-board of Nights and Days
Where Destiny with Men for Pieces plays:
Hither and thither moves, and mates, and slays,
And one by one back in the Closet lays.*

Language and Spelling

The Arabic language has its own alphabet and style of writing (running from right to left, incidentally), which is nowadays used for other languages as well (such as Swahili). Unfortunately, there has never been an "official" system of transcription from Arabic into Latin letters. Early European writers used *ad hoc* conversions, which have today been replaced by more accurate systems, but not before a number of "mistakes" became very widespread.

This book has compromised. I have attempted to use the most up-to-date Latinizations that I could find, except for a number that are simply too familiar in older forms. So I mix references to *qat* and *ghuls* ("kat" and "ghouls") with "anachronisms" such as *Scheherazade*, *Saladin*, *Koran*, and *Mohammed* (which "ought" to be "Shahrazad," "Salah-al-Din," "Qu'ran" and "Muhammad"). This should be easiest for the non-specialist; I apologize to any purists reading this, but they already know better. A glossary appears in the back.

Calendars and Dates

Islam uses a lunar calendar (see p. 8). However, for the convenience of Western readers, this book uses the solar, Christian-Era calendar.

— Phil Masters

About the Author

Phil Masters is an incidental by-product of the English educational and class systems. Born in 1959, he studied Economics at Cambridge University and random trivia in various locations. He has contributed pieces to several games magazines, such as *White Dwarf* (when it was a magazine). His first major work was *Kingdom of Champions*, for Hero Games, followed by a third of Hero's *Champions Presents*.

Phil currently works as a freelance programmer (when necessary) and writer (when possible). He is married, and lives in a small town which was founded by the Knights Templar and named after Baghdad.

About GURPS

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of the *GURPS* system. Our address is SJ Games, Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) any time you write us! Resources now available include:

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Page References

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the *GURPS Basic Set*, Third Edition. Any page reference that begins with a B refers to a page in the *Basic Set* — e.g., p. B102 means p. 102 of the *Basic Set*, Third Edition. Page references beginning with M refer to *GURPS Magic*. Page references beginning with MID refer to *GURPS Middle Ages 1*.



Introduction

SCHEHERAZADE'S WORLD

1



This book is about a culture, an idea – a myth. This myth has a defining text, known as the *Thousand and One Nights*, the *Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, or just the *Arabian Nights*. This has shaped the ideas of generations of Westerners concerning the “mystic East,” and yet ideas associated with it are often a distortion of the original. Then again, the original distorts both reality and older tales. This chapter is about the world from which the stories came.

The culture is that of the Islamic Middle East, from shortly after the death of Mohammed (632 A.D.) through the 13th century. Many changes occurred in the Islamic world during that time; but much also remained the same. Islam, a religion with strong ideas on how society should be run, acted as a stabilizing factor. Islam is not as wrapped up in its own past as is China, but much about the Islamic world is consistent. Even the suicide bombers and terrorists of modern Beirut have their predecessors in the Khawarij of the 8th century and the Assassins of the 12th – and all are equally unlike most ordinary Muslims.

It is perfectly possible to run campaigns set outside this period, and much that is said in this chapter applies to them. However, more ancient settings have many differences; the lack of the laws and assumptions of Islam underlies most of them. Similarly, the modern Islamic world is a complex place, frequently in ferment as tradition, foreign ideas, and oil wealth combine and clash. GMs who wish to use such backgrounds should be prepared to do more research.

A Thousand Nights and One Night

The *Thousand and One Nights* is a collection of stories bound together by a “framework story.” The idea of a “framework” is one of the most interesting things about it; it is a literary trick that has been used thousands of times since (and a few times before) but the *Nights* is a classic example.

The framework is well-known. King Shahriyar invites his brother, King Shahzaman, to visit. Shahzaman sets out, then returns to his palace for some forgotten luggage. There he discovers his wife in bed with a slave, and kills the pair. He then travels to Shahriyar’s court, where he subsequently discovers that his brother’s wife is also unfaithful, and tells his brother the facts. The pair leave to travel the world to discover if they are uniquely unlucky, only to encounter a great djinni carrying a human woman. They hide, but the woman sees them, and demands that they have sex with her or she will turn the djinni on them. Concluding that all women are thus, they return home.

Shahriyar decides that the only way to save himself from betrayal is to take a virgin bride every night – and put her to death on the following morning. This continues for three years. Then Scheherazade, the vizier’s daughter, comes up with a plan. She marries the king herself, and on their wedding night, asks that her sister Dunyazade be allowed to keep her company before her execution. The king agrees, and Dunyazade, primed by her sister, asks Scheherazade to tell her a story. Scheherazade does so – but carefully leaves the tale unfinished. The king, wanting to know what happens next, keeps her alive for another night, when she repeats the trick – and so it goes on, for a thousand and one nights, in which time Scheherazade bears three sons. Finally Shahriyar gives up his bride-killing, marries Dunyazade to Shahzaman, and they all live happily ever after.

The tales include such well-known stories as “Aladdin,” the voyages of Sinbad the Sailor, “The Fisherman and the Djinni,” and others, ranging from tangled epics to one-page jokes. This vast collection came from the popular culture of the East. The framework has been traced back into Indian folklore; it appeared in a now-lost Persian book called “A Thousand Legends,” translated into Arabic around the ninth century. However, the stories within the framework must have changed and evolved over the centuries. The “modern” list seems to have been settled in the 18th century. The stories are frequently nested, one within

Scheherazade

A campaign set in the “true” *Arabian Nights* world might involve an encounter with the original tales’ ultimate heroine. She is a talented woman; apart from her beauty, virtue, and skill with stories, she has a broad education in the philosophy and “general knowledge” of her age. The following describes her after her marriage and full acceptance by the Sultan; she will be over 20 by then, and fits whatever physical description is given to attractive women in her nation. (This will usually involve dark hair and eyes, and probably a shapely figure.)

ST 8, DX 11, IQ 15, HT 11.

Speed 5.5, Move 5.

Dodge 5.

Advantages: Allies (Father is vizier, sister is another queen), Beautiful, Literacy, Patron (The sultan), Reputation (+3 among citizens of her home country – saved them from the sultan’s madness), Status 6, Wealth (Very Wealthy), Voice.

Disadvantages: Basic Arabian Code of Honor, Dependents (Three young sons), Sense of Duty (To fellow-citizens), Social Stigma (“Valuable Property” – half value due to high regard from most people around her).

Quirks: Collects stories; Good Muslim; True fatalist (Strikingly calm in dangerous situations, always acknowledges power of fate).

Skills (bonuses from Voice included): Acting-14, Bard-20, Dancing-12, Diplomacy-16, History-15, Literature-18, Philosophy-14, Poetry-14, Psychology-16, Savoir-Faire-15, Singing-12, Writing-14.

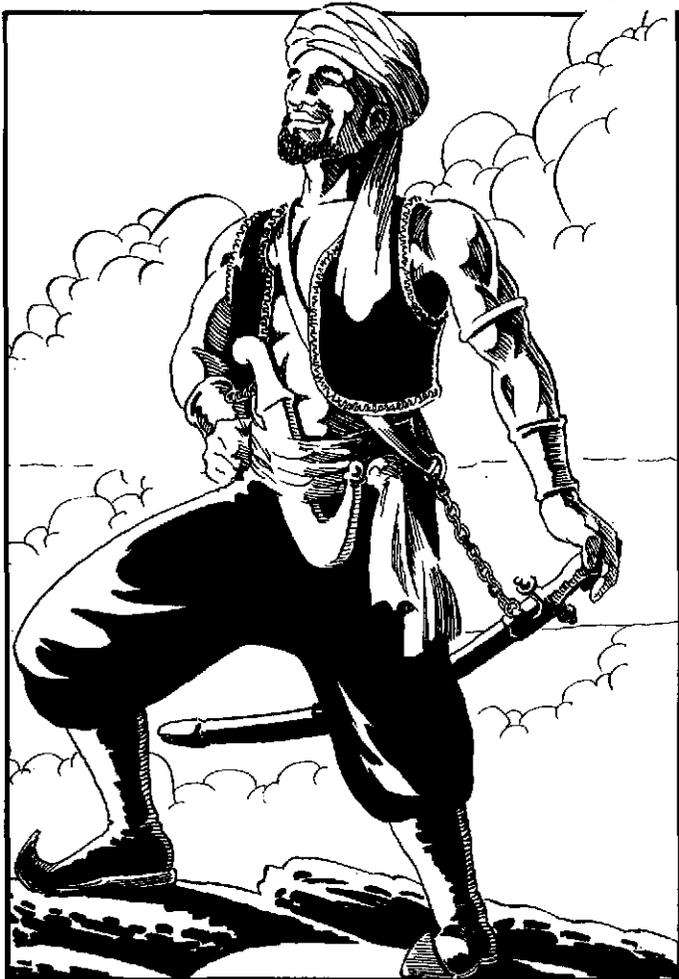


Storytelling

The telling of tales is a classic form of Middle Eastern entertainment. Professional storytellers – *rawis* – could make careers of it; talented amateurs were respected, and would demonstrate their skills whenever a few friends had time to spare. Preachers and theologians, especially Sufis, used parables. The stories in the *Thousand and One Nights* come from all over the East, but have been adapted to suit the audience. All this is separate from the “highbrow” literary tradition of the area.

The only opposition came from parts of Islam itself. As devotees of a religion with a deep contempt for falsehood, some imams and scholars condemned the telling of tales as “lying” and a distraction from serious concerns.

Part of the answer to this was to ensure that most stories had some moral or didactic point (“The annals of former generations are lessons to the living”). However, the simplest response was to attach a general disclaimer to a story. Many tales begin with some phrase such as “*It is said – but Allah alone knows the truth – that such-and-such a person once lived . . .*” In other words, no human being can know absolute truth, but this story *might* be true. (Given the confusions of geography and period in the *Nights*, the disclaimer can seem very appropriate.)



another within another, as characters tell stories to distract others, to illustrate a point, or to pass the time.

One thing to notice about the stories in the *Nights* – if they have any common, unifying idea, it is the absolute power of fate in life. Virtue and holiness are not automatically rewarded; good men die, while blind chance makes a layabout like Aladdin rich. All this fits in with a powerful Arabian belief in fate; it is by reacting to that which one cannot control that one demonstrates virtue. (On the other hand, shrewdness and social skills *do* help characters in some of the stories, and a few vices – gross ingratitude or blasphemy – are always punished.)

Other Views

The problem with the *Arabian Nights* is that it has practically nothing to do with any other Muslim literature, and little to do with any myths. It’s a collection of popular, “coffee-house” stories, told to entertain a casual (male) audience. It’s as if foreigners gained their only idea of American life from a handful of airport novels, skipping not only “classic” literature, but also soap operas, romances, and detective stories. The collection does convey a lot about the culture, but there are other places to look.

The Epic of ‘Antar

The most popular myth in medieval Arabia concerned the black warrior-poet ‘Antar, who rises from slavery to greatness; it tells of love affairs, battles, duels and his love for the beautiful ‘Abla. His enemies are frequently shown insulting him for his skin color, but they are clearly seen as mean-spirited, and ‘Antar marries his Arab true love. (He also eventually learns that he is descended from African kings.) The tale is based, *extremely* loosely, on the life of the sixth-century

poet ‘Antarah ibn-Sheddad al-Absi; a courtier of Haroun al-Rashid allegedly collected it.

The Book of Kings

The Arabs had tribal heroes; the Persians had a civilization, with grand legends. In the 10th century, these were shaped into an epic poem by “Ferdowsi” (which means “the Paradisal”), who lived at the court of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni.

This *Shah-Nameh* (*Book of Kings*) is a mythological history of the world, telling of the Creation, the discovery of fire and other knowledge, and the wars between the Persians and the Turanians – the people of Central Asia. It reaches its height with Rustem, whose centuries-long life is heroic and tragic: he kills dragons and demons – and also his own son, Sorab. After him, Persia declines, until the story ends with its conquest by the Arabs. The *Shah-Nameh* is an epic for and about royalty, full of mighty kings doing mighty deeds.

Other Stories and Alternatives

‘Antar had his rivals as a tribal hero, although few achieved his status; it was the great monarchies that invoked the all-conquering names such as Rustem.

Other epic poets followed Ferdowsi; the greatest was the 12th-century Nizami (or Nezami), whose masterwork was the five-part *Khamseh*. This includes philosophy, as well as the romantic *Khosrow and Shirin* and his version of the popular love story of Layla and Majnun.

The section of the *Khamseh* involving Iskander (Alexander the Great) is a philosophical portrait, but Iskander also became the hero of more melodramatic and fantastic stories by other poets. Lesser Persian epics are little-read in the West; they usually involve heavily fictionalized stories of historical figures (such as Alexander, the Sassanid emperor Chosroes, or Mohammed's son-in-law 'Ali), fighting rivals, dragons and giants.

More recently, filmmakers, fantasy writers and historical novelists have found many possibilities in the early Islamic setting. The best results are well-researched and interesting; the worst are rip-offs, or have nothing to do with the real Arabia at all. However, careful use of modern sources can be profitable. See the *Bibliography* (pp. 126-127) for some titles.

RELIGION

Religion has been important in all civilizations, but the history of the Middle East sometimes seems to involve nothing else. Islam permeates the lives of *Arabian Nights* characters; the background needs some explanation.

Early Religions

Polytheism

The ancient Middle East worshipped many deities. Egypt had Ra, Osiris, Isis, Anubis, Horus, Set, and so on. Babylonians knew of Marduk, who defeated Tiamat, mother of monsters; of Ishtar and Bel; and of ghosts and spirits ("genii" – the winged, part-human, part-animal beings depicted in their great sculptures). They also told of demi-divine heroes, such as Gilgamesh. Some of these were also mentioned, in distorted forms, in ancient Arab myth.

The "Aryans" who conquered Persia and India worshipped other gods, some of whose names are venerated in India today: Mitra, Varuna and Indra. Mitra (as Mithras) became a god of the Persians. Another Persian deity became the supreme being of Zoroastrianism.

Mithraism

Mitra (or Mithras) was an ancient sun-god, who also governed contracts. He was popular in Persia, despite the fact that part of his core myth – his sacrifice of a bull – was anathema to the Zoroastrians for its pollution of the pure earth with blood. His birth was celebrated at the winter solstice. Mithraism was another variant of the Persian worship of purity and solar fire.

This variant survived the conquests of Alexander, and enjoyed a resurgence in the Roman Empire, where it became a faith for the legion soldiers. It was favored by emperors, but died out when Rome became officially Christian.

Zoroastrianism

Zoroastrianism was founded by Zoroaster, or Zarathustra, who lived in the 7th-6th centuries B.C. He transformed the old Persian polytheism into dualism. He said that Mazda (Ahura Mazda), who became known as Ormazd, the creator of life, was in permanent conflict with Angra Mainyu, or Ahriman, and the material world was their battleground. Other ancient gods such as Indra were demoted to demons, underlings of Ahriman; Ormazd was served by "genii" and angelic beings. Founded during the Achaemenid dynasty, Zoroastrianism later faded; it regained power, as a symbol of Persian nationalism, under the Sassanids – possibly in a rather different form.

The two great beings were totally opposed. Ormazd was light and truth;



Tech Level

The correct *GURPS* tech level for a campaign based on the Middle East between the rise of Islam and the fall of Constantinople is 3. Islamic science and technology were sophisticated, and their practitioners were often skilled, but (contrary to some simplistic claims), they were not centuries ahead of Europe. Rather, they had better access to existing ideas, and were willing to use them. They *did* achieve TL3 quite early in certain fields (such as mathematics), if only through contact with the ideas of older civilizations such as Greece and India. This has encouraged a fair degree of anachronism in modern novels and films.

As Europe moved up into TL4+, Islam lagged behind slightly, but only in some fields and by a few years. At no date could a typical Middle Eastern Muslim rate as "Primitive." On the other hand, Islam was in contact with lower-TL societies in Africa and Asia.

There are some variations in the area of weapons and armor. Little plate armor would be available; on the other hand, Muslim chemists may have had the recipe for gunpowder as early as 1280 A.D., and they certainly had cannon by 1366.

Medieval Islamic medicine did have one huge advantage over its European counterparts: it was far less brutal. *GURPS* downplays the weaknesses of early medicine for game reasons, but this difference can be emphasized, perhaps by playing European doctors as dangerous blunderers, or at least having them kill any patient they don't cure, possibly by rating them a tech level behind Islamic doctors. Given the break points on the table on p. B128, there is a good case for making Islamic medicine TL4.

Games with earlier settings will mostly be around TL2, or 1 for "dawn of civilization," Bronze-Age campaigns. Many games may actually focus on times when the Middle Eastern TL is rising noticeably.

Ahriman was darkness and lies. The priestly caste of Persia, the Magi, seem to have started out as fire-priests. The sacred flames that burned on his altars symbolized Ormazd's purity. (These flames caused Muslims to refer to Zoroastrians as "fire worshippers.") Whatever Ormazd created, Ahriman set out to corrupt; the battle against this demanded that worshippers remain truthful, and refrain from polluting the sacred fire and earth. (This in turn is why Zoroastrians deal with dead bodies by exposing them for wild animals to devour – the bodies could be neither buried nor burned.) Zoroastrianism also included prophecies of a final battle, an apocalypse when darkness would finally be driven from the universe.

Judaism and Christianity

In a small area by the Mediterranean, one confederation of tribes made a compact with a single, all-powerful god. The Jews' greatest contribution to human history was their spread of monotheism, which may owe much to Egypt's Akhenaten. Where the pharaoh's monotheism was in practice rather exclusive, however, the Jewish version included all members of the tribes.

Yahweh promised the legendary patriarch Abraham, regarded as an ancestor by Jews and Arabs alike, a land and a future for his descendants. The Old Testament is the story of Israel, the nation that came from that promise through Isaac, Abraham's son by his wife Sarah.

Christianity made a critical change to the Jewish tradition. Yahweh was the God of the Jewish people, but *anyone* could worship the Christian god. Thus, this new belief spread widely. Its message of love and hope appealed to the downtrodden, and over a few centuries, it grew from an outlaw cult to the official religion of empires.

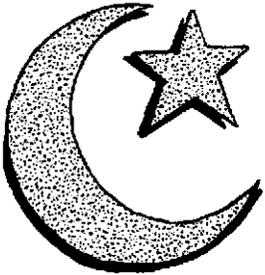
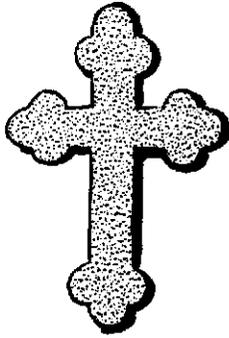
Islam

Abraham's wife, believing she was barren, convinced Abraham to have a child by her maid Hagar. (Arabs trace their descent from Ishmael, Hagar's son.) Once the child was born, however, trouble arose between the two women, and Sarah demanded that Hagar and the boy be left in the Valley of Mecca, in the heart of Arabia. As their water ran low and Hagar grew desperate, Ishmael dragged his heel and a clear spring (the well of Zamzam) broke from the ground. Nearby, Abraham and Ishmael together built the Kaaba, the "House of God," a small, square, 12-foot-high shrine of alternate layers of stone and wood. There they set the Black Stone (possibly a meteorite), said to have come from the hand of Allah. The valley became the site of a holy city, which did much trade.

By 595 A.D., however, the tribes of the area were a mix of Christians, Jews, and pagans. Many accepted the idea of a single, all-powerful God, but there was a constant pressure to dilute monotheism with lesser gods and spirits. At about that time, Mohammed, a 25-year-old trader and former camel-driver, married his employer, a rich widow named Khadijah. With his new position, he had time to ponder religious questions. Mohammed was a simple man; he may even have been illiterate. However, he was given to deep thought.

In 610 A.D., alone in a cave, Mohammed reached a conclusion; there *was* only one God, Allah, and He was all-powerful. Mohammed announced this revelation to his friends and family. They supported and encouraged him, although it was three years before he began to preach openly.

Mohammed was faced with opposition from those who benefited from the *status quo*. Some Muslims died for their beliefs, and some fled Mecca. Eventually, Mohammed himself moved to the city of Yathrib, soon to be renamed Medina (from the words for "City of the Prophet"). Despite opposition, and some setbacks in the small battles they fought, Mohammed's following grew; he was able to return to Mecca a few years before he died in 632 A.D.



The Calendar

Unlike the Western, solar, "Julian" system, the Islamic calendar is *lunar*. It is for people more concerned with navigating by the moon than with seasons. It consists of 12 months (alternately of 30 and 29 days), which start with a new moon. The months are Muharram, Safar, Rabi I, Rabi II, Jumada I, Jumada II, Rajab, Shaban, Ramadan, Shawwal, Zulkadah and Zulhijjah. In order to maintain synchronization, the 12th month, normally 29 days, is sometimes increased to 30. Obviously, this system – with years of 354 or 355 days – does not match up to the "solar" year's seasons; any given month falls at the same point in the solar year once every 32.5 (solar) years. (Muslims, however, divide time into 30-year cycles.)

Islamic years are counted from the "Hegira" (or "Hijra") – Mohammed's flight from Mecca, in 622 A.D. Thus, for example, the Islamic year 857 A.H. ("After Hegira") works out as 1453 A.D., and 1342 A.H. is 1923 A.D.

In the 20th century (A.D.), many Muslim countries have adopted a Western-style, "solar/A.D." calendar, at least officially, although Islamic dates may still be used in parallel or for religious purposes.

Public holidays include Mohammed's birthday. Shiites also celebrate Fatima's birthday, and mourn Husain, Mohammed's grandson, whose death marks the divergence of the visible course of the world from what God willed for it.

Private individuals celebrated births, circumcisions and weddings. A family also throws a party when a child memorizes the entire Koran; both student and teacher receive gifts.

Islam is unusual among religions in that it is entirely "in history." Christ, Buddha, and Zoroaster all no doubt existed, but the only clear marks they made in their own lifetimes were the acts and teachings that were recorded, often after their deaths. The religion of Mohammed built a nation in his lifetime; he is a historical leader and ruler as well as a prophet and preacher. The new religion made the tribes into a unified, dynamic force. (See Chapter 4 for more on Islam as an empire.)

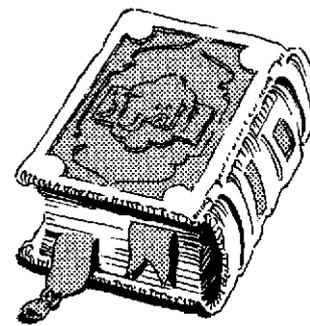
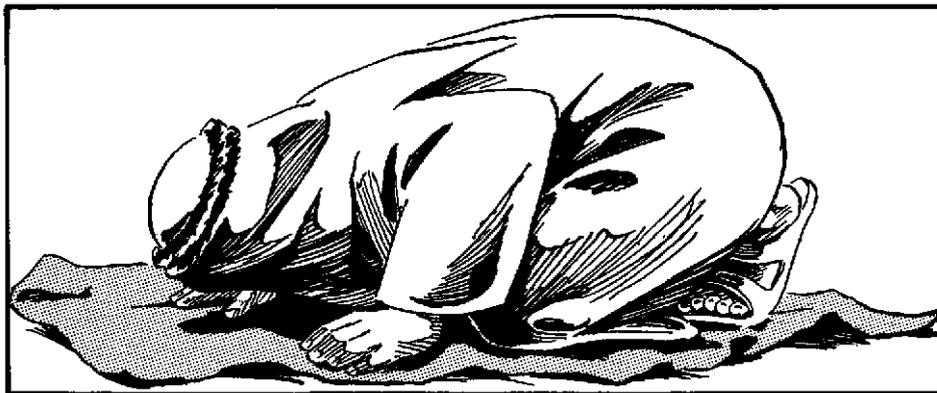
Islamic Faith

For readers used to thinking in terms of Christianity, Islam can be compared, very loosely, to the most austere forms of Protestantism. It has rules, but little hierarchy; the Muslim deals with Allah directly, not through priests and popes. Strictly speaking, Islam does not even have priests – just teachers and scholars. Only prophets relay the word of Allah directly, and Mohammed was the last prophet. (There were many previous prophets, including Noah, Abraham, and Jesus – who is considered by Muslims to have been divinely inspired but mortal.)

Teachers, or *sheikhs*, are experts in the rules of Islam. Scholars, the *Ulama*, remind the world of the Islamically correct way to behave. Semi-secular leaders include the mullahs ("lords") and the Shiite ayatollahs. The caliph – "deputy" of the Prophet – was "Commander of the Faithful" and the "Chief Imam." Indeed, to a Shiite, "caliph" and "imam" are interchangeable.

Mohammed is regarded with vast respect, but *not* worshipped; he himself always emphasized that he was mortal and fallible. The old English term "Mohammedan" for Muslims is misleading and, to Muslims, a little blasphemous. On the other hand, people find it easier to focus on a human being than on an omnipotent, absolute God. Muslim lands often have a number of "free thinkers" and atheists, and these are frequently tolerated provided that they are tactful – the atheist would be seen as wrong, but saveable. But insulting Mohammed leads to a far fiercer reaction, and possibly physical violence. It is normal for a Muslim mentioning Mohammed, by name or as "the Prophet," to follow it with the phrase "*peace be upon him.*" This attitude also emerges, for example, in the rule that Mohammed must be concealed by a halo of flame, even where artists are permitted to depict a human being.

In practice, Islam is a strikingly simple religion. It requires just five things (the "five pillars"). First, and central to all, is the *shahada*, the declaration that "there is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is his prophet." Second, there are the daily prayers (five times daily according to Sunnis, three according to Shiites). Third, a Muslim must fast from sunrise to sunset during the month of Ramadan (see p. 11). Fourth, the Muslim must give alms to the poor; early Muslim states often set a special tax, accompanied by a program of poor relief, to cover this. It later became voluntary, although modern Muslim governments have tried reintroducing it. Lastly, there is the *hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca, which every Muslim must perform once in a lifetime if possible (see p. 11).



Muslim "Heresies"

The Khawarij

When 'Ali was pressing his claim to the caliphate, he eventually accepted the suggestion of arbitration. Some, however, felt that this was an immoral compromise; "judgment," they said, "belongs to Allah alone." These Khawarij, or Kharijites ("Seceders") murdered 'Ali, regretting only that they failed to slay his rival as well. They proclaimed that *jihad*, holy war, was the sixth pillar of Islam, and declared it against anyone who opposed their puritanism. To them, any caliph who committed any kind of sin was disqualified from the throne, as a sinner was automatically not a Muslim; any good Muslim could then be elected to replace him.

The Isma'ilis

Although the majority of Shiites (the "twelvers") held that there had been twelve (known) imams, one splinter group traced a different line of succession, through Isma'il, the seventh imam, who disappeared. These Isma'ilis (or "seveners") became religious subversives, philosopher-revolutionaries seeking to replace the caliphate with a kind of communism. One group, whose leader claimed descent from Fatima, the Prophet's daughter, founded the Egyptian Fatimid dynasty, and also gave rise to the Assassins (p. 36). Some of the later Assassin leaders declared themselves to be divinely appointed, and released their followers from the basic laws of Islam (thus becoming even more despised than their predecessors). The sect decayed, but one fragment survived; today, the Isma'ilis are a peaceable, widespread group in the east, giving allegiance to the Aga Khan, who still claims spiritual authority (but *not* divine status), and who is an important leader of moderate Muslims.

The Druze

When one of the Fatimid caliphs disappeared while meditating alone in the desert (probably murdered), some of his followers declared that he had gained supernatural status, and refused to recognize his successors. The Druze form secretive communities in the hills of Syria (and are still a power in local wars and politics). They believe in reincarnation and allegedly preserve "ancient wisdom."

Sports and Games

Muslims enjoyed indoor and outdoor games. Horse-racing, polo, mounted archery (mostly a military exercise, among Turkish mercenaries, as Arab cavalry avoided the bow), foot archery, wrestling, footraces and weight lifting were all enjoyed and well organized. Betting took place, within rules governed by Islamic law. Animal fights were run, despite an Islamic ban. Pigeon racing became a mass craze in the Abbasid period; the price of good birds became greater than that of hunting falcons.

Indoor games included forms of Mancala, chess, checkers, and backgammon. Games clubs, complete with permanent clubhouses, developed. Within the harem, the women seem to have played dancing games, as well as chess and the like.

Chess

Chess was an especially popular indoor game among medieval Muslims. It came to them from India, via sixth-century Persia; a clever student could make a living teaching it to the upper classes and their slaves, who were valued if they could provide entertaining opposition.

The form of the game was similar to the modern rules. As far as anyone can discover, the objectives were the same, but the moves differed. The modern queen was then a "counselor" or "general," which could move only one square diagonally at a time; pawns could only be promoted to this type. "Elephants," which developed into the modern bishops, could move up to two (diagonal) squares at a time; the rook was a "chariot," set to guard the army's flanks in the Indian military tradition. The modern rule of casting was not invented for centuries.

That said, the fascination of this purely intellectual game of strategy was much as in the modern world. PCs who learn it (as a Hobby skill) to high levels could have some very interesting encounters at court, and might learn something about the mental processes of an opponent: whether someone is quick or careful, precise or daring, smarter or dumber than otherwise thought, or whatever.

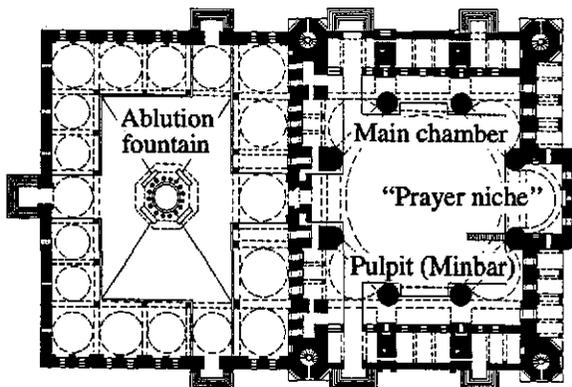


Diagram after *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol. 22, 1974/85.

If someone follows these rules, no one can say that he is not a Muslim. (Of course, there are hypocrites and bad Muslims, but that is between them and Allah. As in any religion, there are some rules that are stretched or simply ignored.) In fact, Islam is built, even more than most religions, on a set of *certainties*. There is no God but Allah; the Koran is the word of Allah; a wise Muslim is equipped to lead a completely satisfactory life, and to give others guidance.

Muslims see fate as the will of Allah. If Allah, the omnipotent and omniscient, determines everything that happens, then no one can hope to escape his fate; humans are judged by their responses to this unalterable destiny. There is some dispute about the subtleties of this, and many Muslims believe that some destiny, at least, is changeable according to human action. But the general sense that "each man dies on the hour appointed to him" can make Muslim warriors ferociously brave, and in the popular tales of the *Arabian Nights*, luck is shown as a whimsical, even amoral, irresistible force.

But Muslims don't ignore cause and effect. Even the most fatalistic take medicine when they are ill, in the hope that it is fated to cure them. A person who is injured by another was fated to suffer – but the suffering is still a consequence of the other's free will (unless the injury was an accident). However, Arabs always acknowledge the power of luck. "Good luck comes to him who has it, not to him who seeks it," says a proverb. Another adds, "Drop a lucky man in the Nile, and he surfaces with a fish in his mouth."

Islam also incorporates a strong morality. In its most puritanical form, it prohibits alcohol, music and free contact between the sexes. However, this kind of stringency is too much for most mortals, and rules are often stretched.

Finally, there is life after death. The Koran says that pious Muslims can hope to enter a glorious paradise, in which all the pleasures of Earth will be magnified. Only martyrs are *guaranteed* entry, but Allah is "the compassionate, the all-merciful." Although there is a burning hell "under the jaw of the devil" for the wicked, Muslims are not obsessed with ideas of punishment.

The Koran

The holy book of Islam consists of thousands of verses of Mohammed's preachings, collected by his followers throughout his life. These are divided into 114 "surahs," or chapters, often known by simple names such as "The Hordes" or "Ornaments of Gold." There is some dispute as to the correct order of the surahs; by tradition they are placed with one key verse ("The Opening") first, and then in descending order of length.

Muslims consider the Koran to be the very word of God; it is blasphemous to change it. It is written in Classical Arabic, which gives that language special importance. Regarded as the ultimate in Arabic poetic language, the original is said to be kept in Heaven, next to the throne of God. Strictly speaking, Muslims think that anyone handling a Koran should ritually wash first.

The Mosque

A mosque is a place of Muslim worship and teaching. One may pray anywhere, but a mosque is preferred, and it provides other facilities, such as education. Thus it is generally run by the community, although some mosques have wider functions; for example, Muslim universities grew mosque schools. In early Muslim cities, there were often several small mosques, and one large communal mosque for the prayers and sermon on Friday, the Muslim "Sabbath." Each mosque has its imam and a staff that includes a muezzin.

Prayers are said at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and nightfall (among Sunnis – only thrice daily among Shiites). On Friday an extended noon session includes sermons and public an-

nouncements. At each appointed time, in Muslim cities, the *muezzin* stands at the door of a small mosque, or on the minaret (a tall tower) of a larger one, and faces east, west, north and south; in each direction, he gives the call to prayer, in Arabic:

Allah is most great. I testify there is no God but Allah. I testify that Mohammed is the Prophet of Allah. Come to prayer. Come to salvation. Allah is most great. There is no God but Allah.

Any adult male who can reach a mosque should do so; others should pray where they are. (Travelers often carry prayer-rugs, to avoid having to use bare ground.) Women don't *have* to use the mosque, but there is often a section divided off for them.

All people entering a mosque, at prayers or any other time, must remove their shoes. The worshiper should also be clean; formal washing may be required before prayer. Each prayer involves movement from standing to prostration on the ground, so clean floors are a matter of comfort. Prayers are led by the imam, who places himself in the *mihrab* (see p. 20). The words are very standardized, with much invocation of the name and glory of Allah.

The Pilgrimage to Mecca

Every Muslim year, at a specific date in the last month of the calendar, many thousands of Muslims from across the world travel to the city of Mecca. (Visiting Mecca at any other time of the year is considered meritorious, but is *not* a *hajj*.) Mecca had been a holy place for Jewish and pagan tribes long before Mohammed pronounced it so, and it remains central to Islam today.

The *hajj* involves a number of rituals, including walking seven times round the Kaaba, and kissing and touching the Black Stone. The final act is the sacrifice of an animal. The whole procedure, with all the walking between shrines and so on, is strenuous and exhausting in the Arabian heat.

The land route to Mecca was never easy; the area is mostly desert. Despite the sacred nature of their journey, medieval and later travelers often faced the added threat of Bedouin bandits; as a result, *hajj* pilgrims often traveled in large groups. These gathered in Baghdad and other cities, sometimes under the leadership of sultans or caliphs, amid scenes of great celebration and respect. Sea travelers would often come via Jeddah (Jiddah), the nearest port on the Red Sea.

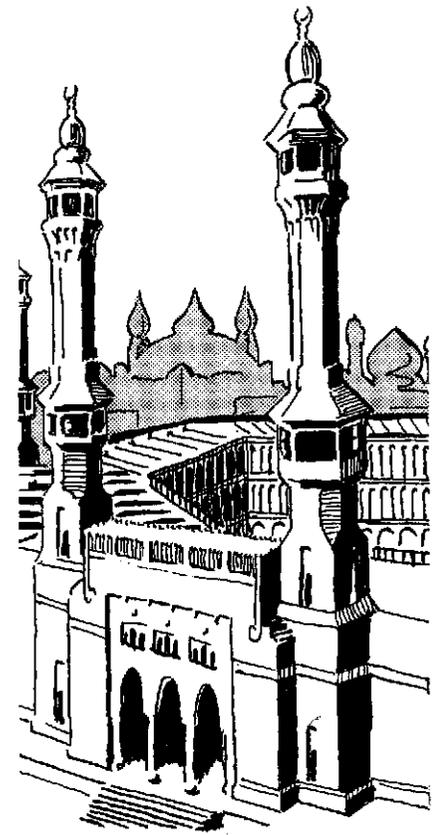
In the twentieth century, air travel has made the *hajj* easier, although Mecca is still a hot desert city, and the pilgrims' rituals are still strenuous. Representatives of major Muslim groups and governments make the event into a religious convention and forum. Incidents such as the collapse of an access tunnel, leading to many deaths, and demonstrations and even rioting by pilgrims from countries with extremist governments, have drawn attention to the *hajj*, but it remains a symbol of the supremacy of religion in Muslim life.

The *Idul Duha*, or *Id Qurban*, is a great celebration marking the end of the *hajj* ceremonies in Mecca.

A Muslim who completes the *hajj* earns the title *Hajji*, and the right to wear a green turban. Good Muslims react to him at +1 as long as his behavior remains devout.

Ramadan and Festivals

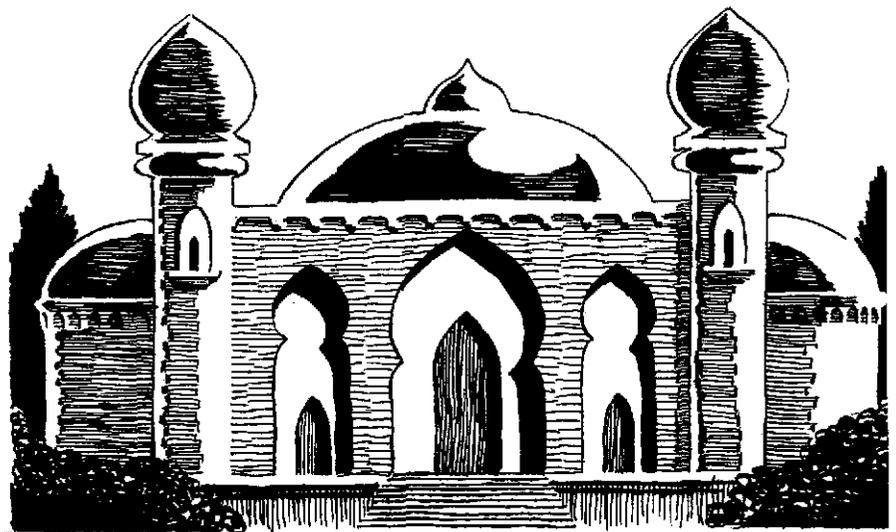
Ramadan, the "fourth pillar of Islam," the main religious event in the Islamic year, is the ninth month of the lunar calendar. Throughout this period, healthy adult Muslims must not eat or drink between sunrise and sunset; the ban also covers sex, and, in Sunni Islam, smoking.



Other Holy Places

Apart from Mecca and its environs, Islam recognizes a few other holy places. Most notable are the "Prophet's Mosque" in Medina, and Jerusalem, starting point, it is said, of a journey to Heaven and back that Mohammed made. The Shiites also esteem the tombs or places of martyrdom of the founders of their sect, and there are many tombs of Sufi "saints," scattered across the Muslim world, which are popular, at least with the masses.

Members of one sect, it should be noted, will often pray at shrines and holy places of another.



Inheritance

Islam has many complicated rules on inheritance, a product of practical problems in its early days. Further, Muslim experts have developed a whole series of fine judgments on the matter.

The net effect is that a dying Muslim's family, wives, parents, and children, must all be provided for. Wives and sons are particularly favored, and a man can, in fact, leave only one-third of his wealth to whom he chooses; the rest is distributed by law. A woman retains her dower, and can leave that and other property as she chooses, subject to rules similar to those that bind a man.

Rights to Power

The death of succession laws was a problem in Islam – as seen after the death of Mohammed. Although there were detailed laws of property inheritance, the great clash between inherited power and tribal democracy was never really resolved.

Unlike Europe, Islam never quite accepted that the ruler's son should *automatically* rule; on the other hand, it never worked out a democratic system of election, either. Worse, the belief that fate was the will of Allah implied that anyone who gained power by force was *destined* to rule, and hence fully entitled to the throne.

Sometimes, a ruler would ask his followers to swear loyalty to his heir. Thus a usurper might work very hard to persuade the "rightful" heir to formally *give* him the throne – which transferred any sworn loyalties. Brutal physical persuasion was often politically unacceptable, but psychological pressure could be heavy.

Qualifications

Islam says that a ruler must be fit to govern; this could lead to more problems. The caliph, for example, was supposed to be just and wise, to study Islamic law, to be in full possession of all his senses and sound in mind and body, to be free to act, to be courageous, and – on some readings – to be of the family of the Prophet.

Of these, physical completeness and basic sanity were easily tested. A ruler who was held prisoner would, technically, be disqualified, but then any Muslim would be morally required to restore his freedom. (A scenario plot?)

The requirement of all senses had an interesting, macabre, consequence. Sometimes, a usurper did not kill a deposed ruler, but *blinded* him, thus disqualifying him. (A game encounter with a blind, "retired" monarch could be interesting.)

The law only really came into force on the rare occasions when Islamic judges elected a ruler. However, any usurper might invoke it as an excuse.

Ramadan traditionally begins when two witnesses observe the new moon, and report this to a *cadi*. If he is satisfied with their reliability, he informs a *mufti*, who proclaims the fast. Today, many Islamic countries take their lead for the start from authorities in Cairo.

Muslims are permitted to sleep for at least some of the daylight hours in this month; many Islamic countries more or less shut down for the duration. Although Ramadan is a solemn matter, Muslims may and often do feast enthusiastically after sunset. Muslim theologians have all sorts of detailed rules for accidental breaches of the fast, medical problems, and so on, including rules for making up time.

At the end of Ramadan, Muslims hold a great celebration, the *Ramadan Id*, or *Idul Fitr* – one of the two great festivals of their year.

Sufism

Sufism is Islamic "mysticism," in the sense of "seeking a mysterious truth about the universe," not necessarily "magic." Islam has mixed feelings about Sufism, but it is widespread in Muslim lands, appealing to those for whom dry legalism is not enough. There are many schools, and some are dismissed by others as confused or incomplete. Sufi teachers say that trying to mix techniques from different schools is tricky and even dangerous. Teachers act as personal guides; because mystic truth cannot be described directly in words or discovered by analytical logic, they must deal directly with their pupils. (Hence the danger: trying to follow two guides at once merely leads to confusion. However, some guides use more than one path.)

Serious Sufis often study full-time, avoiding material concerns that would distract them. These are *dervishes* (also known as "fakirs"). They use various means to attain trance-like states which (they believe) grant special insights; the famous "whirling" dervishes do this with ecstatic dances.

Dervishes were traditionally recognized by their heavily patched woolen robes, as well as by their ascetic lifestyles.

In the *Thousand and One Nights*, the term "dervish" is used very loosely, to indicate wandering scholars, including at least one evil wizard. One story also features a holy woman, living in the wilderness, with healing powers; Sufi "saints" can be either male or female. (The descendants of these saints are sometimes regarded as social leaders or spiritual advisors.) Advanced knowledge of the universe might imply unique power over it. Some Sufis have claimed to possess magical powers; most have not. These ideas are not always accepted; prophets *might* have performed miracles, but Mohammed (who disdained such things) was the last prophet. Wilder mystics are suspected of sinking to mere showmanship (or, perhaps, secular magic).

Exorcisms

One version of the Muslim belief in djinn says that some of these spirits sometimes invade human minds, maliciously or mischievously causing irrational behavior. In modern Western terms, such behavior is called "insanity" or "emotional disturbance"; to the old-fashioned believer, it is "possession." However, the "possessing" djinni can be driven out, usually by prayer and ritual, sometimes by burning herbs, sulfur, or other substances that djinn dislike in the presence of the patient. Prayer and readings from the Koran are considered especially effective; djinn are bound by the laws of Allah, and fear divine power. Some exorcists use more brutal methods, such as beating the patient to make the possessing djinni feel the pain, and in modern times this has led to serious injury and even murder charges. But most Muslims – even those who believe in djinn possession – consider this unnecessary and wrong, the spiritual equivalent of medicine that causes suffering and may kill the patient when safe treatments are available.

Simple ceremonies and invocation of Allah are not the same as magic. On the other hand, some kind of religious authority or learning may well help. Muslims may consider such treatments to be a duty of the *Ulama*, and some religious exorcists say that anyone who charges money to perform an exorcism has the wrong attitude, and is almost certainly incompetent.

Other Religions Under Islam

Islam is often thought of as actively seeking converts, perhaps even by force, but this is doubly misleading. On one hand, the new religion was one of the few things, in the early days of Arab expansion, that could give the victorious desert tribesmen a sense of superiority; their new subjects had ancient civilizations and refined cultures. Conversion of non-Arabs may even have been subtly discouraged. (There are hints in the Koran that Islam was specifically a religion for the Arabs.) On the other hand, Islam is not totally intolerant; the Koran declares that no one can be forced to believe. In particular, the tradition grew up of not persecuting Jews and Christians, who followed prophets honored in the Koran and who worshipped the One God. However, these "People of the Book" were not on a par with Muslims; the ordinary Muslim felt superior to them. They paid special taxes, and were sometimes prohibited from wearing, or required to wear, distinctive styles and colors of clothing. If they were richer or more successful than average, they might be especially resented.

Strictly speaking, the Zoroastrians ("fire-worshippers") were not "People of the Book," but Islam found this old religion too well-established to suppress. The new empire permitted it, but squeezed it out over the following few centuries. A very few Zoroastrians (the Parsees) survive today in India. In games set in early Muslim times, Zoroastrianism might still be around, with varying levels of respectability. It might even appeal to Persian nobles and other nationalists before Shi'ite Islam becomes their focus.

Very tolerant Muslims might consider Hindus, who had their own holy texts, as "People of the Book"; other pagan faiths, on the other hand, were *never* really accepted.

The pre-Islamic Arabs had a system of small "client" tribes, paying tribute to stronger neighbors, but receiving genuine protection in return; at their best, the early Muslims transformed this attitude into a protectiveness for minorities – defending them was a matter of personal or racial honor. Minority Christian sects often preferred Muslim rulers, who took their taxes and left them alone, to Christian empires such as Byzantium, whose centralized, state-backed churches persecuted them as heretics.

The net effect is that small, quiet communities of Christians or Jews usually get on pretty well within Islam, but large groups seen as threatening tend to find themselves in conflict.

(One other oddity developed. When non-Muslims faced heavier taxes than Muslims, some of them, not surprisingly, converted to Islam. However sincere they may have been about this, it *did* deprive the ruler of tax income. Therefore, some rulers cut their losses by slapping a special tax on recent converts . . .)

Islamic Government and Law

Religion and Government

Islam may be related to Christianity, but the Koran does *not* echo the line from the New Testament about rendering unto Caesar that which is Caesar's. Islam has rules for running society; a good Muslim is supposed to support virtue over vice in government as much as in private matters. Some writers say that, where Christianity is a religion of love, Islam is a religion of social justice.

Warriors

The *Ayyar* – free men following warrior codes – were always part of the Islamic military system. However, at a very early date, Islam hit a problem of manpower. When Persia was conquered, its nobles negotiated as a group for a place in the new regime, and could more or less dictate terms; skilled soldiers were in short supply. So another source was found: slave-soldiers.

It seems strange to Westerners that the best troops of many Muslim armies were slaves, but long before the coming of Islam, Persian law had declared that *all* subjects were the slaves of the ruler – so there was little disgrace in slavery. Rulers recruited troops by purchase or by a "tax" of inferior subjects, preferably young, bringing them up within the royal household. This ensured that they had excellent training and no alternative loyalties; good treatment, including regular pay and grants of land, made them (in theory) very loyal. Provincial rulers and governors as well as the caliph could do this.

This was the origin of the regular troops known as Ghulams, and later of the Mamelukes of Egypt. To a Westerner, they would look like straightforward professional soldiers. But there was a problem: they could become a law unto themselves. The Mamelukes overthrew their sultan and became the rulers.

In any event, more troops might be required. Sometimes, feudal systems were used, raising anything from unwilling peasants to skilled knights; even slave-soldiers might be given land, and the responsibility of organizing units. Alternatively, mercenaries might be hired – Bedouin lancers, Turkish horse-archers, Daylami mountain infantry, or even Europeans.



City Government

Early Islam felt little need for complex systems of city administration; for example, if riots broke out, the army would simply take over for as long as necessary. However, the government found it useful to appoint governors.

In each city, there was a *ra'is*, or chief, responsible for civilian administration. There would also be a high-ranking local *'amir*, in charge of military forces, whose responsibilities included maintenance of law and order. Questions of law would be judged by *cadis*, but chiefs of police (see below) had similar powers, and there were also government officials – *muhtasibs* – charged with enforcing Islamic morality and rules of religion.

Over time, the military units assigned to keep order evolved into something more like a police force, with its own chiefs.

For game purposes, a large, rich city will probably have a well-organized police system. A smaller town will get by with a few watchmen, the Islamic rule that a community is responsible for its own good order, and in extreme cases the nearest army unit. Tyrannical rulers will keep their bullying guards patrolling the streets day and night.

Administration of the practical rules that govern a bazaar is handled by a supervisor, sometimes state-appointed, sometimes selected by the local merchants (always an influential group). Serious questions of contracts and so on would go to a *cadi* for decision, and a *muhtasib* could deal with cases of fraud and trickery.

Oaths

Oaths – in court or elsewhere – are treated seriously by Muslims. One classic version is for a man to declare that, if he breaks his word, all his wives should be divorced and all his slaves should be freed – and if that word is broken, the divorces and manumissions are considered legally valid!

At its strongest, Islam and society are one, making Muslim states highly unified. Any citizen can always appeal to the religious principle of justice. On the other hand, because faith and state are the same, any political revolt must be a religious schism, and vice versa.

Furthermore, despite their straightforward rules of inheritance, Muslim states have rarely managed efficient laws of succession. The greatest dispute was over the selection of the caliph. The Shiites invoked the idea of inheritance, which appealed to Arabs who were loyal to families, and also to Persians and others who were used to hereditary rulers. The Sunnis, however, declared that only worthy candidates should have power, and even produced rather vague rules whereby community leaders should choose the caliph – an enlarged version of the old Bedouin tribal elections. As only pious, Islamic rule is legitimate, any Muslim can feel justified in assassinating a tyrant. Muslim history often seems to consist of rule by strong, respected rulers alternating with assassination and chaos.

Shari'a and Hadith

Shari'a (Islamic) law is often called savage by Westerners, but there is one thing to remember: it is, literally, medieval. At the time it developed, the laws of most of Europe were just as ferocious, and often less fair. Allah is, after all, “the compassionate, the all-merciful.”

The Koran provides both fixed rules and general ethical guidelines, and deals with domestic, civil and criminal law. There are contradictions and difficulties in the text, but the taking of a human life, with no justification, is classed as a great crime. Theft, too, is treated harshly, perhaps to counter the traditional Bedouin habits of banditry.

In fact, Mohammed's chief legal idea was *restraint*. The most important part of this, at that time, was the attempt to eliminate the blood feud. Murders and injuries should be dealt with promptly, formally, and by the community; only the criminal should pay. Unfortunately, this is one of Islam's least-obeyed rules; to this day, desert Arabs and even their settled cousins have a taste for unforgiving vengeance.

Punishments given in the Koran are largely on an eye-for-an-eye basis. Medieval folk had little idea of imprisonment as punishment; that would have been seen as keeping and feeding criminals at the state's expense. Prisons were to hold enemies or those accused, temporarily, although later Muslim traditions did sometimes involve punitive imprisonment.

A criminal could make amends if he showed true remorse. Rules permitted the criminal to compensate the victim (or a murder victim's family) with cash; often,

this could mean that the offender was given over to the victim or next of kin, for them to impose whatever penalties they preferred within the law. Forgiveness, after the payment of blood money, was considered commendable. Acts such as an accidental killing might require the freeing of a slave, or long periods of fasting. Theft was often punished by beatings. The Koran specifies that one who robs an article worth four dinars shall have his right hand cut off; on a second offense the left foot is cut off, and so on. Death is reserved for hardened criminals.

The Koran does *not* decree any punishments for apostasy (deserting the reli-



gion). However, those who deserted Islam – turned traitor – during wartime were put to death (hardly unusual in war), and from this, some Muslims have developed the idea of death for apostates. Islam also usually recognizes and accepts that *shari'a* laws cannot be enforced in non-Muslim lands.

Because the Koran does not cover every possible question of law, Muslim scholars developed a system of legal analysis. The heart of this is the *hadith* – the “sayings of the prophet,” supposedly uttered by Mohammed himself. However, any *hadith* must be justified by a chain of reliable sources, traceable all the way back to the Prophet. Even so, there are fierce disputes.

Local Laws

Islamic law did not always travel well. Despite widespread conversions to Islam, alternative ideas hung on, or seeped into Muslim practice. Even the Arabs were not entirely convinced (especially when it came to the blood feud). Indian Muslims have something very like a caste system; many peoples kept their own marriage laws, rules on trade and contracts, and so on. Long-established peasant communities in particular tended to keep old, secular laws around.

The Role of Women

Islamic society is often seen in the West as a hotbed of sexist oppression – an image not helped by the *Arabian Nights*, an entertainment for a male audience. However, things are more complicated than that.

Eastern traditions *do* emphasize feminine modesty – but Islam is just as strong on propriety for men. Mohammed actually introduced improvements in the place of women in society, giving wives better inheritance rights, and attacking female infanticide, bride-stealing and the traditional treatment of women as property. (For information on women’s place in culture, see *Female Characters*, p. 49.)

On the other hand, Muslim societies *have* often been highly sexist. The most extreme have gone in for various kinds of female mutilation (which many would say is against Koranic law), or have locked women away in fear of the kind of woman-stealing that Islam prohibited.

Marriage

Celibacy is *not* a virtue in Islam; a good Muslim will usually be married (and faithful). The Christian ideal of celibacy is considered eccentric – even if some dervishes and other cultists try to surpass all worldly distractions in the course of purifying their spirits.

Families generally arrange Muslim marriages, although parents are encouraged to get the consent of the couple. Romantic love-matches *are* known, and not just in poetry. By law, a woman must have a guardian – usually her father – to make sure the bridegroom is acceptable and (ideally) that she consents.

Mohammed also said that the prospective groom should be allowed to see the face of his bride before he married her. However, this idea is often too much for “respectable” Muslims. *Arabian Nights* tales are full of men falling in love with a girl after a mere glimpse of her face, or just her picture.

The marriage contract involves a dowry, paid by the bridegroom; part of it may be reserved in case of divorce or his early death. This is a secular rather than a religious contract, but even so, an imam will usually officiate. Two witnesses are required; these should be free adult male Muslims, but two women can replace *one* of the men. The ceremony is simple, and usually held in front of guests; then a feast ensues. A traditional Arab wedding would be considered poor if the bride’s family didn’t roast a whole sheep, and the *Arabian Nights* tells of parties going on for days.

Muslim men are permitted up to four wives. Mohammed had more, which has been ammunition for his critics, but Muslims say that he married them before this

The Sahara Desert

As the Muslim Empire expanded into North Africa, it found a land where the desert skills of the Arabs were very applicable; it also found people already living there.

The Sahara is the largest desert in the world. It is bounded by the Atlantic and Mediterranean, the Atlas mountains, the Red Sea, and the Sahel grasslands. (The fertile Nile valley cuts across it.) It was not, contrary to some stories, purely the product of Roman over-farming, although it certainly advanced when the Romans exhausted the soil of their North African farms; it was grassland in prehistory, but not much later than 4,000 years ago.

Its inhabitants, the dark-skinned Berbers, obtained the camel in Roman times, confirming their control of the few trade routes that ran south to the kingdoms of Central Africa and the west coast. Trade along these routes was worthwhile for the Muslims of the Middle Ages; merchant characters might well pass this way. The Berbers adopted Islam, but their sense of independence led them into variant sects. Bedouin tribes moved into the area later, but the Berbers retained control of most of the Sahara.

One Berber group, the Tuaregs, is well-known. Like the Bedouins, they ride the desert in tribal groups, clad in all-enveloping robes, but their customs are very much their own; their women are relatively independent and socially powerful, and the *men* always wear blue veils in the presence of strangers.



Societies

Medieval Islamic society was criss-crossed with guilds, clubs and other social or religious bodies, ranging from informal groups of friends to formal associations, from the publicly-known to the secretive and from the state-backed to the subversive.

The most important of these groups for game purposes were the *Ayyar* of the ninth to twelfth centuries. These were bands of young men whose lives were oriented to combat, followers of the code known as *Futuwwa*. They could range from chivalrous knightly brotherhoods to gangs of street brawlers. Some set up as Islamic holy warriors, raiding infidels on the frontier or fighting off foreign raiders; others were social rebels, who attacked tyrannies or just anyone they disliked; still others were mercenaries or just hooligans. Some had formal initiation ceremonies. Many PC parties may be treated as *Ayyar*.

However, most groupings were quieter: trade guilds, merchant's associations, and so on. Given the Islamic tradition of hospitality, these were very useful to their members. In time, the rulers tried to absorb them into "the system"; the caliph himself joined an *Ayyar* band, going through the membership rituals. Guilds were a natural adjunct of bazaar trade, and survive to this day in the Middle East; "hobby clubs" such as wrestling gymnasiums have also endured.

But a subversive element was also present. Many groups met to discuss religious ideas; in an empire where religion and state were one, this could make them revolutionary, almost by accident. Sufi societies, sometimes accused of heresy, were mostly pacifistic; others were not.

In game terms, both PCs and NPCs might have loyalties or Duties and Allies in all sorts of odd directions. Conversely, a PC party, however odd its membership, may be seen and accepted as "just another *Ayyar* band." Heavy use of these networks of personal loyalty and acquaintance is optional, but it can make for interesting game effects.



law was revealed to him by Allah, and that he married no more afterwards. The important part of the rule is that the man must be capable of properly supporting all his wives, and that he must treat them all equally. Some Muslim lawyers say that this is effectively impossible, making monogamy the only correct practice, but others take it more literally.

Islamic law also permits slave-wives and concubines, but with restrictions. Powerful rulers have pushed these to the breaking point; scholars often justified their employers' self-indulgences by "discovering" dubious *hadiths*.

Where the master had slave-concubines as well as wives, the wives were treated as more important. However, any concubine who produced a male child was raised to an intermediate status. A favored concubine, especially the "Mother of a Son," might hope for legal marriage later.

Divorce and Adultery

Islam makes divorce easy for husbands, harder for wives. In theory, a man can declare a divorce at whim, by announcing it verbally three times. However, he should repay a portion of the wife's dowry.

Muslim law nominally punishes adultery with death, but the evidence required – four eye-witnesses to the crime – sounds almost impossible to obtain. On the other hand, the sworn testimony of a husband may replace the witnesses – unless the wife counter-swears her innocence. (A contradictory rule says that any charge of adultery from a husband automatically dissolves a marriage.)

Slaves

Islam permitted slavery, without encouraging it; the Koran says that the freeing of slaves is virtuous. In practice, Muslim societies have kept slavery in place, right up to recent times. Islamic laws have firm rules on how slaves may be treated, but laws are often bent or broken. (Incidentally, freeing a slave who had no skills or way to survive when free was sometimes illegal.)

Arabs could not be enslaved. In part, this was a ban on enslaving "your own kind"; in part, it was based on the broader rule that free *Muslims* couldn't be enslaved. (Non-Muslim slaves who converted, however, did not become free.) Another strict Muslim prohibition was



against castration of human beings. However, Islamic laws were often ignored at home. Islam is an avowedly tolerant religion, but Muslims do not necessarily live up to this; Islamic culture is neither as bigoted as some others, nor as tolerant as its admirers like to think. As the tendency, supported by Islam, is to avoid marriage across *social* boundaries, racial intermarriage is generally rare.

Private and Public Lives

This section attempts to impart some of the flavor of life in the Middle East. Also, see the *Job Table*, pp. 61-63.

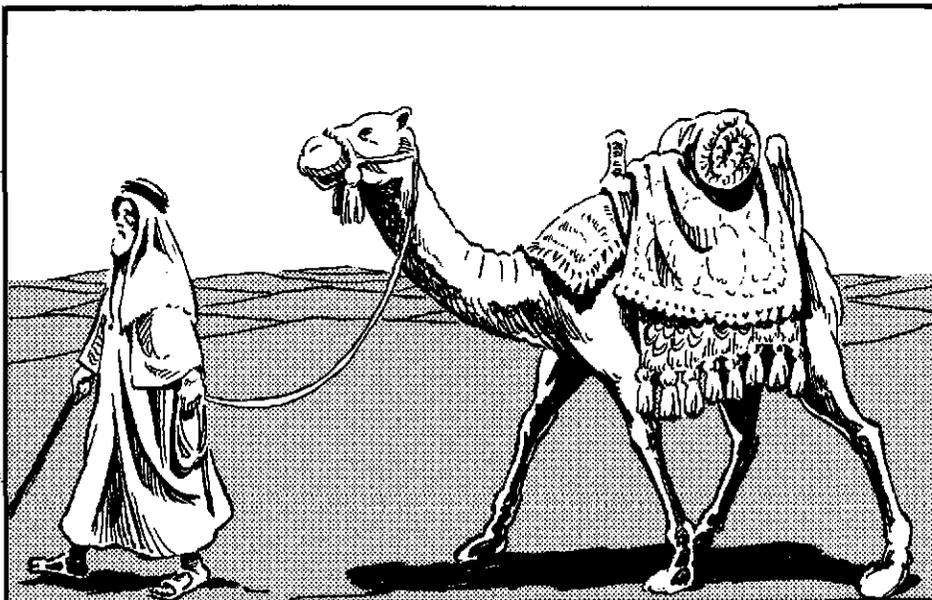
The Desert

The lifestyle of the Bedouins of Arabia was superbly adapted for the desert, and the coming of Islam changed it little; indeed, it endures to this day. They kept herds of animals that could subsist on the local vegetation: camels and goats, and sheep in slightly lusher areas. (There were also some cattle-herders in southern Arabia.) They augmented a diet of milk and meat with dates, which grow throughout the area, and with crops traded or stolen from farming communities in oases or on the desert edge. Knowledge of where oasis wells lay was essential. Other basic lore concerned weather, and survival skills.

The tribes had a hierarchy of prestige, based on the types of animals kept; camel-herding tribes ranked highest. "Gypsies," who either herded cattle or worked with metal, were below and outside any ranking. The nomads thought themselves better than sedentary folk; they could travel where and when they wished, while farmers were bound to the land and subject to the climate, and city dwellers lived in cramped, narrow boxes.

Tough circumstances bred tough, capable people, and survival demanded cooperation. The tribe became the focus of loyalty, but because anyone might need help at some later time, the famous Arab tradition of hospitality grew up. Personal honor was valued highly, but honor was not the same as honesty: raiding another tribe's herds was fine sport. This could trigger ferocious feuds; the Arabs said, "Two may make a quarrel, but two hundred may die for it."

Mohammed united the tribes into a powerful army, but within decades, Bedouin bandits were harassing and robbing Muslim pilgrims traveling to Mecca. The desert tribes are an ever-present backdrop to Middle Eastern history.



Hospitality

The Arabian concept of honor places enormous importance on hospitality. This may be a product of the harsh desert environment; no one could afford a reputation of failing to treat visitors well. Only sworn enemies can refuse each other hospitality, and even they have to respect certain rules. It might even be permissible to *take* the basics of survival from someone who refuses them. This doesn't mean that a stranger could walk into any city house and demand food, but a fairly distant acquaintance might expect it – and in the wilderness, groups would shelter lone wanderers.

The usual rule is that a visitor can claim the privileges of a guest from a household for up to three days. After that, the guest should at least help with tasks such as fetching water or tending animals. Failure to do so is impolite, but it is acceptable for an individual traveling with a desert tribe to move from family to family every three days throughout the journey. Landlords who charge rent according to the number of tenants can say that anyone who stays more than three days is a tenant.

The symbol of hospitality is the offer of bread and salt (or sometimes, water); once that is accepted, a visitor becomes a guest. One legend tells of a thief who broke into a governor's treasury, made up a bundle of gold and jewels, then found a large crystal which he took for a gemstone. He placed it in his mouth for safety, and promptly discovered that it was salt. Then, having eaten the governor's salt, the thief considered himself a guest – so he abandoned his haul and left empty-handed. (The governor subsequently found signs of the "visit," and proclaimed a pardon for the mystery burglar; the thief came forward, and was given a post in the palace. This being an Arabian story, he went on to riches and greatness.)

Food and Drink

Middle Easterners eat most at noon and in the evening. Any breakfast is light and informal; the evening dinner is the main meal. Medieval cooking was mostly boiling or frying, rather than baking, which used too much fuel. Rich men would have trained cooks – perhaps valuable slaves, supervised by free servants of proven judgment. Elegant restaurants were known from an early date.

Recipes have not changed much since Abbasid times. Dishes are well-flavored, with much use of garlic, onion, spices, lemon, mint, almonds, and rose water. Meat was usually widely available: even city-dwellers might keep a few chickens, and mutton or lamb and goat were widespread. Camel was eaten; beef was known, but unpopular, except in cattle-keeping areas – and other people made jokes about them. Horseflesh was legal, but only a Turk or a Mongol would eat it. Duck was liked. The one meat *not* available at any time was pork; Muslim *halal* laws (like the Jewish kosher rules) prohibit it. (They also contain rules about the slaughter of animals.)

Muslims ate and liked fish, and sometimes complained that Christians, with their tradition of fish-eating (especially on Fridays), pushed the price up.

Most meals were based on bread. Wheat flour was standard, and much preferred; other grains, such as rice, were for the poor, and barley bread was strictly for misers and ascetics. Cooked rice was known but less popular, except in sweets.

Milk was used a little; gazelle milk was a delicacy for caliphs. Vegetables included beans, chickpeas, eggplants (aubergines), carrots, leeks and gourds. Apples, grapes, bananas and citrus fruit were eaten before or after meals.

Dates deserve a special mention. The date palm grows *very* profusely in Arabia; while people might enjoy dates, they were generally so commonplace as to be barely noticed. In famines, the people of Baghdad used to travel to Basra, to live on the dates that grew there. A kind of date wine was sometimes made; it was argued that the Koran only prohibits *grape* wine.

Tarts, cakes and jellies at the end of a meal used nuts, sugar, syrup, rose water and honey. Ice, collected as hail, rushed down from the mountains or made in small quantities by a trick of evaporation, might be used in a *sherbet*, watered fruit juice and sugar. The poor had dates and oil-cakes.

Even disregarding the Islamic ban on alcohol, wine was not usually served with meals.

Easterners traditionally eat with their hands rather than with cutlery. The *right* hand is used; the left is reserved for less salubrious purposes. Hand-washing is a large part of etiquette, and use of the wrong hand – especially in the communal dishes – is *very* bad manners.

Farmers

The civilizations of the Middle East grew up around rivers – the Nile and the Tigris and Euphrates. “Peasant-based” cultures had to have fertile soil, and most important of all, *water*. Great rivers not only provided the latter, but their floods also laid down rich earth. Other areas relied on rains or oasis wells. When rivers or rains were not reliable enough, artificial irrigation could be the answer; and even the best river might need controlling.

The Tigris and Euphrates provide a usable flood plain, if not a comfortable one. In summer, the area is dry and burning hot; farmers can only await the winter to raise their corn. In spring – just as the corn is ripe – the rivers flood with mountain melt-water. Local civilizations have always had to organize, digging ditches and building dams not only to irrigate, but to control and channel floods. This need for cooperation helped develop complex societies.

The Nile makes a more hospitable country. Crossing 3,000 miles of desert to the Mediterranean, it provides a narrow, but very fertile, valley; ancient Egypt, above the coastal delta, was a 700-mile-long country. Nile floods are wonderfully predictable; they follow autumn rains in the highlands, and as they recede, the soil becomes good for crops. Summer is drought time – unless the ingenious systems built up over centuries are used to keep water available.

Elsewhere, farmers worked with lesser rivers, or oases. These were the peasants that the ancient Bedouin knew; often, they were Arabs too.

The cities exerted control over the countryside. The movement of grain to the towns was as much tax as trade. Lowland peasant revolts could be suppressed quickly by town garrisons. Only in mountains, where local lords could build strong castles, did power rest with country-dwellers.

Villages were made up of large numbers of poor peasants, plus perhaps one richer family each. The latter would provide the *sheikh*, or headman, who was responsible for administration.

The Cities

Cities were travelers’ resting-places, markets, and sites for palaces and universities. An Arab writer said that a city required three things; drinking water, wood (for fuel), and pastureland. Of these, the grazing land might be spread over a large area, and fuel might be brought in some distance (or improvised – dried dung can burn, at a pinch), but water was a problem. In some cities, the most common traders were water-carriers, with skins or jugs, and small copper and silver cups to measure out servings; other towns would draw from magnificent aqueducts or canals, underground channels or (for the very sophisticated) complex systems of lead pipes. The greatest and luckiest would have clean rivers or many reliable wells.

Towns grew up around oases, caravanserais or military camps, but the center of the town was the mosque. Around this was a market (the *soukh* or bazaar), divided up into streets for each trade or craft. Off the wide public “main streets” lay the side streets for specialized trades; off *those* were alleys and cul-de-sacs leading to private dwellings.

Some towns had a defensible curtain wall; beyond the perimeter lay humbler dwellings, farms and pastures. The mosque provided a forum as well as a place to pray, and the market was what kept the city alive. Every day, farmers (and water-carriers) would converge on the center from the outskirts to peddle the necessities of life to the townsfolk – and to pray and gossip and be entertained.

Wealthy citizens could afford baths, gardens and courtyards; the poorest of the poor lived in hovels. Some folk lived in rented houses, perhaps shared with others to keep costs manageable – although rents would often be per head. Large cities were divided up into “quarters,” with their own mosques, bazaars, administration and both rich and poor inhabitants.

Buildings

The basic design of most Muslim buildings is a flat-roofed structure built around a central courtyard. On a hot summer night, the roof is the coolest place to sleep; during hot days, the courtyard provides shade, and might have a garden and even fountains. Materials include mud, wood, stone and even reeds, but a simple type of sun-baked brick is the classic structural fabric. One common building material in the Middle Ages was stone “quarried” from much older ruins. A new house might incorporate blocks carved with Roman or Sassanid inscriptions.

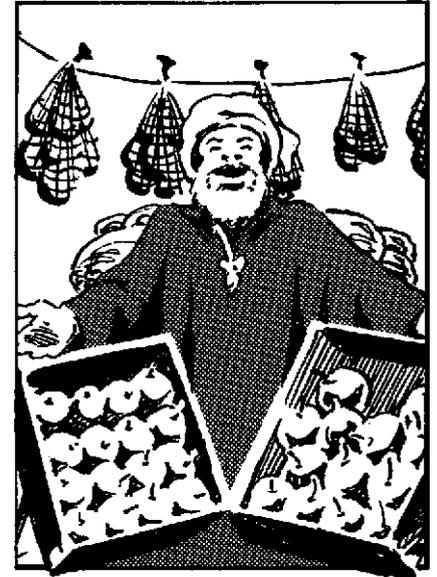
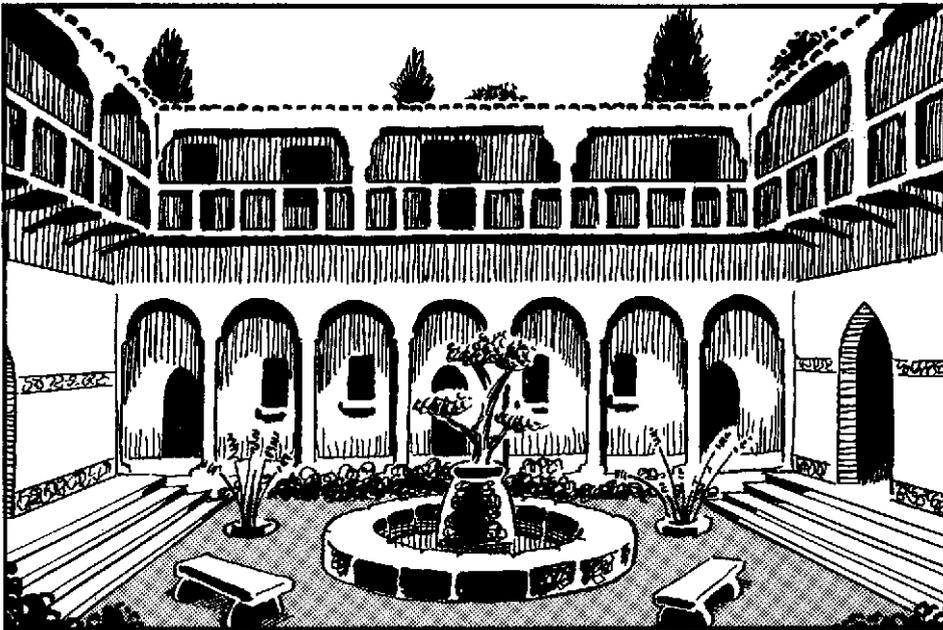
Courtyards were only absent in areas where flat space was limited. The mountains of Yemen and North Africa have “tower-houses,” with the harem on the top, then the reception rooms, and stables and storerooms on the ground floor. External windows were few and small. Buildings could have “ventilator towers” on the roof, with covers to be opened on whichever side faced the wind, to channel a breeze into the house. The greatest symbol of domestic luxury was a *cool* home; this might mean ventilators, fans, or simply naturally cooler cellar rooms.

Many dwellings would have an ornate doorway joining the front gate to the interior, dividing the home from the world. On hot evenings, people would sit outside, chatting to neighbors and passers-by. At the least, someone sitting thus might want a mat to sit on, and maybe some shade; over time, these basic arrangements evolved into ornate carved wood platforms with canopies.

Visitors to the house would be entertained in a chamber with one wall open to face the courtyard; rich houses could have two or even four such chambers. Interior furnishings would be sparse and simple in pattern, if heavily decorated in rich homes; such furnishings would mostly consist of a few low benches, plus many rugs, carpets and maybe cushions. Interior walls of rich houses could be beautifully decorated with mosaics or glazed tiles, even if outside walls were modestly plain. Chests and boxes for storage would be held together with mortise-and-tenon joints rather than nails, and fastened with wooden locks; metal fixings were expensive.

The great luxury, of course, was a *garden* – preferably with audible running water. The Muslim image of Paradise is a garden, and that is the likeliest use of any decent-sized courtyard.

Common architectural features are domes, arches and pillared colonnades. In mosques, the old central courtyard came to be covered by a dome. The Turks especially loved this, as Turkey can be cooler and wetter than Arabia, but a dome also allows air circulation – desirable in hot countries.



The Bazaar

The bazaar is the marketplace in the heart of a Muslim town. (The word is Persian; “soukh” is the Arabic.) Given the significance of trade, this is a very important place – especially as it is where most citizens would go, not just to buy and sell, but to catch up on gossip. By a tradition that may pre-date Islam, many bazaars are considered almost independent of the town; the merchants have jealously-guarded rights and privileges. Sometimes, a curfew might ban access to the bazaar area outside of daylight hours.

A bazaar would usually consist of a maze of narrow streets, lined with shops and market stalls.

The day-to-day running of trade in the bazaar is supervised by a minor official. Because of the importance and sense of independence of the merchants, interference from other quarters would be greatly resented.

The other important part of bazaar life is the various guilds and trade associations. With streets given over to specific trades, and given the popularity of societies and clubs in the Islamic world (p. 16), these dominate many people’s social lives, and regulate much town trade; many seem to have survived for centuries. Guilds wouldn’t usually be able to fix prices – traditions of bargaining, and the market supervisor, would stop that – but they would enable any group of traders to present a (mostly) united face to outside interference.

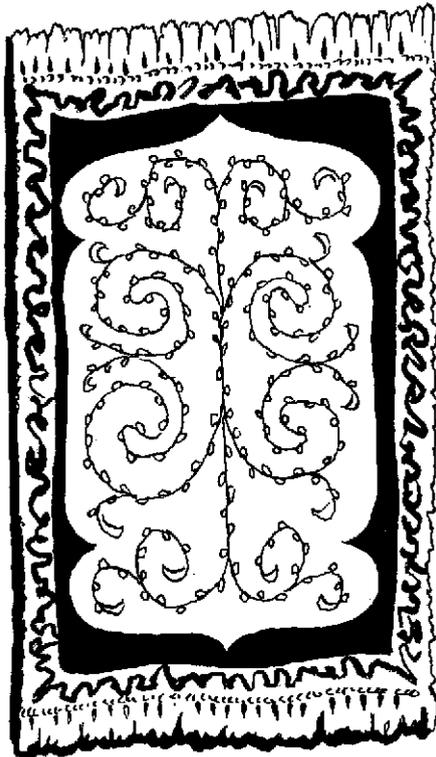
Weights and Measures

An ancient measure of length was the *cubit*, defined as the distance from elbow to middle fingertip. This comes out to around 18-22 inches; a "standard cubit" was often fixed on display in a town's bazaar.

Various units of weight were used. The widespread *rattl* was approximately one modern pound (or pint); there were 12 *uqiya* in a *rattl*. The *dirham* was also used, and was about 1/8 of a modern ounce. Salt was measured in *makkuks*, between 1/4 and 1/2 a bushel.

Rugs and Carpets

Magical versions aside, rugs and carpets are, literally, an essential piece of *Arabian Nights* furniture. For the nomadic tribes of Arabia and Central Asia, a carpet was an all-purpose item. Apart from covering the ground, it could serve as a blanket, saddle-cover, storage bag, tent "doorway," or tomb cover. Good Muslims would carry a prayer-rug when traveling (to kneel on in prayer); this would be small, and would often have a design including the shape of a mosque's *mihrab* – the niche indicating the direction of Mecca.



Specialized Buildings

Basic *mosque* architecture is simple. Details may vary, but there is always a space for the congregation, a raised pulpit (*minbar*) from which sermons are preached and announcements are made, and the *mihrab*, a niche in the wall, usually heavily ornamented, marking the direction of Mecca. A mosque used by a ruler might have a screened-off area; sultans are expected to pray alongside their subjects, but are entitled to some security. There is often an outer chamber, with a water supply, where people wash their feet as they enter. The simplest mosques consist of an open space, and one wall with a *mihrab*. In early mosques, there was sometimes a gallery, shielded by a screen, where the women of the local ruler's harem could pray and listen to sermons without distracting male worshippers. Modern mosques often have a section (again, partitioned off) open to all women.

Traditionally, *shops* were permanent market stalls. Essentially each was an open-fronted box, with the face closed off during non-business hours by a wooden shutter. This might be designed so that the upper section hinged up to form a shelter, while the lower folded down to act as a counter or seat. (Obviously, a rich jeweler, for example, would have something grander and more secure.) The owner might live over the shop, or elsewhere.

Inns were for merchants . . . there were few other travelers, and most of those others would stay with relatives. Again, the basis was a simple square around a paved courtyard. The ground floor would serve as stables and warehouses for goods; the upper level would be living quarters. There would be a single door, with a portico supporting a gallery. Merchants (presumed rich) were a favorite target for rioting mobs; that one door would be good and solid, and could be barred at need. The rooms would be bare; traveling merchants carried their own furniture. (Given that houses would be largely "furnished" with rugs, this is less bizarre than it sounds.) Similarly, the inn would probably not serve food; guests cooked their own, or visited restaurants.

Another long-established feature of Muslim life was the *public baths*. Bath attendants included barbers and such; the buildings would be large, well-kept, and substantial. Men and women generally used the same facilities, but at different times.

Palaces would, of course, be the grandest buildings of all, vast maze-like structures, walled off from the mob, with multiple garden-courtyards.

Islam, which encouraged the good wife and mother in the respectable home, perhaps wearing a veil, soon met and took on some of the ideas of Persia, where rich men kept their wives in guarded seclusion. Thus the *harem* was created. Ironically, this popular symbol of the Islamic world is partly pre-Islamic, and partly a late addition. A rich man's harem might have a courtyard of its own; otherwise, it would be tucked away at the back of the house, or on upper floors. Its walls might consist of pierced wooden or stone screens, allowing the occupants to see the world without being seen.

Trade and Communications

Because of trade, the Arabs were more than poor desert nomads, even before Islam. Arabia was a crossroads; caravan routes ran from the Indian Ocean ports, along the Red Sea coastal plain and across Mesopotamia. (Basra became rich as the port which served Baghdad; Sinbad sailed from there.) Other roads ran from Anatolia and the Mediterranean to Persia. The greatest of these was the Silk Road, which ran from eastern China, along the Great Wall, north of the Himalayas and across the Gobi Desert to Samarkand, south and west around the Caspian Sea to Mount Ararat, then west through Anatolia to Constantinople. Elsewhere, sparse roads ran south from the Maghrib into Africa; some African kingdoms were rich enough to be worth trading with. Spices and perfumes came from India, cedar

wood from Lebanon, porcelains and silk from China. Pilgrimage routes ran to Mecca, north and south along the Red Sea coast, and across Arabia from Basra, Baghdad, and Riyadh. Many pilgrims, especially from Africa and India, came by ship (see p. 11).

Asian Trade

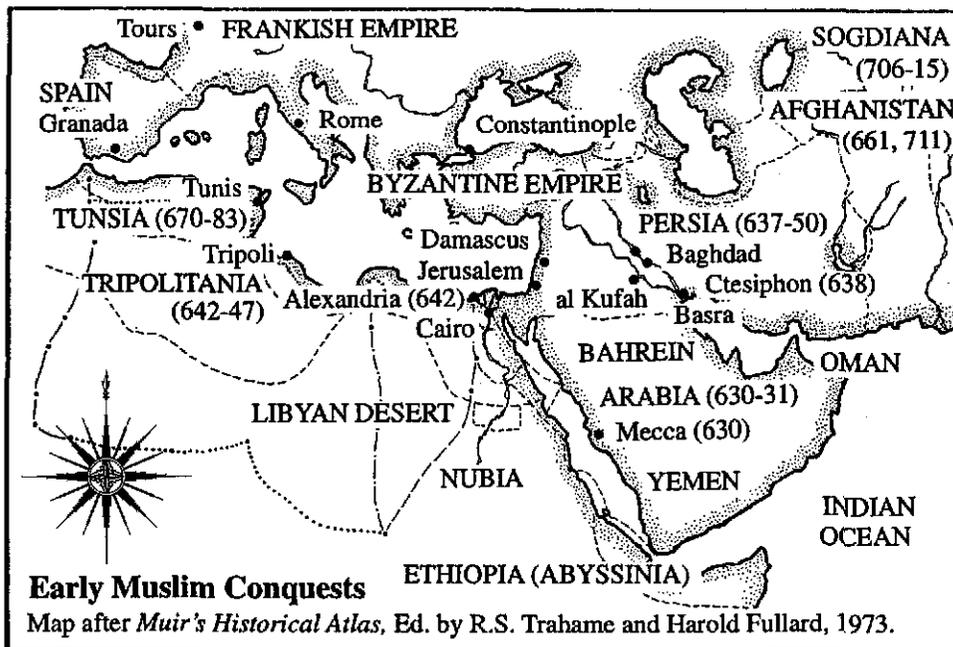
The Middle East had a source of importance other than its ruling empires: trade. Traffic from Egypt, Africa, Europe, India, Central Asia and China, all met here. Goods included cloves from the East Indies, gold and slaves from East Africa, metals from Europe, gold from India, carpets from Asia, and local foodstuffs.

There was also sea-trade; the tales of Sinbad recall the days when dhows out of Basra not only reached East Africa and India, but sailed on to China, the Malay peninsula, the tropical islands of Indonesia, and even the Philippines. The sailors traded in cloth, gemstones, pearls and sandalwood, but their greatest interest was in spices; cinnamon and ginger, pepper and cloves. This was what later attracted European navigators such as Vasco de Gama.

Perhaps the most dramatic trade, however, was with China. Fine porcelain was one Chinese commodity, but the "classic" was silk. In Roman times, China had a monopoly; bales of the stuff came along the Silk Road (see map), to command fabulous prices.

However, as Rome and Sassanid Persia decayed, the Silk Road became more dangerous and less used. In time, the secret of silk – the moth and the mulberry tree its grubs feed on – leaked from China (legend has it that moth-eggs were smuggled out by a monk), and in 552 Byzantium became a producer rather than an importer. Nonetheless, the "Road" was re-established under the Mongols, for other goods; Tibetan powdered rhubarb, of all things, was an important and expensive medicine (a purgative) in medieval Italy.

Few travelers actually ventured along the full length of such routes; rather, goods were traded from city to city by middle-men. If a single caravan did attempt the complete Silk Road trip, it would have been on the road for about a year; Marco Polo's family took three, with numerous diversions and delays. The highly efficient Mongol couriers could take a message over the greater part of the route in about three months.



Curiously, the wheel did not usually play a large part in carrying loads across these expanses. In fact, between around 400 and 1300 A.D., the use of wheeled vehicles in the Middle East fell away to almost nothing. This was partly due to political instability, which prevented proper road maintenance . . . but the camel was always a better option in the region, able to endure long treks across desert sands and to fit down narrow urban streets. Thus, the cliché of a caravan of camels striding across the dunes is not far from the mark. Such a caravan would often consist of a mixed bunch of travelers, with only their destination in common; bandits and other perils of the road and desert meant there was safety in numbers. (GMs will note that the opportunities for social interaction, interesting meetings and even espionage in such a random collection of people could be considerable.)

One of the responsibilities of medieval Islamic government was the maintenance of trade routes. This included not only keeping roads clear and suppressing bandits but also providing shelters (*caravanserais*) at stopping-places between cities, and even signposts to indicate the safest path. There were also land-lighthouses to mark roads; these might be attached to caravanserais, or stand alone.

On rivers, boats proved slow and costly, but they remained an option. Islamic traders also took to the sea, with both oars and sail. This too implied government works; lighthouses marked hazards, and ports and harbors were carefully administered and taxed. Most traders hugged the coast, beaching or finding a port every night; but once the boldest learned enough to sail into deeper waters, others followed, and Muslim sea-power in the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean was formidable. Traditionally, the captain of a trading vessel sat on the prow, surrounded by navigational tools, watching ahead as he issued commands to his crew. The Sinbad-movie image of the captain at the wheel is a modern Western idea.

As skilled astronomers and mathematicians, the Arabs were able navigators. However, although they used the astrolabe (an instrument that measures the position of the sun or a star above the horizon with some accuracy) for astronomy, a design of this instrument suitable for navigation can only be traced with any certainty to 16th-century Europe. (Columbus and other noted European explorers used it heavily.) The *Arabian Nights* also mentions magical navigation.

Gunpowder

The history of gunpowder is still uncertain and much discussed; the best guess would seem to be that it was a Chinese discovery that traveled west in the writings of alchemists. Variants of Greek fire including saltpeter, with some explosive effects, may have been the first development.

The earliest possible date for black powder guns in Muslim lands would be 1280, but these would have been "Midfa" – metal pots on the end of staves, dangerous and inaccurate, throwing crude bullets or feathered bolts. They may well have been armorers' experiments, never used in action. (As with Greek fire, their best use would have been to scare opponents who hadn't seen them before.) Vague references in contemporary texts to "fire weapons," mostly used in sieges, could mean either Greek fire or primitive explosives.

However, it is important to remember that Eastern nations produced excellent archers, who could, under good conditions, produce a much greater rate of fire than gunners of the time. It is only in cinematic games that newly-invented gunpowder should be a war-winning advantage rather than a tricky gimmick.



The Marsh Arabs

Even in ancient times, not all Arabs were camel-riding desert dwellers. Some of the race settled in the marsh where the Tigris and Euphrates meet before flowing into the Persian Gulf; later, in the wake of the Mongol devastation of Mesopotamia, refugees and Bedouin migrants augmented this community.

Malaria and fevers plague the marshes; visitors, let alone invaders, find them difficult to explore. The "marsh Arabs" are isolated and isolationist. They retain a tough, suspicious, tribal mentality, although they may treat polite, non-threatening visitors well; some visitors come away with a liking for the people.

Class Structure

The ancient kingdoms and empires of the East had feudal aristocracies. Meanwhile, in the desert, the Bedouin tribes had a kind of primitive democracy, with each tribe electing its leaders (*sheikhs*) from among its wisest speakers and best warriors. However, this system was not as open as that may sound; older, more powerful families had a great deal of respect, and could count on plenty of votes.

Islam emerged from this system, but challenged it. Mohammed himself was from a minor clan, and his ideas had to overcome the resistance of entrenched interests. So, at its foundation, Islam was an egalitarian religion; it might even oppose the idea of a secular leader with absolute power. However, as it grew, its empire needed rulers.

At first, these were simply the conquerors – especially the desert tribes who had converted to Islam early on, and most especially, members of Mohammed's family. The old Arab admiration for lineage returned; Mohammed's descendants were respected, right through to the 20th century, as a kind of nobility, not necessarily linked to wealth or power.

Meanwhile, other power structures were developing. At the top were the caliphs, a more-or-less hereditary monarchy. Below the court, the *'amirs* were much like European knights, giving military service in exchange for control of land. This position could also become hereditary. However, Islam never denied that the lowly could rise; several dynasties were founded by slave-soldiers.

One other oddity to note: because the Arabs were the conquerors, Arab descent was a mark of status in early times. A snobbish, newly-risen Persian or Syrian might even fake Arab ancestry. Arabs were particularly important in military positions, while Persians remained important in the civil service.

Slaves

Despite the fact that desperate parents from very poor regions were known to sell their own children into slavery, Muslim slavers had to look elsewhere – it was illegal to enslave another Muslim. As a result, raiding activities on the borders of the Islamic world were often slave-gathering expeditions; the old slaver's excuse of bringing primitives and pagans into more advanced lands and giving them the benefits of "civilization" was tied up in this. A large part of the profits of the Barbary corsairs, for example, came from slave-taking, especially since European captives could be ransomed for even fatter profits.

The development of the harem led to a demand for eunuch slaves. This was another reason for slave-raiding beyond the borders of Islam, with eunuchs bought or made before import. (So the despised eunuch of the *Arabian Nights* tales is often a despised foreigner as well.)

Skin color is often mentioned in stories. Arabs were swarthier than their Persian neighbors, lighter than African Negroes – and thought themselves superior to either. Thus slaves might as easily be marked by black skin or by red hair; they were looked down on for being *slaves*, not for their color as such. The Negro (actually half-Arab) hero 'Antar was based on a much-admired real-world poet; once 'Antar gains his freedom, however, he shows little special sympathy for other slaves (of any color).

Better owners treated their slaves as part of the family; in many places, it was not only taken for granted that any slave could eventually hope for freedom, but that the owner would set a freedman up with money or property. Freed slaves often remained loyal to their former owners; some of the most talented civil servants and assistants of early Muslim rulers were court freedmen. Islam permits free men to marry slave women, and the harem system involved slave-concubines. In both cases, the husband would sometimes free the woman as a mark of respect or affection. If a female slave bore a child, and her master formally acknowledged it as his own, the child was free, and the slave became free on the master's death.

Science and Scholarship

Muslim scholars studied and systematized, and made many important contributions. Medieval Islam was the most dynamic source of scientific knowledge in the world. A *hadith* advised Muslims to “Seek knowledge, even if it be in China.”

However, medieval Islamic science – like medieval European science – did not attempt the kind of direct manipulation of the physical world that modern Western science excels in. Rather, the scholar sought to know and understand the shapes and symbols of the natural world; from this, it was believed, deep *spiritual* insights might follow. The ultimate scientist was the *hakim*, the sage.

Nonetheless, Islamic engineering was second to none in many areas. Medieval Islamic ceramics and crystal-work were exquisite. Skilled astronomers and geographers advised on navigation; engineers, drawing on physics and mathematics, constructed efficient irrigation systems; medical doctors achieved effective cures as well as accurate diagnoses. (On the other hand, the great Al-hazen embarrassingly failed to come up with a flood control scheme for the ruler of Egypt, and had to feign madness to avoid trouble.) An *Arabian Nights* setting is one where useful knowledge is available and applied.

Philosophy and Physics

Medieval Islamic philosophers often studied what we would call “theoretical physics” – the nature of matter, time, and motion – with more originality than the “physical” scientists, who followed ancient Greek ideas closely. Some Muslim scientists performed practical experiments in optics, matter density, simple machines and so on. However, this was a sideline to the usual theoretical, abstract approach.

Medieval Islam had simple mechanical clocks. Timepieces of any accuracy were a later invention, but one to which Muslim ingenuity contributed. But even big, crude, early devices would have been expensive; simple candles and water-drip devices would have been far more widespread.

Mathematics

Whereas medieval Europe showed little interest in mathematics, Muslims made a number of important advances. If nothing else, their role in spreading the system now known as “Arabic” numerals (the digits 1 to 9), and the use of zero, from their source in India across the world, was crucial. This attraction to mathematical study reflects an Islamic belief in an underlying, mysterious logic to the universe.

Astronomy

Many modern star names are Arabic in origin, a mark of the significance of Islamic astronomy: Algol (*al ghul* – the ghul), Vega and Altair (reduced from the Arabic for “The Swooping Eagle” and “The Flying Eagle”), Deneb, Rigel, Betelgeuse, Fomalhaut, Aldebaran, and so on.

Early Islamic astronomy was linked to astrology. The latter declined under theological pressure after the 13th century, but it never entirely died out.

Muslim rulers sometimes financed great observatories which also functioned as teaching institutions. Aside from aids to navigation, Muslim astronomers developed highly accurate calendars.

Alchemy

The Arabs and Persians studied ancient Greek and Christian work on the subject of chemicals and substances. They built a style of alchemy subtly different from the “Greek School” that dominated Europe, but effective. Like the Europeans, they wanted to manufacture gold; they also mastered techniques of distillation.

Universities and Centers of Learning

The first Muslim colleges were religious schools attached to mosques, teaching reading, writing and law, thus ensuring that religious advice was always available to the community (a system that continues throughout Islam). Subsequently, rulers established universities (with libraries) in their cities. Some may have built on pre-Islamic foundations, especially in Persia. Libraries were where texts were translated from Greek and other languages.

In the 11th century, great universities were founded in cities including Cairo and Baghdad, partly to train intellectuals to argue with the embarrassingly bright Christian and Jewish philosophers of the Islamic lands, partly as status symbols for their founders. Despite later decay, some of these foundations survive today, the oldest universities in the world. There were also astronomical observatories (again, usually founded by rulers), hospitals and Sufi “monasteries.”

One-to-one teaching was both commonplace and regarded as perfectly natural. The normal method was for a student to study closely for years with a single teacher, a highly personal, basically informal process. Years of close contact helped maintain the “chain” of knowledge and *attitude* that Muslims so respected. On the other hand, it also led to conservatism of approach; in modern times, outsiders criticize Muslim teaching for its emphasis on rote learning and obsessive memorization of “set texts.”



Greek Fire

The discovery that some liquids burn, and the idea of somehow throwing them at enemies, pre-dates recorded history. However, the trick was rarely worth much; such oils tend to spread and burn out easily, and are usually fairly simple to extinguish or wash off. "Greek fire" is a special, deadlier idea, a mixture of flammable compounds that carries as a jet, burns hot, floats on water, sticks to targets, and is hard to put out (in short, a precursor of modern napalm). A Syrian architect named Kallinikos is often credited with its invention; he sold it to the Byzantines around 673 A.D. The Arabs probably had it within a couple of centuries, but the Muslim defenders of Acre, during the third Crusade of 1190-1191, were saved by *one* individual who knew an incendiary recipe and could build weapons to use it. In modern fantasy films, the knowledge again appears as a deadly secret. It is perhaps the best-known creation of practical Middle Eastern alchemy.

Greek fire was much feared because water didn't put it out (and it floated). Fire-fighters needed sand, or (according to legend) vinegar or urine, although the chemistry of that is rather uncertain. In land battles (mostly in sieges), its main use was its surprise effect; good troops could be taught counter-measures, and fire weapons had limited range and accuracy. It was mostly used at sea, where a good tactician with a few siphon-ships could play havoc with whole enemy fleets: fire was always the sailor's great fear in the days of wooden ships. The Byzantine navy used it extensively (hence its name).

Automatic Fire

"Automatic Fire" was similar to Greek fire, but with special properties: it burst into flame in the midday heat, or in early morning sunlight, or on contact with moisture (such as morning dew). It was probably older (and rarer) than Greek fire. It was not used in thrown pots or sprays, but for various tricks and traps. Smearred, for example, on enemy-occupied wooden buildings or siege engines overnight, it could cause devastation while the users were far away. "Automatic Fire" was said to be as hard to extinguish as Greek fire.

For game purposes, alchemist experts could be assumed to know recipes that would be triggered in each of the three circumstances (if the mix was exactly right).



However, their view of this science was, again, deeply mystical; they did not distinguish between alchemy and chemistry, and many wise Muslim alchemists would have considered an obsession with gold-making as missing the point (as well as vulgar). What mattered was the "great work," the symbolic study of purification – of substances, and of the soul. The creation of gold would simply be the supreme example of purification.

On the other hand, some Muslim alchemists took a practical approach, avoiding mysticism, and turned alchemy into chemistry.

A name for any Arab alchemist or astrologer to invoke is "Balinus" – actually Apollonius of Tyana, a first-century Christian mystic. His "Book of the Secret of Creation" incorporated "The Emerald Tablet," supposedly by "Hermes Trismegistos" ("Hermes the Thrice-Great," who may or may not ever have existed), with its catch-phrase, "As above, so below" (see sidebar, p. 75).

However, the practical side of Islamic alchemy also had influence. Ironically, although Islam prohibits strong drink, Arabic gave the world the name of its active ingredient: *al-kohl*, originally referring to antimony powder, was part of Arabic alchemy's technical vocabulary.

Medicine

Medicine was the best-regarded Islamic science, and Islamic medical texts were studied in Europe as late as the 17th century; their precise observations made them useful, even to doctors working from different theories. Doctors were not universally trusted, if only because their science was based on pre-Islamic sources, but they were often very effective. The true *hakim*, whose wisdom led to a better world, would be a doctor above all.

Arab doctors took what would now be called a "holistic" approach, treating the mind as well as the body. The result was subtle, thoughtful, though rather mystical treatments. Doctors were expected to be wise and virtuous as well as intelligent and widely-read; many great philosophers made their livings in medicine. Non-Muslims could achieve fame as doctors; Saladin's personal surgeon was a noted Jewish thinker.

Techniques – at a time when European doctors usually relied on amputation and physical shock – tended to involve subtle drugs, and even psychology (such as deliberately getting the patient angry so as to accelerate metabolic effects). Drugs such as opium were used to good effect, while at the same time doctors were taught to be careful of their addictive properties.

Sadly, this great tradition didn't become part of Arab culture; in the 19th century, Western travelers found that Bedouin tribesmen seemed to treat *every* problem by cauterizing with hot irons!



Geography

The *Arabian Nights* tales show a certain disdain for geography. They treat everywhere from Morocco to China as much the same, although the distances between are often mentioned. Minor details, such as varying styles of bread-making, are invoked for effect. To most Muslims, most foreigners had more in common (foolishness, scheming habits, hostility to Islam) than they had differences. GMs will probably want to pay some attention to accurate geography, but a degree of vague inaccuracy fits the sources.

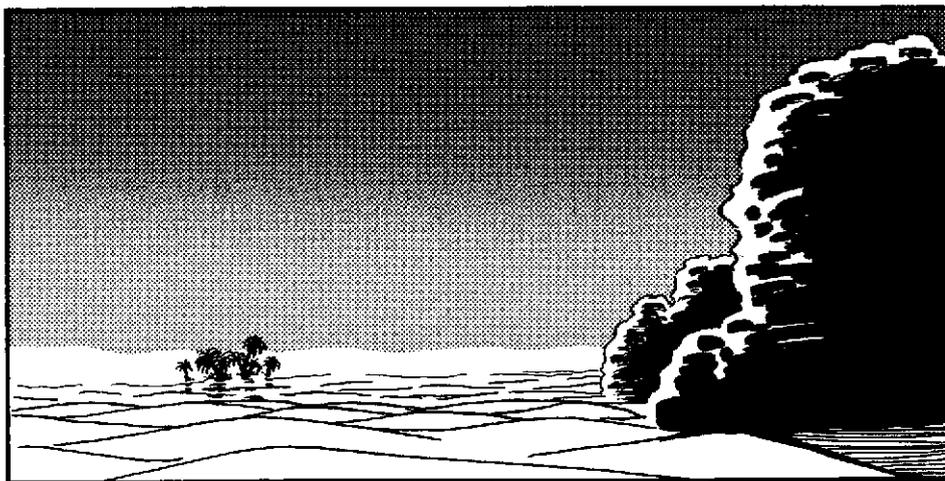
The Climate

Most of the “Lands of Islam” have Mediterranean, sub-equatorial weather; large areas are desert. Like most deserts, they become bitterly cold at night, and occasionally suffer sudden, severe flash floods which overwhelm unwise travelers in normally-dry wadis. (The great mosque at Mecca once, it is said, flooded to the depth of 10 feet.) Some fertile regions get adequate rain; others depend on regular river floods, or on artificial irrigation. Wars are fought over oases; the desert tribes sometimes turn envious eyes on the fertile lands.

People who set out to travel from one oasis-town to another without ensuring an adequate water supply (or blankets for the desert night) are idiots, and *will* suffer badly. On the other hand, GMs shouldn't over-emphasize the heat. For example, the idea of wearing full chainmail in such conditions seems appalling – yet that is exactly what many Crusaders (and some Saracens) did. But a heavily-laden traveler in the desert needs water even more than most; when armies let themselves be cut off from supplies, they quickly became desperate and undisciplined. (The rules on p. B130 and p. B134 apply, but GMs should be flexible, provided at least one party member has Survival (Desert) skill, and the travelers carry plenty of water.) At a less brutal level, one of the great luxuries of the setting is a long, cold drink (especially if ice is somehow available); PCs riding into town at the end of a long day should be encouraged to head first for the well.

Arabia

The Arabian peninsula extends from the Mediterranean coastlands to the Indian Ocean, divided from Asia by the Persian Gulf, and from Africa by the Red Sea. Most of it is desert. The Mesopotamian plain, to the north, can be cultivated, and the northwestern region was fertile enough for the Bible to talk (poetically) of a “land of milk and honey,” but the central plateau, the *Nejd*, is barely habitable. A mountain range divides it from the *Hejaz* lowlands by the Red Sea. At its southern end, the *Hejaz* is relatively fertile, as is the Indian Ocean coast, and the nations known today as Yemen and Oman developed there, sometimes becoming



Bandits and Corsairs

From the earliest times, Bedouin tribes had a reputation as bandits. Individual rogues aside, they expressed their tradition of inter-tribal rivalry in raids and skirmishes; a clever tactician who could get away with another tribe's best camels was much admired. The Bedouins also disdained agriculture, but ate its products; there was always a temptation to steal from the *fellahin*. (Mohammed criticized such behavior.) Furthermore, the Bedouins regarded the desert as *their* land; they therefore felt entitled to demand tolls from traders and travelers, and when these were not paid, they took what they felt entitled to.

Thus bandits “on the road” might be outright criminals – or they might have some kind of justification, at least in their own eyes. Even mighty empires paid tolls to the Bedouins around the pilgrim route to Mecca, and any failure in such payments (due, say, to corrupt or inept officials) could mean trouble for travelers. Sometimes, Bedouin behavior could seem almost whimsical; rich-looking travelers might be robbed, but those without anything worth taking *might* be treated with great courtesy. After all, if they were on Bedouin territory, and they weren't enemies, they were *guests*.

Similar attitudes arose with the Barbary corsairs. These were the Muslim equivalent of European privateers, carrying on “legalized piracy” for profit, with the “justification” of the unending conflict between Turkey and Europe. They were efficient and brave, and treated their prisoners (who were, after all, potentially valuable for ransom or as slaves) with some courtesy. On the other hand, they *were* aggressive slave-takers, and there were doubtless ruthless thugs among them.

The Arts

Islam is austere, but not entirely hostile to art. However, two prohibitions are very significant. The first is against any attempt to imitate the work of Allah. The Koran is the word of Allah; any attempt to imitate its style is banned. Furthermore, any attempt at representational art – such as realistic pictures – may be blasphemous; Arab art tends to abstract designs and calligraphy rather than pictures. (Persian artists, looking back to an ancient visual tradition, are more relaxed, and have been responsible for some exquisite miniature paintings. Also, some rulers commissioned pictorial decorations for their harems, which would be out of sight of the public.)

Islam also prohibits *lying*, and puritans extend this to any kind of fiction; after all, an imaginary world might be a blasphemous imitation of Allah's creation. This is extreme, as the existence of the *Arabian Nights* proves, but it is one reason why the "highest" Arabic literature consists largely of poetry about emotions.

Because of the need to impress by style rather than description, Muslim writing, and speech, tends to hyperbole. Promises and threats alike sound wild and even ludicrous to English speakers, who are more used to understatement. (Modern Muslim leaders who talk about the "great Satan" or the "mother of all battles" show signs of this.)

Music and Dance

Early Islamic morality despised music. The nearest thing permitted was a chanted recitation of the Koran, which often served as a form of entertainment.

However, the ban was not effective. Some Muslims argued that it only covered musical instruments; the human voice, being a gift of God, could hardly be immoral. Trained slave singers – who might perform from behind a screen to audiences of the opposite sex – were highly valued. They sometimes sang to instrumental accompaniment, and musical techniques reappeared from conquered or neighboring cultures. The dervishes took to music, and the lute and the modern guitar owe much to Islamic instruments. Wind instruments such as flutes were also used, and the drum and tambourine were old favorites.

Slave-girls with musical talent were highly valued, received years of expensive training in special schools, and sang at private parties. Although "folk" dancing and dancing games survived, they were not especially regarded. To the extent that the scantily-clad "harem dancing girls" of legend ever existed, they were a late (Turkish?) development. Belly-dancing was a form of private exercise and amusement for the women of later harems, only being adopted for any kind of public entertainment in recent times.

wealthy from seaborne trade, and from the sale of incense obtained from local trees. Often, however, the communities of the Hejaz, including the holy city of Mecca, have had to import their food from Egypt. The Arabs who conquered an empire soon moved their capital to more fertile areas – Syria, then Iraq.

The *Empty Quarter* (Rub' al-Khali) is the inland region at the southern end of the Nejd. This is the largest area of continuous sand in the world (250,000 square miles), taking up more than a quarter of modern Saudi Arabia. Until oil was found there this century, it was almost totally unexplored; it is utterly dry and uninhabitable, and even the Bedouins regard it with horrified awe.

Persia

The heartland of Persia is the Iranian Plateau. This highland region lies between the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf; it has a great desert at its center, surrounded by mountains, with more fertile valleys where villages and cities developed. This geography encouraged the development of feudal, decentralized empires.

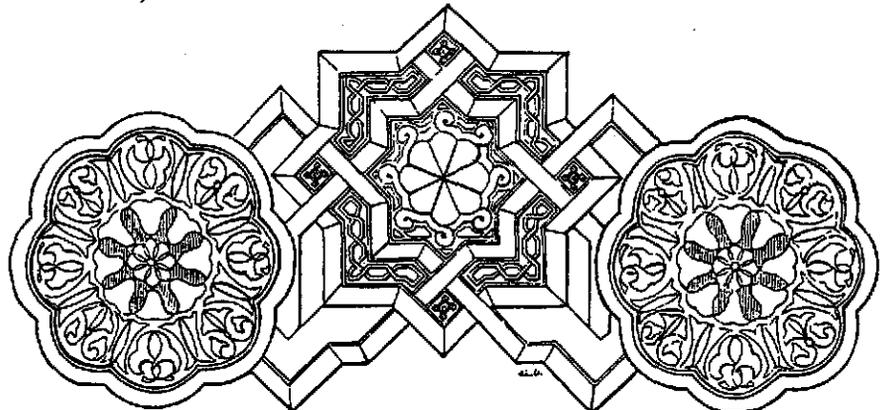
Anatolia

The region of Asia extending west from Persia towards Europe (also known as "Asia Minor") is mostly highlands; Turkey, which occupies it today, is less than 9% level ground. The main lowland areas are on the coasts; the mountains are rugged, scarred by ancient glaciers. The vegetation is mostly scrub, with forests on higher slopes, while the interior plateau is steppe country.

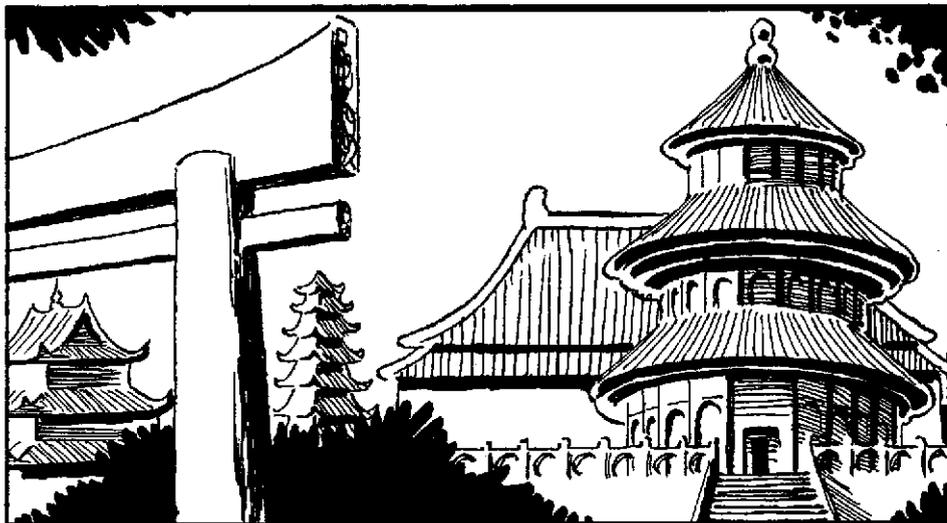
Views of the World Beyond

Early Muslim images of the world referred to a central cosmic mountain, *Qaf*, and to "Seven Climes" – just as there were seven heavens in Muslim theology. These "Climes" were bands running east-west; the first six were inhabited by folk of skin colors ranging from black, in the most southerly, to white in the most northerly. The seventh was an obscure mystery. Alternatively, geographers classified the Earth as divided into four quarters.

In the oceans of the far west, there were the "Fortunate" or "Eternal" Islands, presumably the Canaries; Islam never looked beyond that, at least until the availability of fat prizes in the Atlantic led to Muslim piracy based in northwest Africa – the "Sallee Rovers." Cultivated lands were said to stretch from the equator to Thule ("which belongs to Britannia") in the north, and from the Fortunate Islands to China. The Asian steppes were known to be inhabited by fierce nomads; the Arabs picked up the ancient myth that Alexander the Great had built a wall to keep them out, which would fall when the world ended (possibly a hint about the Great Wall of China).



The first part-European nation which Islam met was *Byzantium*, the eastern remnant of the Roman Empire, with its capital city, Constantinople, at the mouth of the Black Sea. These "Romans" or "Greeks" were Christians, but also Eastern; they fought against Islam with some success, but the two cultures could communicate.



Ethiopia – the eastern African kingdom lying south of Egypt – was known to the Arabs. Early stories portrayed it as a land of mystery, and an enemy; before Islam, it had attacked Arabia across the Red Sea. Later, in the time of Mohammed, some of his followers traveled there to find temporary refuge from pagan persecution. Ethiopia was, in fact, a Christian nation from early times, but Arab tales portrayed Ethiopians as "fire worshippers," like the Zoroastrians.

As Muslim trade spread, some traders became acquainted with the real Ethiopia. Islam was adopted in the northern coastal region of Eritrea; by the 14th century, Christian and Muslim Africans were fighting each other (a conflict with bloody echoes in the modern world). Later traders moved on down the coast, taking their religion with them. Games might follow the myth or the reality of Ethiopia; either way, it ought to appear as a land of bizarre, but sophisticated, African culture.

China was a wealthy land, highly urbanized and with strange customs (such as using paper money instead of gold and silver), but skillful in the arts. Muslim visitors generally found it well-regulated and safe; there were many Muslim merchants there, and every city seemed to have a "Muslim quarter."

India was also well known, as a rich land of unbelievers, strange in many ways, with a complex caste system, but expert in the arts and sciences. India was often attacked by Muslims, but never completely conquered. To its north was *Tibet*, a mountain land, frequently conquered by China, sometimes allied with the Muslims against this foe.

Islam – and Muslim trade – also spread eastward by sea. Later Spanish conquerors attempted to bring Catholicism to the Philippines, but never suppressed the fanatical "Moros." In Brunei, on the coast of Borneo, a full-fledged Muslim sultanate was established.

Lastly, *Europe* was another region whose inhabitants often fought the Muslims. Despite the enmity, there was also trade and some exchange of ideas. Although Muslims had little liking for the cold, wet north, the better educated among them had some idea of its geography and politics. (Apart from the "Greeks" and Crusaders, they met the Rus on the Black Sea, whose culture was Scandinavian in origin.)

Ship Types

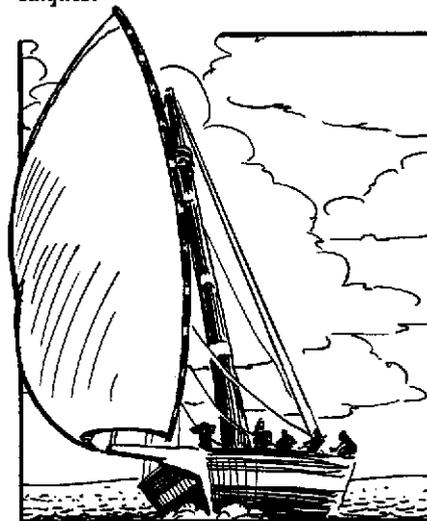
The *dhow*, the classic Muslim work-horse on the Indian Ocean, is still in use. It has a sharp, up-thrust bow, and one or two masts with lateen (slanting triangular) sails. The design is not very efficient working across the wind, but given the predictable conditions of this ocean, that may not matter too much. Larger designs included *baggalas* and *booms*. Other ships working this ocean included a few Chinese junks, and later, European galleons.

On the Mediterranean, the favorite design was the *galley*, a slim vessel, designed to be propelled by oars but carrying a mast and sails (square- or lateen-rigged): rowers could not keep up much speed for more than a couple of hours, and on long runs, favorable winds were welcome. Military galleys were fitted with rams, to hole targets below the waterline. If ships became locked together, marines swarmed over the sides and a melee would ensue. This was the favorite tactic of the Barbary corsairs, who did not use rams; the privateer's objective is to capture, not sink.

The basic galley design developed from the Greek triremes through the later, massive quinqueremes and Roman grain-ships to the ornate fleets of Lepanto, but the essential methods were common to all. The corsairs' smaller "galleys" were called *galloets*, *brigantines* or *frigates*, down to the *felucca* with only 3-5 oars a side.

A sail-powered craft was never as fast as a good oared vessel over short distances, and was vulnerable to calm, hence all the "mixed" designs. However, sail gave greater endurance, and sailing craft could carry cannon where other ships had to place oars. A flotilla might have a couple of feluccas for towing and in-shore maneuvers, protected by a bigger sailed ship. (Felucca escorts made many of the corsairs' captures.) As gunnery improved, the galley faded.

Mediterranean sailed ships included the *tartan*, the *pollacca*, the small, three-masted *barques* and the two-masted *saiques*.



HISTORY OF THE ISLAMIC LANDS

The "Arabian Nights World" is based on medieval Islam. However, a glance at the older history behind this setting may be useful.

The kingdom of Egypt blossomed, flourished, and declined over a period of more than two millenia. The Tigris-Euphrates flood plain saw the rise and fall of Sumer and Babylon. The Persians rose to greatness under Cyrus, Darius and Xerxes, but were defeated by the Greek city-states. Philip II of Macedonia began an empire which his son Alexander extended into Egypt, Persia and India. Rome conquered Greece, moved into Asia Minor and was supreme in the Middle East until its division into eastern and western halves. The Sassanid dynasty ruled an area including Iran, Iraq and part of central Asia.

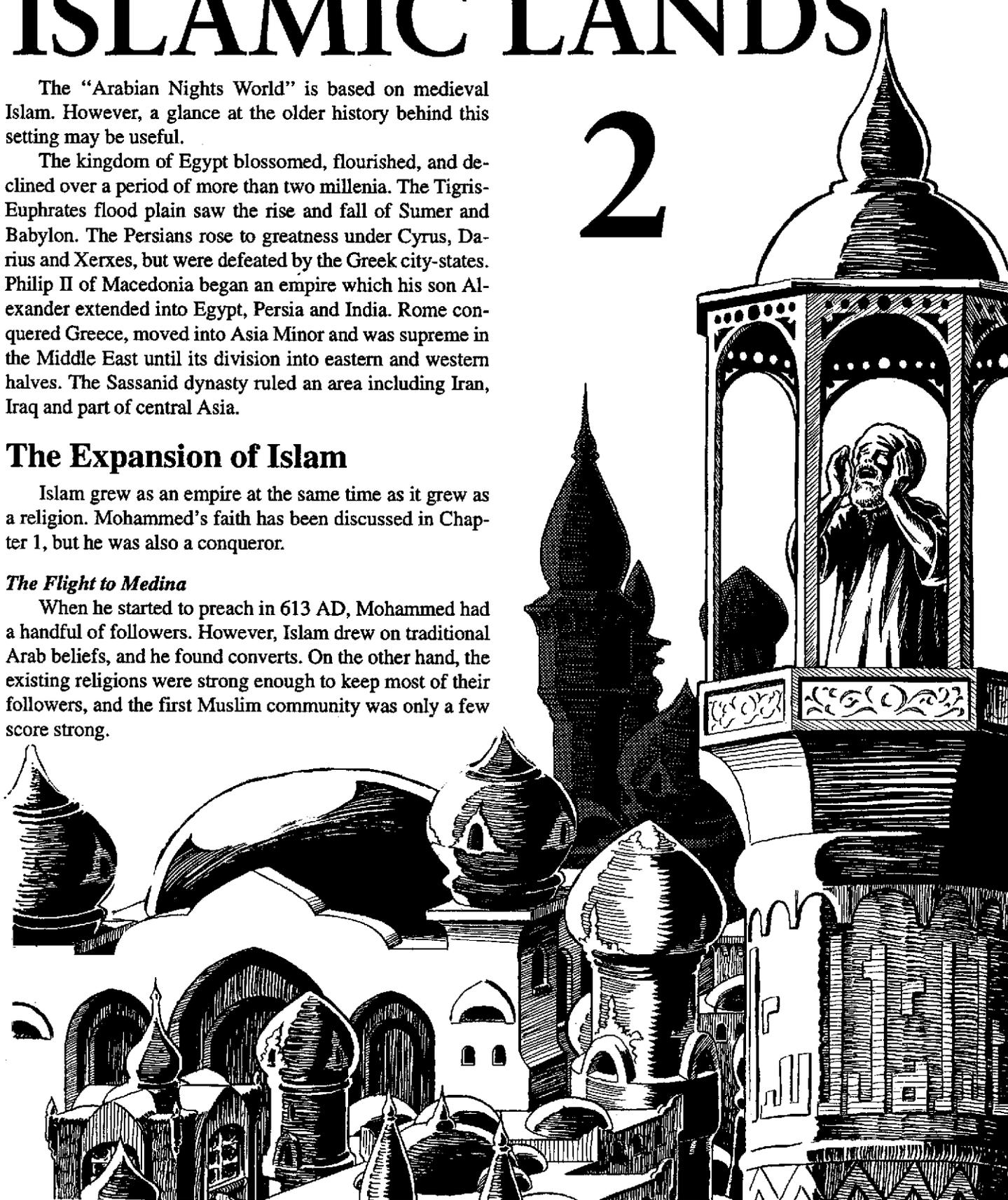
The Expansion of Islam

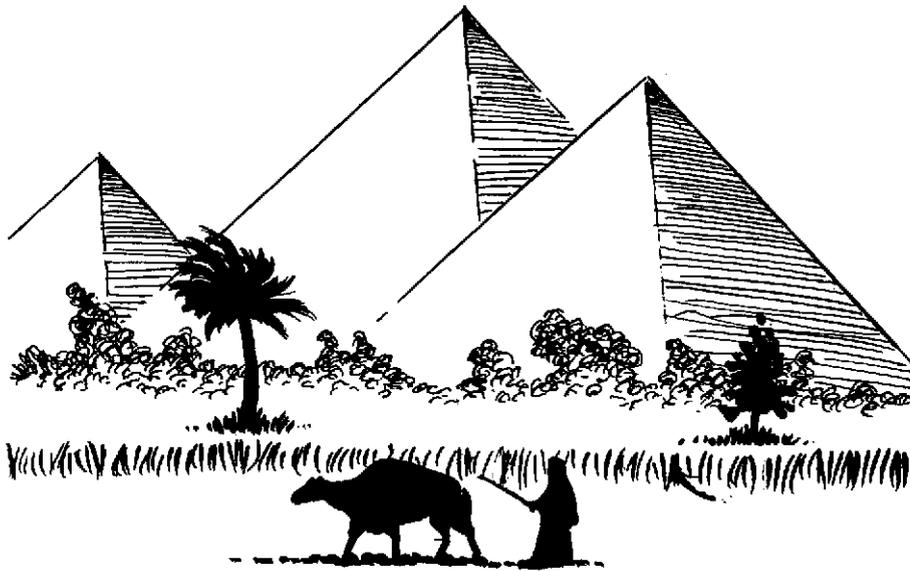
Islam grew as an empire at the same time as it grew as a religion. Mohammed's faith has been discussed in Chapter 1, but he was also a conqueror.

The Flight to Medina

When he started to preach in 613 AD, Mohammed had a handful of followers. However, Islam drew on traditional Arab beliefs, and he found converts. On the other hand, the existing religions were strong enough to keep most of their followers, and the first Muslim community was only a few score strong.

2





Mohammed's message was not universally popular; in Mecca, he was seen as a threat by the pagan cults, and distrusted by the Jewish and Christian tribes. In 622 AD, he was forced to flee to Medina, 280 miles away, with around 75 followers. This is the *Hegira* (or "Hijra"), the "emigration," from which the Muslim calendar is dated.

In Medina, Mohammed found more converts. He became a community leader, establishing the rules that became the basis of Muslim law. At the same time, he had to fight off hostile tribes, sometimes winning against much stronger forces, sometimes losing (a story which Muslims take as a warning against overconfidence). Within six years, he was not only secure, but able to muster an army of several thousand and return to Mecca.

The Capture of Mecca

Mohammed's return was strategically necessary; he had adopted the old belief in Mecca's sacred importance. His army surrounded the place, and a truce was made. Although some accounts speak of massacres of unbelievers, Mohammed seems to have achieved control with remarkably little bloodshed, permitting Jews and Christians to live within his domains; however, most Arabs became Muslims. Two years later, Mohammed entered Mecca as a pilgrim, confirming his position.

Two years after that, in 632 A.D., the Prophet died. By then, his armies were spreading across Arabia. In 634, they took Syria, followed by Egypt in 641. However, by that time, the question of who was to rule this new empire was becoming a problem.

The First Caliphs

Mohammed had made no clear statement of how matters were to be arranged after him. If he had left a living son, then his realm might have been treated according to traditional laws of inheritance; as it was, the new faith fell into controversy.

A minority, the Shiites, supported 'Ali, Mohammed's cousin, husband of his daughter Fatima, and one of his first followers. However, the majority – or at least, the senior faction, the Sunnis – backed Abu Bakr, one of Mohammed's fathers-in-law, who became *khalifa*, or "deputy" – *caliph*. Abu Bakr was able to re-impose the rule that had been shaken by Mohammed's death, and he was soon sending expeditions against the Byzantines and the Persians.

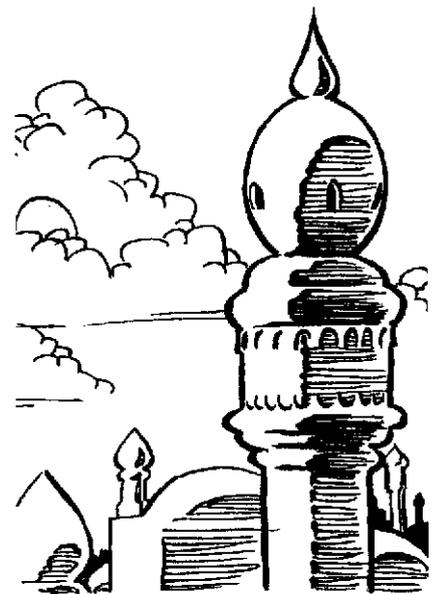
The old, weakened empires found they had a real problem with the Arabs, who could strike out of the desert on fast horses, then disappear again, using their camels and survival skills to move efficiently in the wilderness. This had been a

The Legend of Prester John

It is written that, in about 1165 AD, a letter arrived in the courts of Christian Europe. It claimed to come from a great Christian king in the distant east, whose name was "Prester John." ('Prester' came from 'Presbyter', or priest.) He claimed to be immensely rich and powerful, and Christendom was enthralled; such a friend, beyond the lands of the Saracens, would be a wonderful ally for the Crusaders as they struggled against the ever-stronger Muslims. The letter was widely believed; after all, it was not the first news of Prester John. He was first mentioned, battling against the Seljuks, in a text dated to 1145.

In fact, the letter was a literary and political hoax. The tales of Prester John were garbled accounts of the early Mongol victories over the eastern Seljuks; one account mentioned "King David of India," son of Prester John, descendant of the biblical magi – but actually described Genghis Khan. Conversely, Marco Polo identified Prester John with a Mongol Khan who had died fighting Genghis. The fact was that some of the Mongols were Nestorian Christians, and they surely terrified the Muslims – but the "great eastern ally of Christendom" was a product of pure wishful thinking.

Not that this stopped Christians hoping – and sometimes even sending letters east, asking for aid. The myth survived to the 14th century, when reports of Christian Abyssinians caused the focus to shift to Africa – again, somewhere beyond the Muslim enemy. The search for Prester John was one of the great hopeful wild goose chases of human history, and could well fit into a fantasy-historical campaign.



Byzantium/Istanbul

Byzantium was a Greek colony on the European side of the Bosphorus – the narrow strait that separates Europe from Asia, at the entrance to the Black Sea. The Roman Emperor Constantine made it the center of eastern imperial administration. His name was adopted by the city, so when the empire was formally split in 395 A.D., the eastern capital was “Constantinople.” Nonetheless, its state is known as the “Byzantine Empire.”

The “Byzantines” had a great but ultimately decaying realm; they often dreamed of reunifying the empire, but even their most successful attempts proved too expensive. They defeated the Sassanids, but that merely weakened Persia for conquest by Islam.

Byzantium, a byword for complex politics, ruled through a mixture of raw power and imposition of its own brand of Christianity. Muslim rule appealed to many of its subjects – even dedicated Christians – as less autocratic and more tolerant. The Byzantine empire tore itself apart over the religious “Iconoclastic Controversy,” assisting the Abbasids greatly. Byzantium regained strength later, but it was increasingly divided into feudal “themas”; after its defeat at Manzikert (1071 A.D.), Europe saw Byzantium as fatally weakened (hence the Crusades).

The great Byzantine church of Hagia Sophia was turned into a mosque and then (in the 1930s) a museum. The old walled city of Stamboul, supposed to have seven hills, like Rome, still stands. Suburbs have spread for miles around, including to the Asian side of the straits, which are reached by modern suspension bridges.

nuisance when the Arabs were bandits; as fanatic invaders, with competent generals and the unity of a shared religion, they became deadly. In Syria, the local communities, largely Arab themselves and proudly claiming cousinship with the desert tribes, happily accepted their new masters. Persia, battered and exhausted by recent wars with the Greeks, was worn down by raids.

Abu Bakr died after a couple of years, to be succeeded by Omar. Now the Arabs pushed south from Syria to Egypt, and extended their position in Persia. In 637 A.D., they defeated and killed the legendary Prince Rustem in the three-day battle of Qadisiyya, allowing them to take the Sassanid capital of Ctesiphon; another major victory followed at Nihawand in 642, and all of Persia except one small province was taken by 649.

Meanwhile, Omar had died in 644, to be replaced by Uthman, of the Umayyad family; expansion continued, into Afghanistan and North Africa, and by sea sorties into the Mediterranean. Byzantine resistance had firmed up, but raids continued across the border.



-8,000 to -859

-8,000

Jericho, a fair-sized settlement defended by a stone wall and a ditch, trades with places as far away as Turkey, and supports itself by harvesting wild grain and by hunting.

-7,000

Catal Huyuk, Turkey, a village of 5,000, supports itself with agriculture.

-6500

Catal Huyuk keeps sheep, goats and, later, cattle. Pottery and weaving develop.

-4,000 to -3000

Urban society develops on the Tigris-Euphrates flood plain, the “land of Sumer,” to manage the rivers. Lords (high priests of patron gods) rule the cities.



-3,100

Kingdoms of Upper and Lower Egypt are united under the double crown of Upper Egypt.

-3,000s

The Sumerian city of Uruk develops an early picture-writing, precursor to later cuneiform.

-2,700 to -2,200

The Old Kingdom of Egypt creates the pyramids.

-2,200 to -1575

Egypt suffers decay and revolt in the “Intermediate Periods.”

-1,700s

The Sumerian King Hammurabi of Babylon develops a comprehensive legal code.

-1575

Southern Egyptians found the New Kingdom; Egypt becomes an imperial power.

-1385 to -1358

Pharaoh Akhenaton introduces monotheism to Egypt, sparking religious disputes.

-1274

Ramses II fights the Hittites to a draw at Qadesh.

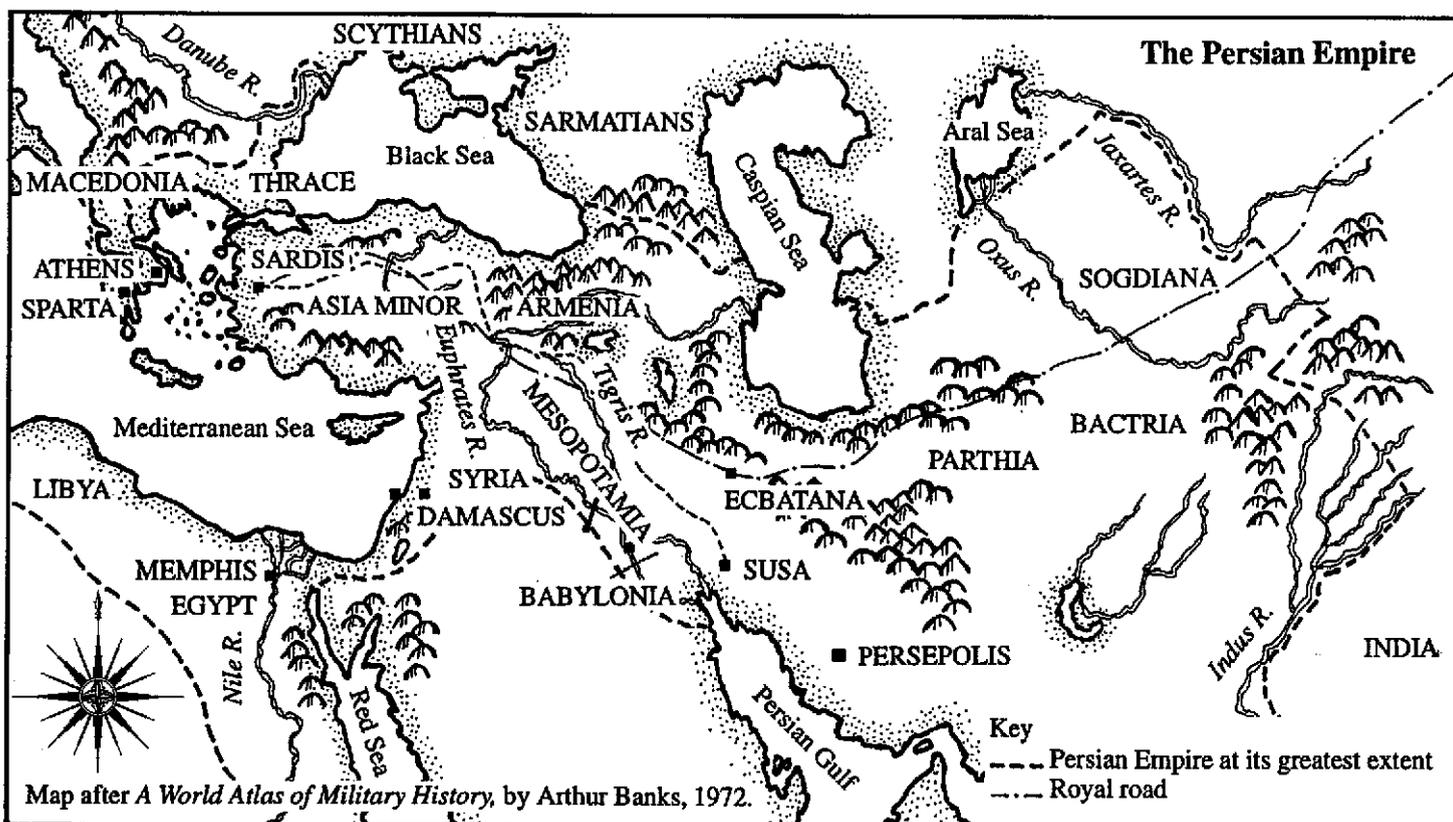
Shalmaneser I begins Assyrian policy of extremely bloody conquest.

-1250? on

Egypt loses its empire in a centuries-long decline.

-883 to -859

Assur-nasir-pal II moves the Assyrian capital to Nineveh; Assyrian power rises again.



Uthman survived until 656, but was then murdered by court enemies. Now, 'Ali finally got his chance.

However, although he had widespread support, he also had enemies, including Uthman's aristocratic kinsman Mu'awiya, who hinted darkly about the murder of Uthman. 'Ali had to negotiate, and he in turn was murdered in 661, by extremists who denied that *any* leader was either needed or morally entitled to rule the faithful.

This gave the *Shi'atu Ali*, the "Party of 'Ali," a martyr. Mu'awiya took the caliphate, but was faced with rebellions. Both of 'Ali and Fatima's sons were killed, the first murdered in a harem intrigue, the second, Hosein, in battle – yet another martyr. Another son by a different wife, Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyya, disappeared, leading to prophecies of his eventual return as the *Mahdi*.

The Children's Crusade

The most tragic of crusades was the "Children's Crusade" of 1212, when bands of French and German children were persuaded by some bizarre preaching that they could take back Jerusalem by power of faith alone. Led by Stephen, a French shepherd boy, and Nicholas, a boy from Cologne, they struggled across Europe. Many of them died. Of the rest, most were taken into slavery; some reached Italy to be sold to Egypt, and some only reached Marseilles before they were taken. An estimated 50,000 children were lost.

-671 to -201

-671

Assyria invades and temporarily conquers Egypt.



-612

Babylon allies with the Medes and the Scythian barbarians of Central Asia to destroy Nineveh, with Assur-bani-pal's library of 22,000 clay tablets.

-550

Cyrus, king of Persia, overthrows the Medes with Babylonian help; he then conquers Lydia and Babylon itself to carve out an empire more than 1,500 miles across.

-522

Darius of Parthia becomes king of Persia, from the west of Egypt to the borders of India. The kingdom is peaceful, religiously tolerant and heavily taxed.

-490

The Persians attack the Greek city-states, who force them back to their ships at the Battle of Marathon.

-480

Xerxes, the Persian King of Kings, marches his army across the Hellespont on a boat-bridge. Many Greek cities submit; Athens is taken and sacked; all three hundred Spartans in the Pass of Thermopylae are wiped out. Athens then destroys the Persian fleet at Battle of Salamis.

-359

Philip II of Macedonia unites Macedonia, creates a professional army and uses both the army and diplomacy to gain control of Greece.



-334

Alexander of Macedonia crosses the Hellespont to begin conquest of Egypt and Persia; he was also victorious in India, but mutiny in his army forced him to return home.

-324

Alexander the Great dies of a fever in Babylon.

-323

Ptolemy Soter, one of Alexander's generals, founds an Egyptian dynasty that lasts through Cleopatra.

-264 to -241

Rome and its rival Carthage fight the first of three wars, called the Punic Wars.

-219 to -201

The Carthaginians begin the Second Punic War.



Mecca

Islam adopted as its chief holy place a desert city that had long been a center for religious culture. Mecca lies in a dry valley in eastern Arabia (and can occasionally suffer from flooding); it was a stop on the ancient caravan routes from the Yemen, and a festival town.

With the coming of Islam, Mecca became first and foremost a pilgrim city. It was distant from the capitals of the Muslim empires, and remained largely independent of them (although the region never produced enough food to support its population, and had to import grain from Egypt). It acknowledged the nominal sovereignty of Damascus, Baghdad and the Mamelukes. Today, Mecca lies in Saudi Arabia, and the Saudis claim the status of guardians of its shrines.

Mountains – including the one on which Mohammed had his first visions – dominate the local scenery. The town itself centers on the great al-Haram mosque and, in its central courtyard, the sacred well of Zamzam. Only Muslims are permitted to enter the city, which has no airport or rail links of its own. Travelers come in through Medina, 250 miles away, or the port of Jeddah; an efficient road-transport system carries them the rest of the way. In former centuries, the trip was much harder. Today, the population of what is by most standards an average-size town swells by one or two million people during the month of pilgrimage.

The Umayyads

The new dynasty has often been criticized within Islam, and not just by Shiites. The earlier rulers are often called the “Rightly-Guided caliphs,” whereas the Umayyads are seen as tyrants. They established the government of the new empire, which meant replacing relatively democratic tribal leadership with a monarchy. This was based in Damascus, in Syria; Mecca was left with purely religious significance. However, they were successful on their own terms. Internal reforms aside, the conquests continued; Morocco fell in 710, and from there, an invasion force promptly crossed the Straits of Gibraltar to Spain, which was conquered in three years. To the east, expeditions probed India and Central Asia.

A Mixed Culture

The Muslim domains were becoming more than just an Arab empire. For one thing, Islam was increasingly multi-racial; despite the Arabs’ occasional attempts to keep it for themselves, conquered people were converting to the victors’ religion. At first, they had been given the status of *mawlas*, clients – subservient to a particular Arab tribe, required to provide taxes or troops, but also protected by the tribe as a point of honor. Now, non-Arabs were becoming rulers themselves, as the old Persian nobility and civil service reappeared, Turkish mercenaries made their presence felt, and the Berbers of North Africa led the assault on Spain.

Furthermore, centralization was breaking down. The Sunni-Shia split was the first stage; the Umayyads, a family who had sometimes opposed Mohammed, were not universally respected. The extremist Kharijites established power bases; meanwhile, the Abbasids, descendants of a cousin of Mohammed’s, were building a network of supporters, diverting the energy of the Shiite movement. Arabs in Damascus could exert little control over converted Berbers invading Spain, thousands of miles away.

The End of the First Wave

In 715 A.D., Chinese armies pushed a Muslim raid back from their borders to Ferghana. In 717, the Arabs assaulted Constantinople itself, but faltered, and Islamic armies would not return for centuries. In 721 and 732, large reconnaissance raids from Spain were stopped and shattered by local armies in France. In 730, the Khazars of Asia invaded Muslim territory in retaliation for earlier raids, winning one battle and losing one.

-218 to 616

-218

Carthaginian general Hannibal crosses the Alps to invade Italy from the north.

-149 to -146

Rome destroys Carthage in the Third Punic War; 10% of the population remains alive and is sold into slavery.

Rome gains control of Greece.

-51

Gaius Julius Caesar subdues Gaul. Cleopatra VII allies herself with Caesar.

-44

Caesar is assassinated.

-31

Mark Antony and Cleopatra commit suicide following their defeat at the Battle of Actium by Octavian. Egypt becomes a Roman province.

-6

Rome annexes Judaea.

-4

Jesus of Nazareth was probably born this year.

70

The Jews revolt against Roman rule; the Romans capture and destroy Jerusalem.

226

The Sassanid dynasty rules in Persia.

395

The Roman Empire formally splits into Eastern and Western Roman Empires.

531 to 579

Chosroes I, king of Persia, leads the country to new heights of culture and art.

570

Persians overthrow Abyssinian rule in the Yemen.

Mohammed is born in Mecca.

600

Antara ibn Shaddad, author of the “Divan,” dies.

Barbarian invasions in western Europe end.

606

Mohammed’s youngest daughter, Fatima, is born.

610

Mohammed has a vision on Mount Hira.

613

Mohammed begins preaching publicly.

614

Persians conquer Damascus and Jerusalem; the Holy Cross is part of the loot.

616

Persians overrun Egypt.



North Africa and Spain

In 640 A.D., the Arabs attacked Byzantine-controlled Egypt; its capital Alexandria surrendered in 642. Next, "Ifriqiya" (modern Libya) fell in 644. The Arabs then paused until 682, when, over a period of 30 years, they conquered the Berbers of the rest of North Africa.

The Berbers converted to Islam, but remained independent at heart; they kept their own traditions, and joined sects that most Arabs considered dubious. When a Muslim army crossed the Straits of Gibraltar to Spain in 711 A.D., it consisted of 7,000 Berbers and 300 Arabs.

Spain was ruled by the Visigoths – descendants of Germanic invaders who ran what amounted to a quasi-Roman kingdom. However, it was evidently weak; the Muslims conquered all of it by 713.

Under the Abbasids, these westerly provinces started to break away. When the Umayyads were deposed in 750, one of their royal family, Abd al-Rahman, fled west, reaching Spain with a handful of companions in 755. There he was welcomed as a symbol of independence from Baghdad, and made ruler of Spain (see sidebar, p. 39).

As for Africa, Egypt was near enough for Baghdad to control, and rich enough to justify the effort, but the Maghrib, farther west, was less interesting. Rebellious governors were put down, then replaced with trusted men who were permitted a great deal of independence. In effect, the provinces were transformed into friendly states. So developed the Aghlabid dynasty of Tunisia, who would also conquer Sicily (which Islam ruled for two centuries), and the even more independent Idrisids of Morocco.

The first expansion was ended. Certainly, the great *Arab* conquests were finished; the Muslim victors of later centuries would come from other races. For now, the new rulers relied upon consolidation.

The Abbasids

The Umayyad dynasty lasted 90 years (with 11 caliphs), but in 750 A.D., after a couple of corrupt or inept caliphs, it was replaced by the Abbasids, descendants of Mohammed's uncle. The last Umayyad, Merwan, took sides in the disputes between Arab tribes (which the Abbasids may have quietly encouraged), and failed to deal with the discontents and regional jealousies of his empire. At one stage, his army missed a chance to arrest the entire Abbasid family, taking only the patriarch; the rest fled across hundreds of miles of desert before meeting their

622 to 710

622

Mohammed flees Mecca for refuge in Yathrib (renamed Medina); Moslems count this as the beginning of their calendar.

624

Mohammed marries Aisha, Abu Bekr's daughter, then 10 years old.

625

Mohammed begins dictating the Koran.

627

Meccan enemies of the Prophet besiege Medina and kill 700 Jews.

The Byzantines decisively defeat the Persians at Nineveh; Byzantine soldiers find sugar from India in the captured castle.

628

Mohammed takes Mecca, and sends letters to the world's rulers explaining the Muslim faith.

The Byzantine emperor takes back the Holy Cross from the Persians.

630

Mohammed makes pilgrimage to Mecca.

Cotton is supposedly introduced in Arab countries.

632

Mohammed dies.

Fatima dies.

Abu Bakr, Mohammed's father-in-law, succeeds him as the first caliph, and makes Medina his seat.

634

Abu Bakr dies and is succeeded by Omar I. Muslims conquer Syria and Egypt, and defeat the Byzantine emperor Heraclius. Christian access to the churches of Jerusalem, Antioch and Alexandria is curtailed.

644

Omar I dies; Uthman, of the Umayyad family, replaces him. Muslims expand into Afghanistan and North Africa.



656

Uthman's enemies at court murder him. 'Ali, Fatima's husband, becomes caliph. Mu'awiya spreads dissent.

661

'Ali, last of the "Rightly Guided" caliphs, is assassinated. Mu'awiya founds the Umayyad caliphate, with its seat in Damascus.

710

Muslims conquer Morocco. Three-year conquest of Spain begins.

"The Bride of the World"

One of the Abbasid dynasty's great achievements was the founding of the city of Baghdad. The Umayyads ruled from Damascus, in Syria, but the new dynasty's power base lay farther east, and Mansur wanted a capital in Iraq. The region's greatest city at the time was Kufa, but Mansur distrusted the Kufans, who were notoriously treacherous. He therefore picked a new site, between the Tigris and Euphrates where they almost met, 30 miles from the ruins of the Sassanid capital of Ctesiphon.

By the reign of Haroun al-Rashid, Baghdad was a great and beautiful city, known poetically as "the Bride of the World"; like Imperial Rome, it was a "city of marble," as well as of fountains and gardens. The minarets and domes of many mosques dominated the skyline. Three bridges spanned the Tigris, which fed canals and waterways, crossed in turn by 150 more bridges. The center of the ground plan was the walled "Round City," where the royal palaces and government offices lay. Unlike many Muslim cities, where the fortified palace lay some way from a central bazaar, Baghdad's several bazaars were all outside this core. Mansur feared that assassins and spies could sneak in with shoppers and merchants, so access to the Round City was restricted.



supporters in the city of Kufa. During the final battle, part of Merwan's army mutinied, and Merwan himself had to flee, eventually being caught and killed in Egypt.

Although they had promised peace and justice, the Abbasids could be ruthless. The Shiites, whose support they had courted, were suppressed; rivals for the throne were killed. The first Abbasid caliph was Saffah (ruled 750-754 A.D.), whose nickname means "the Shedder of Blood." On the other hand, some of them understood the value of mercy, sparing rebels who surrendered. This dynasty also became increasingly "Persianized," building great and elegant courts which were run with the utmost formality. (Another Persian idea that grew in popularity was the harem, and the seclusion of women.)

After Saffah came his brother Mansur, a ruthless character who killed many he suspected of threatening him. However, Mansur was also a meticulous and thorough administrator; he is said to have kept the court's financial accounts personally. He was scholarly, but humorless and petty. He built the great and

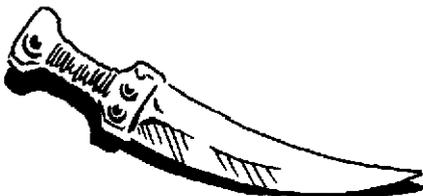
715 to 1048

715 to 732

Muslim raids and assaults on China, Constantinople and France fail; Asian Khazars retaliate for earlier raids. The first expansion of Islam ends.

750

Abbasids replace Umayyad dynasty. The first Abbasid caliph, Saffah, is nicknamed "the Shedder of Blood." The seclusion of women in the harem gains popularity.



754 to 775

Mansur, Saffah's brother succeeds him, and founds Baghdad.

755

Abd al-Rahman, an Umayyad family member, reaches Spain and is made its ruler.

786

Haroun al-Rashid becomes caliph. Jabir ibn Hayyan, the founder of Islamic alchemy (called *Geber* in the West), works at his court.

809

Haroun's son al-Ameen succeeds him as caliph. His brother al-Mamun rebels.

813

Al-Mamun captures and kills al-Ameen. Al-Mamun rules well for 20 years.

909

Egypt, under the Shiite Fatimids, breaks away from Baghdad's rule.

980

Ibn Sina (*Avicenna*, d. 1037 A.D.), known as *Sheikh al-Ra'is*, "Leader of the Wise Men," whose wanderings took in Central Asia and Persia, where he worked as a court doctor and (briefly) as a vizier, is born.

965

Ibn al-Haitham (*Alhazen*, d. 1039 A.D.), who worked in Egypt and who is especially noted for his expertise in optics, is born.

1048

Omar Khayyam (d. 1132 A.D.), mathematician, astronomer, Sufi and poet, whose great practical achievement was the creation of the highly accurate Persian calendar, is born.

beautiful city of Baghdad, but he also checked the cost of every part of the building. When he wanted to improve the defenses of Kufa, he announced a cash handout of five dirhams for every citizen; then, when the recipients had signed for their money, he used the list of signatures to collect a tax of forty dirhams per head to pay for a city wall.

Mansur died in 775, and was succeeded by his far more cheerful son Mehedi, who kept a large harem and sponsored poets and musicians. However, Mehedi was also competent and popular; he suppressed rebellions and pirates and defeated the Byzantines (who were weak and internally divided throughout this period). But when he died, in 785 A.D., he left a tricky situation. He was apparently on the verge of transferring the succession from his older son, Musa al Hadi, to the younger, Haroun al-Rashid, and although Haroun did not challenge Musa's succession, Musa was (understandably, given the history of the caliphate) nervous about Haroun. The younger brother had a nerve-racking time of it for over a year – until Musa died.

There is little suspicion that Haroun caused this death; he had been extremely careful throughout Musa's reign. Some historians accuse Khaizuran, mother of both the princes, but others believe the cause was entirely natural.

Haroun al-Rashid ruled from 786 to 809 A.D. His reign is seen as the height of Arab civilization and glory. He defeated rebellions, sent successful raids into Byzantine territory and extracted tribute from Byzantine emperors – and also promoted art, science, and religion. His richer subjects developed a refined, well-mannered lifestyle, and the caliph himself seems to have been genuinely popular. On the other hand, the problem of ruling at a distance led him to hand the African province of Ifriqiya (around Tunis) over to a semi-independent governor, who founded the "Aghlabid" dynasty there. And Haroun, too, left two sons squabbling over the succession.

These were al-Ameen, his nominated successor, and al-Mamun. At first, the pair cooperated, but they soon fell out. As had happened several times in the past, the new caliph tried to appoint one son as his heir ahead of his brother, and the excluded brother didn't accept this. Al-Ameen had the advantage of the capital and a bigger army, while al-Mamun was serving as governor of the important but distant Persian province of Khurasan. However, al-Ameen was politically less skilled, and his generals were far more confident than their troops. Al-Ameen's attacks on his brother collapsed, al-Mamun's armies laid siege to Baghdad, and al-Ameen was captured and killed in 813 A.D.



The Old Man of the Mountains

The Hashishin were always led by unquestionable scholar-lords, the chief *da'is*, based in castles such as Alamut. In Syria, such a leader – especially the powerful Rashid al-Din Sinan, who ruled from 1162 to 1193 – was called the *sheikh al-jabal*, the "Sheikh [patriarch] of the Mountains."

Marco Polo, writing of the primary communities in Persia, described their leader – presumably the Grand Master of Alamut – as the "Old Man of the Mountains." However, there is no other evidence that the Persian *da'is* ever bore this title; Marco Polo must have picked it up from Syria. (His account of the Assassins generally seems slightly confused.) Still, all of these leaders had a lot in common.

If encountered in a campaign, any "Old Man" should come across as a formidable, frightening figure. He should have a high level of skill in Theology. Hasan I, like his more competent successors, would add Debate, Bard, Writing, Administration, Strategy, Detect Lies and Charisma. To their followers, Chief Da'is were Status 8. Hasan had traveled, and would know something of foreign lands. He would also be a Fanatic, and would utterly despise any weaknesses and self-indulgences. (Possession of alcohol in Alamut was punishable by death – a sentence allegedly carried out on one of Hasan's own sons.)

Later leaders in Alamut were sometimes (relatively) moderate, although one or two of them may have been mad.

1070 to 1192

1070

The Order of the Hospital of St. John (the Hospitallers) is founded in Jerusalem, to nurse sick pilgrims.

filler

1085

Spanish Christians, with Burgundians, retake Toledo.

1091

The Byzantine emperor, Alexius I Comnenus, appeals for help against the Muslims.

1094

Rodrigo Diaz de Bivar, el Cid, takes Valencia.

1095

Pope Urban II calls for a crusade. "People's Crusade" sets out but is eventually slaughtered by the Turks.

1097

The First Crusade army reaches Syria.

1099

Crusaders take Jerusalem.

1118

The Poor Knights of the Temple of Solomon (Templars) is founded to protect pilgrims on the road.

1126

Ibn Rushd (*Averroes*, d. 1198 A.D.), a Spanish philosopher and expert on Aristotle, is born.

1138

Saladin is born.

1148

Second Crusade ends in quarrels among the French and German nobility. Crusaders return to Europe with sugar, soon highly prized.

1171

Saladin takes control of Egypt, removes the Fatimids and drives out the Crusaders.

1174

Nur al-Din dies; Saladin replaces his heirs. He begins taking cities from rivals and Crusaders alike.

1187

An attack on a caravan convinces Saladin that Reynald of Châtillon has broken the peace; Saladin takes the Kingdom of Jerusalem.

1190-1192

The Third Crusade, led by Richard the Lionheart of England, ends in a 3-year truce guaranteeing Christian pilgrims access to Jerusalem.

The Teutonic Knights are founded as a nursing order.

Al-Mamun ruled well for 20 years, although his idealistic plans to return power to the descendants of 'Ali (showing Persian, Shiite influence?) came to nothing. Islamic attacks on Europe continued; in 831 A.D., the island of Sicily fell to Islam – but that was an *Aghlabid* invasion, out of North Africa.

Genghis Khan

In Central Asia, in the vicinity of Lake Baikal, the ruling nomad tribes were the Mongols and Tartars. Genghis Khan was born (as "Temujin") around 1162 AD, the son of a Mongol chief. He succeeded his father at the age of 13, and proved himself a skilled general, defeating rival chiefs and acquiring a following who gave him his better-known name in 1206. By then, he was undisputed Great Khan of Mongolia; by 1213, he was powerful enough to break through the Great Wall of China.

Genghis was more than just a conqueror. He was aware of the need for laws and even justice in the running of an empire, and his code, if harsh, was rational. The Mongol Empire made the Silk Road safer for travelers than it had been for centuries. It also had an efficient postal service, religious equality (it was equally harsh on everybody), and a policy of taking whatever skills it needed from whatever subject nations could provide them.

Peking fell in 1215. Then Genghis turned west, attacking the trading-cities of the Silk Road. Samarkhand, Bokhara, and others fell around 1219-20, and Genghis' army circled the Caspian, defeating a Russian army not far from the Black Sea in 1223 before turning for home.

Genghis died in 1227, but his empire survived him. His heirs moved further south in China, destroying the Sung dynasty, and eventually attempted assaults on Japan; they also struck west into Muslim lands.

Fatimid Egypt

As Abbasid power declined, one group of Shiites gained influence in Egypt; in 909 A.D., they declared independence from Baghdad, under a dynasty claiming descent from Fatima, the daughter of Mohammed, and her husband 'Ali – the Fatimids.

The breakaway rulers decided that they needed a capital to challenge Baghdad, and in 973 A.D., they founded Cairo. This soon became a great city (still the largest in Africa); its university became a center of Muslim theology.

The Shiite Fatimids thus became rivals to the Sunni powers of Arabia, Mesopotamia and Anatolia (both the declining Abbasids and the rising Turks); they clashed for control of border areas (including Palestine), and gave Shia Islam an alternative center to its Persian heartland. (The Assassins, extremist Shiites, had connections to Egypt.) The Fatimids lasted until 1171, when they were removed by Saladin.

The Assassins

Despite the continued dominance of Sunni Islam, powers such as Fatimid Egypt kept Shiite hopes alive, and variant sects sprang up. The strangest of these were the fanatical Nizari Isma'ilis – the Assassins.

The Isma'ili sect appeared around the end of the 8th century, as a branch of the "sevener" Shiites. It was a secret society that taught its initiates to find subtle hidden meanings in the Koran; it aimed to build up a network of supporters, converted by secret missionaries, to overthrow the caliphate. It survived as a revolutionary conspiracy, and assisted the new Fatimid dynasty. When the Fatimids drifted away from "pure" Isma'ilism, a Persian group, adherents of a deposed Fatimid caliph named Nizar, broke away in 1094 under the leadership of one Hasan-i Sabah.

Hasan, using the old Isma'ili techniques, had managed to subvert the occupants of Alamut, a castle in Daylam, a region south of the Caspian that was a hotbed of Shiite sects. "Alamut" means "the eagle's nest"; the castle sat high in

1193 to 1307

1193

Saladin dies; his heirs war among themselves.

1198-1204

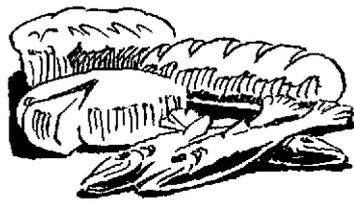
The Fourth Crusade produces a "Latin" empire in Byzantium, which lasts 50 years. The Teutonic Knights turn military.

1212

The Children's Crusade ends in tragedy.

1217-1221

The Fifth Crusade makes some gains, but then loses them, ending in failure.



1229

In the Sixth Crusade, Emperor Frederick II retakes Jerusalem by treaty.

At about this time, the Hospitallers become military.

1243

A Mongol army attacks Seljuk territory.

1244

Muslims recapture Jerusalem.

1248

King Louis leads the Seventh Crusade to Egypt, takes a city and is then defeated and forced to withdraw.

The Alhambra is begun; building will be completed in 1354.

1258

Baghdad falls to the Mongols; the Abbasid dynasty ends.

1260

Mamelukes take charge of unifying Muslims in Egypt. They defeat an Ilkhanid army at 'Ain Jalut.

1270

King Louis leads the Eighth Crusade to Tunis, where he sickens and dies.

1277

Baibars, famous Mameluke sultan and commander, dies.

1289

Tripoli falls to the Mamelukes.

1291

The Mamelukes take Acre; Christian fortresses surrender without a fight.

1307

The Roman Catholic Church appoints an archbishop to Peking.

the mountains – a secure HQ. From there, Hasan sent out missionaries to subvert other castles, until the sect held dozens of fortresses and villages, forming a small independent state.

But the Nizari Isma'ilis were numerically weak, and the Seljuk lords of Persia were hostile. On the other hand, Hasan's followers were utterly fanatical. Needing an alternative to military power, they discovered assassination.

Victims ranged from sultans and kings to local lords and Sunni theologians who had attacked Isma'ilism. Hasan's first and greatest victim was Nizam al-Mulk, the famous and brilliant Persian vizier to the Seljuk sultan, who was hunting down Isma'ilis in general and Hasan in particular.

This phenomenal fanaticism has led to wild stories, such as Marco Polo's tale that the Assassins maintained a garden "Paradise" in the mountains, where drugged converts were taken, and then told that they would return when they died on a mission. Tales of drug use became widespread; the word "Assassin" comes from "Hashishin," "taker of hashish" (although that's often been a general term in the Middle East for a rioter or hooligan). Other tales mention enemies of the Assassins waking in the morning in a well-guarded palace to find an Assassin dagger lying on their pillow – a clear hint of what *could* happen to them. However, most such accounts are probably myths. The simple truth is that the Assassins were dedicated ascetics who were taught to believe in the complete authority of their leaders. Their castles were places of Spartan simplicity, where all self-indulgence was banned; the idea of them using drugs seems unlikely, and they needed few flashy illustrations to prove their dedication and lethality to anyone.

Part of their power came from the Muslim problem of succession law. The assassination of a sultan could lead his kingdom to tear itself apart.

Apart from Persia, the Assassins established bases in mountain regions of Syria from 1103 on – hence their encounters with the Crusaders and later with Saladin, hated as a rival and as the destroyer of Shi'ite rule in Egypt. As a "wild card" in the power-politics of Seljuks, Fatimids and Crusaders, they were a problem – but also allies for such unlikely factions as the Knights Templar.

After Hasan's death, the Assassins were led by his lieutenant, Buzurg'umid, and then by Buzurg'umid's descendants. They continued using assassination, with some success, but they became increasingly disunited. Buzurg'umid's grandson, Hasan II, seems to have gone some way over the edge, declaring himself caliph, announcing that the end of the world was coming, and terminating all religious laws. Similar (quieter) ideas had always been part of the cult's secret doctrines; Hasan II made them public. It took the sect far from mainstream Islam. Eventually, in 1256, the Persian castles were destroyed by the Mongols, who wanted to remove this rival power (and whose forces included conventional Muslims who would thoroughly approve). At about the same time, the Mamelukes destroyed the Assassin communities in Syria. All that was apparently left were a number of converts and refugees, scattered through Persia and India; some say these were the forerunners of the Illuminati (see p. 108).

Other Breaks

The Fatimids were not unique. Khurasan too became semi-independent; the Abbasids lost an important power base and recruiting ground there. To compensate, they recruited increasing numbers of mercenaries and Ghulams – who decided that they could take more power for themselves.

Khurasan and the rest of Persia passed between Shi'ite, anti-Abbasid dynasties, and Sunnis such as the Persian Samanids, who respected the caliph in Baghdad but still restored Persian self-rule. The Samanids lost ground to the Buyids, a dynasty of Shi'ite Daylami mountain men, but were eventually replaced by the Qarakhanids and Ghaznavids, Turkish ex-soldiers.



Haroun al-Rashid

Many of the *Arabian Nights* stories involve a genuine historical character who also became a favorite of popular myth: the Abbasid caliph Haroun al-Rashid.

Haroun was a contemporary of Charlemagne in Europe, and may have received ambassadors from the Franks. He was 22 when he became caliph, 45 when he died; in his life, he gained a reputation as a good, pious, thoughtful and energetic ruler. (But then, he was *certainly* a patron of poets, which would have ensured him a good name.) He enjoyed intelligent company – apart from his arts patronage, he took advice from religious scholars, and even his slave-girls had to be educated conversationalists. On the other hand, he also displayed a quick temper, and he seems to have become increasingly autocratic over the years. He prayed long, hard and regularly, but his religion seems to have been formal and conventional rather than saintly, and he banned religious debate lest it cause confusion among the uneducated. In short, he is a classic example of a competent ruler, fair but conventional. If met in a game, he should be depicted as personally impressive, educated, and skilled in Administration; he was prone to strong emotions, but did not usually let them interfere with good government.

The Abbasids were served for many years by viziers and officials from a Persian family called the Barmakis (or "Barmecides"). When he became caliph, Haroun was advised by Yahya al Barmaki; Yahya's brother became chamberlain, and his sons, Ja'afar and Fadhl, passed through various court posts and governorships. Finally Ja'afar became tutor and advisor to Haroun's son and heir. Ja'afar appears as Haroun's vizier in the *Arabian Nights*; he is shown giving good advice and keeping the court running smoothly despite all the weird events and the Caliph's whims. However, in reality, Haroun grew suspicious of the Barmakis' personal power, fearing that they might even be planning a Shi'ite-Persian revolt and bid for power. This may have been true, or Haroun may have been jealous, and influenced by courtiers not favored by the Barmakis. In 803 A.D., Haroun had Ja'afar arrested and killed, and the rest of the Barmakis quickly rounded up and placed under house arrest. The aged Yahya died in prison, and the Barmakis never regained power.

Continued on next page . . .

Haroun al-Rashid (Continued)

Haroun married his wife, Zubaida, when he was 17; the match appears to have been affectionate, although Haroun certainly kept and enjoyed a large harem, and the popular stories – perhaps unfairly – are full of tales of Haroun's amorous adventures around Baghdad. He also had a personal servant named Masroor, a eunuch who functioned as his bodyguard and general assistant. All of these, and his son al-Ameen, appear in the *Arabian Nights*. (Masroor is usually described there as an executioner; he was much more than that, but he did execute Ja'afar al-Barmaki.)

However, the caliph of the tales may not otherwise bear much resemblance to the real Haroun. The stories show him as a practical joker and a lover; the real man, although certainly well able to enjoy himself, was a working ruler. Tales tell of him wandering the streets of Baghdad, in disguise, at night; if he did so, it might have been in search of amusement – or to see how his subjects lived. The *Nights* also show him as a heavy drinker. Contemporary historians (admittedly biased) suggest that he was either a teetotaler, or only drank, late in life, lightly and in private evening gatherings at home. On the other hand, the man and the historical figure are perhaps less important for game purposes than the myth; Haroun was a great and famous caliph, and in that position, he was by definition a larger-than-life character.

Meanwhile, the Buyids were challenging the remnants of the Abbasid dynasty; they marched in and out of Baghdad at will, and treated the caliph as a puppet. Around this time, beginning 869 A.D., the Zanj, Negro agricultural slaves in southern Iraq, rose in a revolution which took 14 years to suppress. Abbasid glory was gone.

The caliph, always the "Prince of the Faithful," became more and more a religious rather than a secular ruler. Even in his own territories, the Turkish soldiers were now the real power.

The Crusades

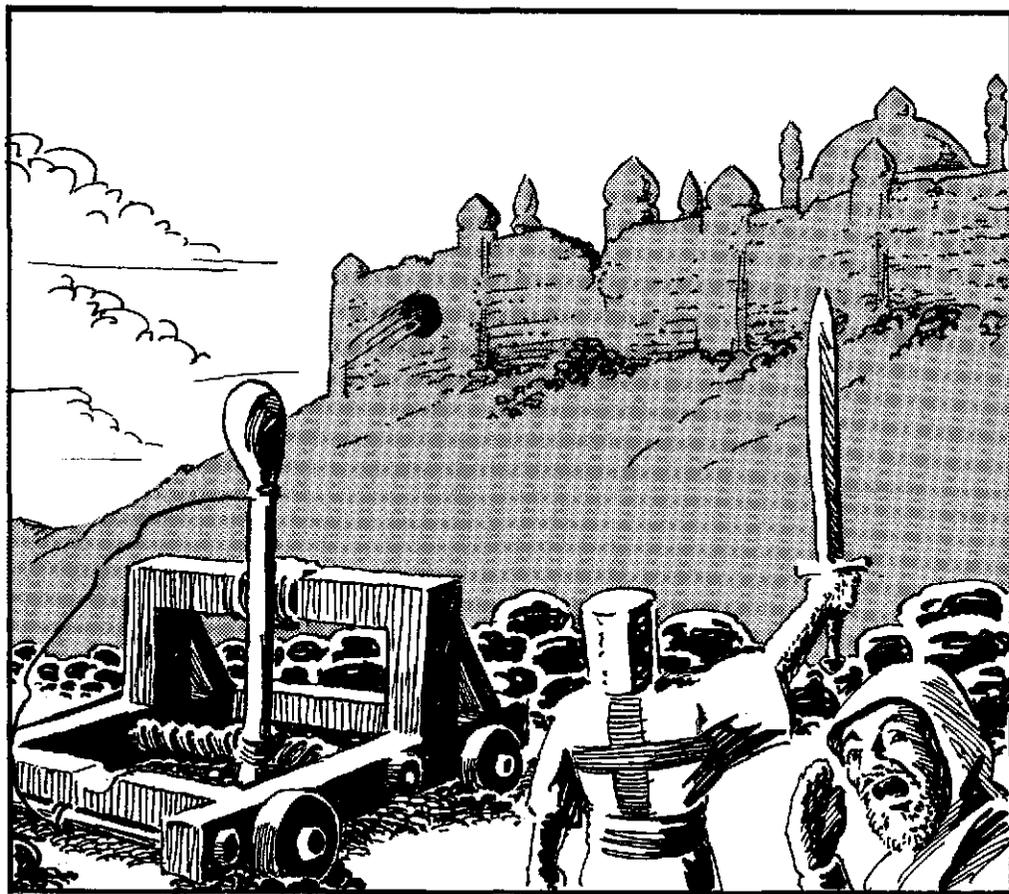
Depending on the point of view, the Crusades can be seen as the last of the barbarian assaults on the ancient Mediterranean civilization, or the first wave of European colonization; a great demonstration of Christian faith, in defense of the heart of the religion, or a brutal assault by blind fanatics. Certainly, their effects lasted far longer than the wars themselves; they simultaneously established new communications between Europe and the East, and left Islam with an embittered view of the west.

The First Crusade

In 1091, the Byzantine emperor appealed to Europe for help against the Muslims. This may have been little more than a strongly-phrased request, backed up with religion, for mercenaries, but the Pope took the opportunity to assert his leadership, calling in 1095 for a crusade against the "infidel." The rulers of Europe decided that the Holy Land should be recovered.

If the original request was mostly just flowery language, the results were soon well out of hand. Offered remission of their sins if they freed Jerusalem, looking for more territory to divide into feudal holdings, the "Franks" burst into frenzied activity. A disorganized "People's Crusade" set out across Europe, were shipped across the Bosphorus by the Byzantines to get rid of them, and were slaughtered by the Turks. Eventually, in 1097, a relatively organized army mustered at Constantinople, crossed to Anatolia, and crashed into Syria under assorted leaders, primarily Bohemund of Otranto.

They found themselves trying to besiege Antioch without even enough forces to blockade it. However, their "Saracen" enemies were at this time especially disunited, happily letting each other be defeated piecemeal by the Crusaders in order to obtain personal advantages. Antioch fell after eight months, but the Crusaders were then besieged themselves. Inspired by the discovery of a "holy relic," they sallied out and routed the Turks.



Seven months – and many private quarrels – later, the Crusaders moved down the coast to Jerusalem, currently held by the Fatimids; as the Seljuks controlled most of the rest of the country, the defenders had little local support.

In 1099, after 40 desperate days, the walls were stormed. The Crusaders marked their victory by alternately falling on their faces in prayer in the holy shrines, and massacring the Muslim and Jewish population – men, women, and children.

Many of the Crusaders returned home shortly thereafter, but enough remained to establish a feudal “Kingdom of Jerusalem.” The Byzantines, who had hoped to regain their lost territories, were ignored.

The Second Crusade

Over the next few years, the Franks settled in to rule Palestine, making agreements with their Muslim neighbors and joining the local politics. However, when the Muslims achieved a local victory at Edessa in 1144, the fanatical St. Bernard of Clairvaux preached a Second Crusade, which was led by the Holy Roman Emperor Conrad III and King Louis VII of France.

In 1148, the Crusade fell apart in bitter arguments after a futile siege of Damascus. Even St. Bernard recognized it as a fiasco.

Saladin and the Third Crusade

Subsequently, a genuine threat to the Kingdom of Jerusalem arose: the Sultan Saladin.

His father, a city governor, moved his family from Baalbek to Aleppo the day Saladin was born in 1138, taking service with the regional Turkish government; the young Saladin was brought up as a warrior-civil servant. He joined his uncle Shirkuh (himself a successful general) when the latter was sent to Cairo. This was part of a complex political and military game that involved the Turks seeking to keep the Franks of Jerusalem from gaining control of the Fatimid caliph.

Saladin fought alongside Shirkuh, and – in the Muslim tradition of inherited jobs – took over when his uncle died in 1169. Following a series of maneuvers over two years, he took control of Egypt, first as vizier, then as sultan; a good Sunni Muslim, he was happy to terminate the Shiite Fatimid caliphate. In the process, he drove out the Crusader incursion.

After that, Saladin’s power and reputation within the Muslim world expanded, and his true interest became ever clearer. He was utterly dedicated to the cause of *jihad* – a holy war to drive the Franks out of the Middle East. To achieve this, he had to build up his own power.

This brought him into conflict with Nur al-Din, his former overlord, to whom he felt much loyalty, but who distrusted him. However, Nur al-Din died in 1174, and his heirs fell into court intrigue. Saladin was able, in good conscience, to take over as leader of the Muslims in the whole region.

He took a string of cities from rival Muslim lords and the Crusaders, giving him strategic control of the area around the Kingdom of Jerusalem. Thus he was able to besiege and capture the Crusader strongholds methodically, one by one; occasional Crusader victories, such as a repulse in Syria in 1177, made no long-term difference.

Saladin’s great move came in 1187. Provoked by the truce-breaking of Reynald of Châtillon, he invaded the Kingdom of Jerusalem. The quarrelling Christian lords united against him, forming a great field army – which they tried to use to relieve the besieged fortress of Tiberias. This enabled Saladin to catch and harass them in open country, eventually giving battle at the “Horns of Hattin” when the Crusaders were exhausted and desperately thirsty. The result was the annihilation of the Crusader army.

Muslim Spain

Muslim Spain (sometimes referred to as “Andalusia,” from the Muslim’s “Land of the Vandals”) evolved into a distinctive, sophisticated culture. It was noted for its scholarship, famous (and perhaps a little romanticized) for its tolerance of Jews and Christians as well as Muslims and symbolized by the beautiful Alhambra palace in Granada. Even the Spanish fondness for guitar music may be traced back to the Moors.

The Umayyad rulers of Spain (see p. 33) had their capital in Córdoba. They sent expeditions into France and Italy, but any conquests there didn’t last long, and they suffered some famous defeats. Even so, they built great schools and universities, where scholars such as Averroes passed the philosophy of the Ancient Greeks on to visiting Europeans as well as Muslims. In 970, there were nearly 30 *free* schools in Córdoba.

But for all their skills, the Muslims were disunited. Their single state broke up in the 11th century, and the resulting divided emirates proved vulnerable.

The Christians of Europe regarded the Muslim presence on their continent as an affront. A few Christian outposts survived in northern Spain, and in 1085, Spanish Christians, aided by Burgundians from France, recaptured Toledo. The Spaniards found a leader; Rodrigo Diaz de Bivar was called *sidi* , “lord,” by the Moors, and the Christians made this into “El Cid.” He was at times a mercenary, serving Moors as well as Christians, and he clashed with his own king. But after he took Valencia in 1094, he became a culture hero and inspiration to the Spaniards. In the 12th century, a group of passing Crusaders, persuaded to stop and fight Muslims closer to home, took Lisbon, founding the kingdom of Portugal. By 1270, the only remaining Muslim territory was Granada, in the south.

The Alhambra, one of the world’s great buildings, was built up between 1248 and 1354. It is a fortified palace atop a rocky hill that dominates the town. Inside the walls, arched colonnades surround graceful courtyards, where cool water is channelled between pools and fountains (a typically Muslim attempt to make a building into a garden-paradise).

Granada was finally conquered in 1492, the same year that Columbus reached the New World – and by Ferdinand and Isabella, the same fiercely Catholic king and queen who sponsored the explorer. At first, the Muslims were permitted to retain their customs and religion. But after another century, the same intolerance and the same Inquisition that drove the entire Jewish community out of Spain was turned on the Muslims. Moorish Spain was dead.

The Military Orders

The Crusades saw the creation of the "Military Orders" – warrior organizations who swore quasi-monkish vows to pursue Crusading objectives. As the most stable, best organized forces on the Frankish side, the Orders were skilled and well-disciplined. This, and their accumulated wealth and territory (in the East and throughout Europe), made them into a political force. They were also fanatical and arrogant. The Saracens respected and hated them; European kings found them difficult to live with. They were answerable only to the Pope; Crusader kings did not have full control of their own best soldiers.

The oldest Order, the *Hospitallers* (the Order of the Hospital of Saint John) was founded in Jerusalem, in 1070, as a nursing organization for sick pilgrims; they only formed armed units in the twelfth century. They fought in many battles, and moved their headquarters to Cyprus after the fall of Acre in 1291, going on to Rhodes in 1310. From there, they became a naval power, a thorn in the side of Islam.

The *Templars* (Poor Knights of the Temple of Solomon) started out in 1118 as fighters, protecting pilgrims on the road. They were particularly aggressive, and much hated by Muslims. They were also greedy: one story claims that they sabotaged an attempt by the Assassins to convert to Christianity, in order to protect the source of financial tribute they extracted from Assassins (as non-Christians) on their territory. After the fall of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, they withdrew via Cyprus to France. There their wealth – and possibly some odd ideas picked up in the East – led King Philip the Fair to conspire with the Pope to accuse them of heresy. They were exterminated in 1314.

Other Orders were less significant, at least in the East. The Teutonic Knights (founded by Germans in 1190 as a nursing order, turned military in 1198) withdrew via Venice to Germany in 1308. They became infamous for their brutal wars against the Slavonic pagans.

In game terms, members of the Military Orders have a Vow, a Duty, and – in Muslim lands and sometimes elsewhere – a Social Stigma. They would also tend to be competent soldiers (or dedicated helpers of the sick).



With no real forces left to defend them, the Crusader castles and cities, including Jerusalem itself, soon surrendered – except for the port of Tyre, where many survivors gathered. (Saladin had a chivalrous willingness to let trapped opponents ransom themselves.)

The fall of Jerusalem caused consternation in Europe, and the call went out for a new Crusade. It was answered by the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, King Philip of France, and King Richard I of England. Barbarossa arrived first, but fell ill and died; by the time the other two kings arrived, a desperate war was well underway. Legally, Philip had feudal precedence, but Richard was determined to take charge. In the end, Philip went home in high dudgeon.

The Lionheart

Richard "the Lionheart" was feared and respected by the Muslims. Big, red-haired, a dedicated warrior, sometimes chivalrous, often brutal, not above murdering prisoners (and maybe even rivals), he seemed to them the archetypal Frank. However, he was more than just a tough barbarian. He proved a better tactician than Saladin, handling smaller armies with deadly effect. The Third Crusade ran from 1190 to 1192; Richard came within a dozen miles of Jerusalem, but quarrels on his own side, and the Turks' strategy of harassment, forced him to withdraw to the coast.

Richard and Saladin seem to have formed a considerable mutual respect – something that romantic European writers play up more than the disdainful Muslims. It is unclear whether or not they ever met in person; Western sources say yes, Muslims say that Saladin dismissed the idea as pointless, as they shared no common language. Richard is said to have offered his own sister in marriage to Saladin to cement a treaty, but if so, this was probably an unsuccessful political bluff. In the end, news from home (where Philip was making trouble for England) forced Richard to withdraw. He made a three-year truce with Saladin that guaranteed access to Jerusalem for Christian pilgrims, but left the city in Muslim hands, and apparently never entered the place himself. Richard had won all the battles, but Saladin had won the war.

Richard then set off for Europe, to be captured on the way and to enter the great stories of the West. Meanwhile, the sheer exhaustion of a lifetime's campaigning was catching up with Saladin, the even greater culture-hero of the East. He died in 1193; Muslim histories say that he seemed prematurely aged, and that he had been such a good, charitable Muslim that he did not even leave enough money to pay for his funeral. Inevitably, his heirs fell into civil war over the areas he had ruled, while the Franks hung grimly on to the coastal lands.

Later Crusades

From then on, the "Crusading Ideal" faded away. The Fourth Crusade (1198-1204) was the lowest point, where all the idealism collapsed into naked, cynical greed. It was called by a pope who was trying to restore the authority of the Church, and taken up by a group of nobles with an eye to profit. They decided to travel to the Holy Land by sea, and negotiated passage with the city-state of Venice. When they couldn't afford the Venetians' fees, they paid instead by storming a town that the Venetians were claiming from the king of Hungary. Then, they accepted an offer to help a claimant to the throne of Byzantium, and captured Constantinople. When the prince couldn't pay them, they took his city for themselves – which entirely suited the Venetians, trade rivals of the Greeks – and founded a ramshackle "Latin" empire, which lasted for just 50 years. A crusade to free Jerusalem from the Saracens had turned into the conquest of a Christian country.

The Fifth Crusade, from 1217 to 1221, was a German enterprise; it struck at Egypt, in the hope of forcing the powerful sultan there to hand back Jerusalem –

not an *entirely* stupid strategy, but the Crusaders haughtily refused what offers they received, and were eventually driven off in complete failure.

The Sixth Crusade, in 1229, was a strange affair, although it did retake Jerusalem for the Franks – by treaty. The brilliant, scholarly Emperor Frederick II, grandson of Barbarossa, had sworn to go on crusade to gain the support of the pope. However, he was based in Sicily, and his contacts with Muslim culture made him highly sympathetic to the East; he was said to live like a Muslim sultan. Eventually obliged to keep his vow, he got no help from the Church or the Frankish lords in the Holy Land, but negotiated with the Sultan of Egypt. He received control of Jerusalem, which he garrisoned lightly and then mostly abandoned. In 1244, the Muslims recaptured it.

The Seventh Crusade (1248) went much like the Fifth: the saintly King Louis of France sailed to Egypt, took a city, suffered defeat, and had to withdraw. He tried again with the Eighth Crusade in 1270; a wild strategic idea diverted him to Tunis (in North Africa). Muslim forces cornered him where he landed, and he died of illness.

The next year, Prince Edward (later Edward I) of England tried to raise a crusading army in the Holy Land. He fought a little, learned something about castle architecture that he later applied in Wales, survived an assassination attempt, and went home. The tide had turned completely against the Crusaders.

The Mamelukes

Previously, the Franks had survived because the Muslims had been disunited. In 1260, however, the Turkish slave-soldiers of Egypt, the Mamelukes, had taken charge, and their ruthless leader, Baibars, was proving formidable. His early victories over Christian forces were what inspired St. Louis' crusades; in 1271, he captured the huge and magnificent Hospitaller castle of Krak des Chevaliers. Islam would have been on the way to unity in the area, had a deadly new threat not appeared on the eastern horizon.



The Mongols

The Mongols were another steppe-nomad people out of Central Asia. Their great khan, Genghis (see sidebar, p. 36), had turned them into an all-conquering army; now they arrived in the Middle East.

Genghis had defeated the Persians on his travels, expanding his empire into Khwarizm and obtaining the nominal allegiance of local rulers; in 1243, a Mongol army attacked Seljuk territory. The Sultan of Rum, Kai Khosrou II, counterattacked, and the two forces met at Köse Dagh. The battle itself was even, but the Seljuk ally troops proved unreliable, and both they and their general slipped away separately the next night. Thus the Sultanate of Rum was obliged to submit to the Mongols, paying annual tribute; all else aside, this collapse saved the Byzantine Empire from a growing Seljuk threat, as the Turkish domains fragmented – also opening an opportunity for the rise of the Mamelukes.

Common Enemies?

The Mongols were skilled at psychological warfare; they induced utter terror in their opponents. As a result, people who hated each other sometimes tried to

Saladin

Small and frail-looking, with a short, neat beard.

ST 10, DX 11, IQ 14, HT 11.

Speed 5.5, Move 5.

Dodge 5, Parry 6 (sword), Block 6.

Advantages: Charisma, Literacy, Luck, Military Rank 8, Status 7 (6 for much of early career). His Wealth should be surprisingly low, due to his modesty and personal generosity. After 1187, he would have a +2 Reputation among Muslims (as an heroic leader), and +1 among most Franks (as a chivalrous, noble foe).

Disadvantages: Basic Arabian Code of Honor, Compulsive Generosity, Sense of Duty to all Muslims. Before 1181, he has a Sense of Duty to Nur al-Din and his heirs. (But this is fairly minor; he'll oppose them, but hold back from crushing them. He also refuses to meet Nur al-Din himself, for fear of giving in to him.) Between 1171 and 1183, he has a -2 Reputation among Syrian Muslims as an upstart usurper. Between 1186 and 1187, he also has a Vow – to kill Reynald of Châtillon, personally. At times, the Hashishin might rate as a powerful personal Enemy.

Saladin seems to have been dedicated to *jihad* all his adult life, but he was surprisingly controlled about carrying it out; this is an aspect of his Sense of Duty, *not* Fanaticism!

Quirks: Pensive and melancholy (and looks it); Unusually tolerant (in religion and court) but punishes outright blasphemy; Dislikes long sieges; Hates unnecessary bloodshed; Underestimates fanatical opponents.

Skills: Administration-15, Bard-13, Bow-11, Broadsword-13, Chess-6, Diplomacy-16, Literature-12, Politics-14, Polo (Hobby)-13, Riding-12, Savoire-Faire-14, Shield-12, Spear-11, Strategy-19, Tactics-16, Theology (Muslim)-16, Tracking-12.

Languages: Kurdish-14 (native), Arabic-14, Persian-13, Turkish-13.

Historical or "lightly fantasized" Crusades-era games might well involve encounters with Saladin, greatest of the Muslim leaders. This represents him at the peak of his career, around 1187 A.D., and as he was depicted by fellow-Muslims; hence it may be a little idealized.

Saladin was a Kurd by birth; his title-name was Salah al-Din, "Rectitude of the Faith." He was described as a great general, rather than a front-line warrior. Still, as a war-leader, he would always have a sword at his side. At times when he had cause to fear the Hashishin, he wore lightweight chain armor (see p. 70); in battle, he would wear heavier protection, and carry spear and broadsword. (His Move and Dodge scores assume no encumbrance, and should be recalculated if he is in armor.)

activity involved.) Conversely, an enchanted carpet will not bank sharply, fold, or bend; the spell specifically provides a stable, level platform. (This makes flying through narrow gaps rather hard.) For the purposes of the flying rules given on p. B139, a carpet will only pull 1-G turns, with *no* reduced turn radius possible. Because the carpet provides a flat, stable platform, anyone fighting from it is treated as being on the ground, apart from the DX roll requirement, rather than using the special rules for flying combatants. In fact, firing some missile weapons, such as crossbows, from a sitting position on a carpet is perfectly safe, although reloading them isn't. Characters aiming a missile weapon from a moving carpet can only take the Acc bonus; aiming for extra turns gives no further increase.

Magic carpet "dogfights" (fun for high-magic campaigns, silly otherwise) mostly reduce to either cautious, long-range archery duels, or scrappy close-quarters fencing matches, with the occasional sneaky attempt to destroy the opponents' carpets.

Duration: 1 minute (plus 2d+2 turns, as above)

Cost: Base 5 to cast; 3 to maintain; +1 to cast and maintain per additional passenger (or 200 lbs. of baggage) apart from the controller; +1 to cast and maintain for each extra +2 flying Move.

Time to cast: 5 seconds.

Prerequisites: Magery 2, at least two Djinni spells, Levitation and any two other spells.

Item: A permanently enchanted carpet; requires *verbal* (audible) commands, otherwise functions as above. Drains a single point of energy from its controller each time it takes off. (This point cannot be eliminated through the Power spell.) Energy cost to create: 500 times the cost for the spell with the same capabilities. (So, for example, a three-person carpet with a Move of 12 would cost 4,500 energy.)

Necromantic Spells

Animation (VH) *see p. M64; Regular*

Lets the caster animate an existing statue or other item. The object that is animated must be human- or animal-shaped. Its abilities and attributes will depend on its body. This is entirely up to the GM, but (for instance) a statue could leave its base and move around, but only talk comprehensibly if its mouth and tongue were *very* well sculpted; a carefully wired-up skeleton might move, but not talk. Treat animated objects as IQ 9, but short on initiative and free will. Within their limitations, animated objects follow the caster's verbal orders faithfully. (See p. 100 for game values for a typical animated statue.)

Duration: 1 minute.

Cost: 3 to animate a man-sized or smaller object; more in proportion to the object's size (GM's decision); half the initial

Magic Items

These are a common part of *Arabian Nights* tales; where would Aladdin be without his ring and lamp? Unlike some settings, weapons are in a minority here, although some very deadly swords do appear; as with spells, transport and power over djinn are the most common capabilities.

Many devices that will appear in scenarios are simply the "item" embodiment of spells listed above – for example, see the Flying Carpet spell, or the various amulets described.

It is also possible to introduce "technological" items that are so complex and weird that they can only be explained by the addition of magic; the movies love giant mechanical monsters. Variants of the Golem spell can power many of these.

cost to maintain. Double cost to animate stone; triple to animate metal.

Time to cast: 5 seconds.

Prerequisite: Magery 3.

Item: The figure may be *permanently* animated for 100 times the energy cost needed to animate it initially. Compare with the cost for Golems, p. 103.

Protection and Warning Spells

Magelock *Regular; Resists Lockmaster spell*

Locks a door magically. The door will not open unless the spell is removed (Counterspell or Lockmaster, pp. M53 and M61, will counter it), or the door itself is destroyed.

Duration: 6 hours.

Base Cost: 3 to cast, 2 to maintain.

Time to cast: 4 seconds.

Prerequisite: Magery.

Item: A mage can seal any portal permanently, as an enchantment. The simplest version merely holds the door, as above, until someone speaks a command word, which must be decided and spoken aloud when the enchantment is cast. When the word is used, the spell is broken. A limited closure like this costs 25 energy to create. A more powerful version, costing 300 energy, holds the portal firmly closed whenever it is shut. It will open freely to the command word, which again must be spoken loud and clear when the enchantment is cast and when the door is used, but the spell reactivates as soon as the door is shut again. One can specify a different word for each side of the door, or specify *no* word for one side, creating a one-way entrance. It might also be possible to build the spell into a portable item, to be cast on any door (but without any passwords or whatever); the creation energy cost for such an item would be 300.

Sound Spells

Sound *see p. M69; Regular*

Produces any sort of *meaningless* sound the caster wishes – the drone of an insect, the distant babble of voices, the clatter of something falling, or anything similar. Will not produce *loud* noise. Requires no concentration once the spell is cast.

Duration and Cost: 1 to create 5 seconds' worth of sound; 2 to create a sound that lasts for a full minute; 1 per minute to maintain.

Item: Any. Continually produces the specified sound (though Link or Delay – see *GURPS Magic* – are often used to turn it on or off). Energy cost to create: 50.

Although magic items are relatively common, they should not be trivial; in an adventure, one or two powerful items are more appropriate than a camel-load of low-power trinkets (aside, perhaps, from the low-power charms made by amulet-sellers). Furthermore, items tend to be the work of legendary ancient wizards, rather than "contemporary" characters. GMs should consider banning "Quick and Dirty" enchantments (pp. B152-153), and possibly restricting use of assistants in enchantment, raising the energy cost of all enchantments by a flat amount, or other limitations (up to and including banning enchantments altogether). Making enchantment harder should make new items rarer, and only the most powerful will be worth the effort.

GMs wishing to add to the following list can look at *GURPS Magic Items* and *GURPS Magic Items 2*. Most items featured there can be imported, although some are more appropriate than others. For example, Dwarven Mail or the Sylvan Staff are hard to fit into a world without Dwarves or Elves, and with few large woodlands, few Arabian wizards wield enchanted staves. On the other hand, many an Eastern scholar would love to own Nicodemus' Foolproof Laboratory, and a Heartstone looks like a classic high-powered amulet.

GURPS Magic Items also contains specific rules for amulets. These are distinct from the amulets detailed here, but the principles are very similar, and the two ideas can easily be combined.

"Asking Prices" are *not* given for items here; magic is too rare, wild, and socially unacceptable in this setting for a regular market to develop. However, some items have notes on "Saleability." In most cases, magic items would be so useful that no one would want to part with them, and those who did bid for them could afford almost any price!

Amulet of Health

This amulet protects against disease (in modern terms, bacteria, viruses, and fungal infections, but not larger parasites such as tapeworms, and not poisons). Such amulets come in a range of power levels; most work by increasing the wearer's HT, for purposes of avoiding or shaking off infections only. (See p. B133 for general rules on the subject.) Some work against a specific disease; others are more useful, and protect against all infections. The best simply grant the wearer the Immunity to Disease advantage (p. B20); if donned by someone who already has a disease, they eliminate it, restoring each reduced characteristic at the rate of 1 point per hour.

Creating these amulets requires the Enchant spell, Lend Health (cast in a variant form), and Diagnosis skill; the amulet-maker's skill roll for the enchantment is equal to the lowest of these three. Most such amulets (apart from the "total immunity" type) drain 1 point of fatigue from the wearer, once per hour, for every +1 HT they grant. (So wearing them when they aren't needed is usually a bad idea.)

The energy cost to create such an amulet, and the usual market price of the result, varies with the HT bonus as follows:

- +1 HT: 100 energy, \$110.
- +2 HT: 250 energy, \$5,000.
- +3 HT: 500 energy, \$15,000.
- +4 HT: 750 energy, \$22,500.
- +5 HT: 1,000 energy, \$30,000.

These values are for an amulet that drains fatigue and helps against all diseases. Halve them for one that only works against one specific disease; double them for "self-powered" versions that do not cost fatigue to wear. More powerful amulets might be possible, but would be prohibitively expensive; the best of those listed will only be sold to a limited market.

To create an amulet granting full immunity to disease (with no energy cost) requires all the above abilities (including Power), plus Recover Strength; the enchanter's roll is the worst of all four, and the energy cost to create is 1,000 if it protects against a single disease, 2,000 for one that stops all infections. Respective costs would be \$30,000 and \$60,000; the former might be hard to sell. (Plenty of people would like to be immune to *all* infections, but who's *that* concerned about any *one* disease . . . unless the plague is raging?)

The Celestial Orb

This extremely powerful crystal ball is mentioned in the *Thousand and One Nights*; with it the user may view any place on Earth. In game terms, a user will need Magery 2, and can then

view any one point, from any viewing position, for as long as they like, at the cost of one energy point. (Of course, knowing *where to look* is always the important thing. Also, the Orb only allows *viewing*, by ordinary light.) The spells Scryguard or Scrywall (pp. M52, M53) could resist it, but it has an effective power of 25.

The Orb's second power is even more terrifying, but it can only be used while the device is in full, direct sunlight; the crystal sphere can focus the light on the area being viewed, and cause anything there to burst into flames. In game terms, it lets the user cast Create Fire, at skill 20, on any observed area – but only on a clear day!

Component Spells: This is a great and ancient magic; game characters are very unlikely to be able to reproduce it. It no doubt involves spells such as Crystal Ball, Invisible Wizard Eye, and Create Fire, but the power involved would take lifetimes for most wizards to gather and control.

Saleability: This item is militarily beyond any price; owners can ask what they like for it from any ruler. The entire world will fear anyone known to possess it; there is a very real chance of secret attacks, devious plots by multiple enemies, and all manner of other problems ensuing.

Djinn Bottle

This small brass or copper bottle is not exactly magical in itself; it is simply a well-made container, closed with the Seal of Solomon (see p. 91), that is guaranteed to hold a djinni once the creature is inside it (in the form of a cloud of smoke). Opening the bottle frees the djinni, for good or ill; it will emerge in smoke form in two turns. See the Entrap Djinni spell for further details. (And see the *Arabian Nights* tale of "The Fisherman and the Djinni" for an instance of human ingenuity, and a malevolent but seriously Gullible or Overconfident djinni.)

Saleability: An empty bottle, appropriate for this function, costs \$150. One with a djinni inside *should* be handled with great care, and *sensible* folk will quite likely take it well out to sea and drop it overboard, but if the prisoner offers solemn promises of harmlessness, sworn by "the Most High Name," then many people will take the chance of enrichment. The sale price then would depend on what the djinni says; if it offers unlimited wealth to whoever frees it, then the holder probably won't sell! If the djinni is of uncertain temperament or intentions, a powerful (or overconfident) wizard might offer, say, \$10,000 for it, with the hope of overpowering or manipulating it. Then again, some djinn might be *very* unhappy at the indignity of being bartered like a slave . . .

Dust of Blood-Staunching

This is a fine powder that instantly stops blood loss from a wound. One dose (approximately an ounce), sprinkled on a cut of up to seven points, stops all bleeding (see the optional rule, p. B130); use extra doses for worse injuries. A dose also restores one point of damage lost to such wounds (once only), and gives +3 to First Aid rolls and so on when treating them.

The power of the Dust is such that a freshly-severed body part, placed on a flat surface covered in the stuff, will remain alive for a few minutes; this can allow skilled surgeons to reattach limbs and the like if they reach the patient in time (GM's option). Even a human head will remain alive temporarily, and can continue to speak a little (roll against HT every minute; on a failure, the head loses consciousness and dies). Although this happened in the tale of King Yunan and the Sage Duban, realistic GMs will note that a severed head has no lungs . . . (This is powerful stuff indeed.)

It is possible that this Dust is enchanted with some kind of Healing spell, but it is just as likely that it is the creation of a very skilled physician-chemist. Treat it as an elixir (see pp. M87-91),

requiring \$50 in materials and 1 week to make; the alchemist must also make a Physician roll to complete the process. It sells for \$150 a dose.

Kohl of Treasure-Seeing

This is a vial of kohl (an ordinary-seeming eastern cosmetic). Applied to the eyes, it lets the user “see the buried treasures of the earth.” Most vials hold enough for ten applications; each grants the equivalent of an Earth Vision spell, good for 100 yards of depth, maintained for ten minutes.

Component Spells: Earth Vision. Energy cost to create: 750, and \$50 worth of materials, per dose (a vial can be filled one dose at a time).

Saleability: In most campaign worlds, the kohl would be regarded as potentially useful, but only in limited circumstances. As the time and energy required to create it would set the sale price around \$20,000 at the very least, it just wouldn’t be made very often. However, in the original *Arabian Nights* world, people believe that there are thousands of fabulously wealthy ancient tombs and buried palaces throughout the land (and the stories bear this out); the chance of finding one, with a little research and the aid of the kohl, makes the price justifiable.

The Lore of the Ancients

This book is utterly unique; many wizards would give all they possess to obtain a copy, and then spend their entire lives studying it. Brothers have fallen out arguing over possession of it. Its students claim that it contains the answers to all the world’s great mysteries, and the location of every hidden treasure. Few copies exist; there is a great deal of text to transcribe, the contents are subtle and defy summary, and too many scribes would be sidetracked by what they had to read as they worked.

The *Lore* is a bulky, obviously ancient volume, weighing several pounds and written in several different hands, all of them employing the most antiquated calligraphy. Note that it is not actually imbued with spells. Rather, it provides complex and subtle information about the practice of magic and other topics. However, the information it contains is so mighty that there is a slight but definite aura of power about it; Detect Magic, cast within a yard of the book, will note the fact.

To use the book, a Research skill roll is required. The reader may research any question to which the answer might have been known in ancient times (so no looking up contemporary politics – but remember that medieval scholars thought that their forefathers knew *more* than they, even about science or technology). The book will almost certainly contain *something* pertinent, but the skill roll is needed to find and identify it. Unless the roll is made by 4 or better, the data obtained will be vague and evasive. A critical success is needed to extract a really straight answer from the book. The search will take 1d hours, or 1d×10 minutes on a critical success if the reader is content with only basic information.

The book contains information pertinent to *every* magic spell, apart from those the GM specifically declares to be modern inventions, or especially secret. A mage can justify spending experience on any sort of magic after some time with the book and a successful Research roll. Similarly, study of the book can help a person build up knowledge-based skills such as Philosophy, Mathematics, or Archaeology. In such cases, the reader must spend 1d times 5 hours with the *Lore* for every point that he wishes to expend. If used for long-term study, the book can be as good as a human instructor. Make a Research roll for every 25 hours spent reading it, and if successful, count them as time spent with a teacher; if unsuccessful, count them as self-teaching time (see sidebars, pp. B82-83).

There is just one catch to all this; the book can be *too* interesting. Someone who is curious about some topic covered by the *Lore* (especially if that is on his character sheet as a quirk) must make a Will roll whenever using the book, or get lost in fascinating cross-references for 1d times 20 minutes; the same effect may overcome a person who suffers from, say, Greed, as the *Lore* contains much on possible sources of buried treasure. The GM can improvise similar effects linked to other disadvantages, at his whim; this is a powerful item, and should come to dominate its users’ mental lives. An individual who has Curiosity as a form of Compulsive Behavior could starve if this book is around, becoming engrossed for 3d hours at a time (reduced to 3d+60 minutes by a Will roll), every time they open it.

Meteoric Weapons

Meteorites – “black stones fallen from the sky” – were thought by the Arabs to make *deadly* swords. This ties in with a general idea of meteorites as a source of power; some ancient holy places seem to have centered on meteoritic stones. A blade such as that wielded by the hero ‘Antar would be a thrusting broadsword with Accuracy +2 and Puissance +3; even an unworked “black pebble,” flung by hand or from a sling, could easily kill, functioning as an Impaling weapon and having some level of Puissance.

To simulate this, meteoritic stone can be treated as containing magical energy that can be used for Accuracy and Puissance spells (and possibly also Fortify and Deflect – GM’s option). The amount available can be measured by an Analyze Magic spell. It can be released by a “Quick and Dirty” enchantment (p. B152), being equivalent to a powerstone for this. The amount will vary from stone to stone; 200 for a small one, good for a dagger blade, up to 6,000 for the most powerful. Such stones require Armoury skill at 17+ to work, and the metal they contain cannot be mixed or “diluted” with ordinary steel.

Saleability: Apart from any innate power in the unworked state, meteoritic stones are valued for the energy they contain. A suggested price is \$10 per point of energy.

Ring, Gem, or Lamp of Command

These are the best-known *Arabian Nights* items: devices that summon and control djinn – which may be of very high power levels, perhaps even commanding djinn servants of their own. The item is usually easily activated, simply by rubbing a hand across it.

It is also possible to have similar devices that allow the user to summon or communicate with uncontrolled djinn. These might be deadly traps if the djinni is mean-spirited, but they can also make interesting plot devices if the djinni is prepared to help people it likes – say, those who do it favors. (“Your chance action set me free. You may ask for one small favor or three pieces of advice . . .”)

In the tale of Aladdin, a ring which commands a djinni also provides some kind of protective effect; this may be a separate enchantment, or it may be a complex “side effect” of the djinni’s power. Similarly, other djinn-related devices may have extra magical features. For example, a great gem that allows speech with a djinni might turn into a plain stone in the hands of someone the djinni doesn’t want to talk to, or the djinni might actually be killed if its trapping item is destroyed. GMs should feel free to introduce all sorts of complications with such devices.

Component Spells: Any from the Djinni College – usually Summon (or Entrap), hopefully also Lesser Geas. Some items may actually be Summoning Mementoes (see below).

Saleability: Immensely variable. An item which grants the

holder power over the kingdoms of the world is obviously beyond price; something which calls up an unpredictable djinni might fetch a few thousand dirhams from a curious and reckless wizard.

Saddle-Bag of Endless Feasts

This plain-looking saddle-bag allows the user to call up any dish he desires at will, served on gold plates. It requires just a command phrase to work (“Servant of the Bag, by the mighty names that have power over you, bring me what I wish”), and return of the plates to the bag after each meal. It is “powered” by a bound djinni.

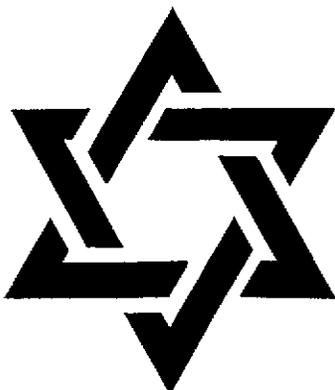
Component Spells: Strictly speaking, this should require Entrap Djinni and Lesser Geas; the djinni, having been selected for this job, then does the work. However, it may be simpler to assume that the item has Create Water, Create Food (p. M43), Banquet (p. M43) and Create Plant (p. M66) enchanted into it. The materials for the spell (including gold plates) would cost several hundred dirhams.

Saleability: Being both useful to travelers and luxurious for anyone, this item could fetch a high price – say \$100,000 or more. However, pious Muslims, if aware of its djinn-powered nature, might consider it “unclean.”

The Seal of Solomon

This is not necessarily an enchanted item as such; rather, it is a symbol, designed by the founder of white magic, which has power over the most formidable of djinn. (Such creatures might even swear oaths by the seal.) It may also appear on magical texts, inscriptions and items, either as a “focus” for their internal “mana currents,” or just to hint at their nature. It isn’t necessarily a sign of actual magic, but anything marked with it may at least be worth checking!

The basic design of the seal is a star, made up of two equilateral triangles – the well-known “Star of David.” This is often used as a simple symbol, but the *fully effective* seal is embellished with mystical writings and inscriptions. A *good* magical text will usually show the full design (roll vs. Research skill in a decent library), or a scholar may be able to reproduce it from memory; any spell-caster who knows any spells from the “Djinni” school can do so with a roll against IQ + Magery, and any other spell-caster gets a roll at IQ-3 or Theology. *Anyone* may roll against Theology-2, Archaeology-2, or Literature-4 (or Occultism-1 in a non-magical game), provided that he has spent at least one point on the skill in question. The result of a successful roll is a design that any wizard or djinni will recognize, but it may not necessarily be fully effective. It must be carefully inscribed on whatever material is being used, demanding a successful Calligraphy or Artist roll for a drawn design, a Jeweler roll for a seal ring. If made up as a seal ring, a DX roll is needed to get it to make a clean (effective) impression in wax. A fully effective seal can be identified with the same roll as that for remembering the design.



Any djinni that has ever been trapped or restrained by the seal of Solomon will pause for at least one turn if the design is forcefully presented to it. If the seal is fully effective, or is one that once held it (even if previously broken and repaired), *any* djinni must make a Will roll before it can move toward it, and physical contact with it costs the djinni 1d-2 ST as fatigue. If the djinni is sealed in a closed container per the Entrap Djinni spell, the seal resists any attempt by the djinni to break out. The djinni must make a Will roll to even try, and then roll a Quick Contest of Skills between the djinni’s Will and the IQ of the person who placed the seal – with a 1d-3 fatigue cost for the djinni. If the one preparing the seal rolled a critical success at any stage, the djinni has effectively -5 Will, and loses 1d fatigue per attempt, but the only way to test whether the work is this good is to try it. (The GM can make the rolls secretly, to preserve uncertainty.) After every three unsuccessful attempts to break out, a trapped djinni must make an IQ roll at -3, or conclude that it is trapped for all time, and give up trying to use brute force (although it may try other methods, such as talking to humans outside its prison).

Saleability: A fully effective design is useful to many wizards; it can fetch \$25-\$50, or add as much to the value of a magical textbook. However, there is a limited market; those who try mass-producing such items will soon glut that market, and the time and materials required are not trivial. Wealthier experts in magic sometimes wear a high-quality seal ring with such a design; this costs 10-20% more than a comparable piece of ordinary jewelry, with a minimum of \$300 (for a plain but chunky, hand-engraved silver ring).

Summoning Memento

Magical beings, such as a Si’lat or the Simurgh, sometimes give away some small personal item, such as a lock of hair or a feather. This is in effect imbued with a special one-use Summon spell; burning it will cause the creature to come to the scene instantly. The point of this is usually that the being owes the recipient of the item a favor, which can be called in when the summons is used; anyone else using the item will have some explaining to do. (The GM decides what the creature’s attitude is, or rolls a random reaction.) *Some* beings may consider themselves bound by the promise, no matter who burns the item.

Note that the item may not actually contain the summoning magic; it *may* simply communicate with the creature, which then uses some kind of transport spell to reach the scene.

Component Spells: See above; the ability to create such an item is usually an innate ability of a magical creature, but a human wizard might be able to reproduce the effect with a lot of research.

Saleability: Questionable, due to the uncertainty of the results of use. A boldly curious wizard might offer 2d×\$1,000. If the results are reliably predicted to be safe, the value could be a *lot* higher.

Sword of Flame

Another of those rare blast-hurling magics; a sword that can project “flames bright as lightning.” In game terms, this is a broadsword, and it grants its wielder the ability to throw Fireball, Explosive Fireball (p. M34) or Flame Jet (p. M34) at skill 25.

Component Spells: As noted. Of course, these aren’t usually available in *Arabian Nights* campaigns, so it’d be hard to reproduce this item.

Saleability: Given the limited supply of offensive magic in this setting, this sword is highly desirable. A rich ruler might offer several hundred thousand dirhams for such a wonderful personal weapon.

5 ANIMALS, MONSTERS AND DJINN



This chapter deals with wildlife, supernatural creatures and some odd breeds of human. The topic falls into three parts: the djinn; wild animals and monsters, which run together because medieval Muslim “travelers’ tales” included many exaggerated descriptions of real creatures, while modern fantasy films use giant and prehistoric beasts as threats for their Arabian heroes; and species which have long been domesticated in the Middle East. This culture loves fine horses and fierce hawks; for this reason, we will discuss pets and trained animals first.

“Domesticated” Animals

Several useful and “friendly” animals are common in this setting. All are operated by the GM; PCs should have to make plenty of Animal Handling rolls, and be ready to put up with a creature’s behavioral oddities. Descriptions can be found on pp. 94-97.

Prices of Animals

Some of the following are based on known Abbasid-era prices; the rest are logical guesses, as consistent as possible with other *GURPS* material.

Racing pigeon egg: \$30; young racing pigeon: \$45; good pigeon: \$200-\$450; matched pair of *fine* pigeons: \$7,500; young hunting dog: \$10; trained hunting dog: \$40.

Note: the last is trained to an acceptable level to form part of a working hunting pack. A dog trained to the limits of its IQ – up to the level of a modern “seeing eye” dog, say – would be a very expensive oddity, given the time invested.

Trained baggage camel: \$1,200-\$1,500 (mostly according to ST).

Light horse (ST 28-35, Move 13-16) or nomad pony: \$1,200+.

Heavy horse (ST 35-45, Move 12-15): about \$2,500.

Full war training (p. B135) adds \$1,000-\$1,500 to horse prices. The cheapest racing horse half-worthy of the name would cost \$3,000; this quickly rises to over \$4,000 for one with a chance of winning serious competitions. A beautiful, intelligent war-horse worthy of the caliph, or a true champion racer, would cost whatever someone was willing to pay – which could get into five figures.

Untrained falcon: \$150-\$225; trained falcon: \$1,000; untrained caracal: \$300; untrained cheetah: \$3,000.

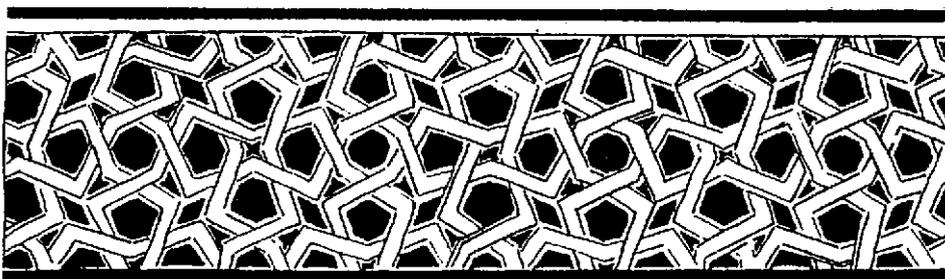
For *trained* felines, add \$1,000+. For a proven hunting cheetah in good health, a rich courtier *might* pay \$10,000.

Prices for trained animals are for creatures with an Obedience Modifier of 0. For dogs and horses, each change of 1 in the modifier changes the price by 10%; so an animal with a +2 modifier costs 20% extra, and one with -1 costs 10% less. For felines and falcons, the same is true for *negative* modifiers, but really obedient creatures are so rare that the increased cost for *positive* modifiers is +25% for +1! (That’s if they can be purchased at all, which is unlikely – and better than +1 is unthinkable.) See pp. B144-145 for further details.

Fantastic campaigns might feature all sorts of strange trained animals. For example, in the *Thousand and One Nights*, a jealous husband buys a talking parrot, intelligent enough to spy on his wife, for 100 gold dinars – \$1,500.

Unusual Animal Companions

Some old Arab accounts mention larger predators, such as wolves and lions, being trained to the hunt, but these were very unusual. On the other hand, PCs are unusual; if they are prepared to commit a lot of time and effort, and trust their luck, they might train some very exotic creatures. However, note that there is a large difference between the level of cooperation given by a domestic dog, and the limited “killing to order” obtained from, say, a falcon.



Hiring a Trainer

Professional trainers (treat as finding a Hireling, p. B194) are mostly employed by noblemen and royal courts. These are “Court Huntsmen,” (a Comfortable job, -2 on roll to locate). The best places to look for trainers are big cities (near the court), or *perhaps* Bedouin tribes, where talented young tribesmen hope to take their skills out into the world. “Poaching” a good employee from a noble’s entourage could get you into trouble.

It might be possible to find an NPC to hire purely as an Animal Trainer – someone lacking the skills required by a Court Huntsman. He would command a salary of around \$50 × his level of Animal Handling or Falconry skill per month. In general, however, he would work as a Groom in a noble’s household, while acquiring the other skills needed by Court Huntsmen.

Finding a competent individual to look after messenger birds is less difficult. Pay a semi-skilled workman’s wages, or a little more for a literate “post manager.” Messenger pigeons are not trained; the system simply exploits a natural homing instinct, which breeders identify and favor. The birds are, however, accustomed to human handling.

Hunting in the Middle East

The Bedouins always lived partly by hunting; when the Islamic Empire was created, this combined with the aristocratic hobbies of ancient Persia and elsewhere.

As in medieval Europe, royal courts saw the hunt both as enjoyable sport and as a profitable source of food. It was also good practice in military skills. Hunting animals were highly valued. However, the nobility was not “exclusive” about this; the poorer classes were free to hunt for food and as a source of income – albeit without so much use of trained animals. *Good* nobles also paid generous compensation to any farmers whose fields and crops were damaged by their hunts.

A ruler’s hunting-party would be made up of with dozens of professional staff, servants, horses, trained animals, doctors (in case of accidents) and poets and singers for later entertainment. They would take tents, so the group could rest overnight in the field and enjoy freshly-caught meat. Prey included small game, deer, antelope – and also wild boar and lions, neither one eaten, both very dangerous, but challenging, the favorite prey of the proud aristocrat.

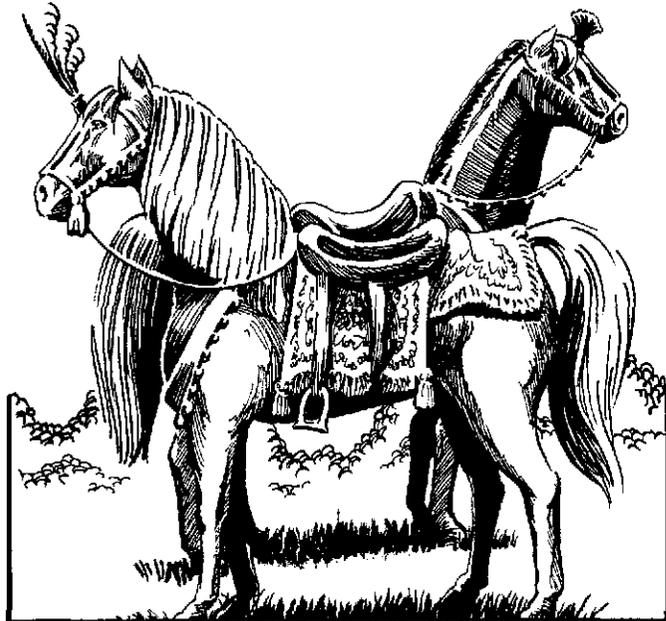
Weapons used in the hunt would include swords, spears, javelins, bows, and pellet-firing crossbows. The Turks were always rated as better archers than the Arabs, here as elsewhere. Snares, lures and beaters were also used.

Natural Animals

Apart from the large species noted below, Arabia has its share of minor wildlife; see the *GURPS Bestiary* for coverage of "small game." Sheep, goats, donkeys and small cattle are staples of the herding lands; the gazelle, oryx and ibex run wild, hunted by man and by hyenas, wolves and jackals. In ancient times, there were ostriches and lions; smaller species include foxes, badger-like rats, and snakes. Arabians traveling to Africa or Asia might encounter many other species.

Large wild animals sometimes appear in legends being ridden by giant or semi-human lords. Demonic knights riding elephants may derive from garbled versions of true stories; the one who fought while riding a giraffe was somewhat weirder . . .

Note: In this and the following sections, "size" is the number of hexes the creature occupies; see p. B141 on animal HT and hit points.



Arabian Horses

The Arabs had a proverb: "When a man rides his horse he forgets about Allah, and when he dismounts he forgets about his horse." Arabs love fine horses, but this does not blind them to the animals' limitations. Horses can be docile and loyal. Horses can also be *stupid*. On the other hand, a truly intelligent horse, like those owned by some legendary heroes, is admired beyond price.

The quality of the local horses made Persian cavalry some of the best of their day, and "Arab" synonymous with racing horse. The smallest would be about equal to the Pony listed on p. B144; the largest would be between the "Cavalry Horse" and "Heavy Warhorse" there – say, ST 45, HT 15, weighing 1,600 lbs. PCs might even encounter specially-bred racehorses, as on the table. See p. B143 for combat abilities.

Most horses react to danger by running away; warhorses have to be trained to their full IQ level (4) and then may attack unknown humans. Some Arab hunting horses, trained to be reliable while their riders were fighting lions, might be tricky to deal with in less perilous situations. Horses will run back into familiar places even when those places are flooded or on fire. A horse which has not been trained or brought up with camels will be *spooked* (pp. B135-136) by the sight or smell of them; a Riding roll calms the horse for 1d seconds, or 3d seconds for a critical success. (Most horses in this setting will, however, be used to camels.)

Horses require at least one hour of care per day if ridden (15 minutes to saddle up, 45 minutes of brushing and rub-down after the ride), only 15 minutes if not. During the day, they will require a 2- to 3-hour break for rest and foraging. This is already figured into the travel times on p. B187; riding the same horse all day is little faster than walking. (They allow themselves to be worked to death, and sometimes react to thirst by drinking themselves to death.) A string of horses – or, often best of all, a mixture of horses and camels – adds 20-30% to daily travel distances. (Realistic mounted parties should often have a herd of animals with them, even if they aren't nomadic herders; the Mongols liked to have 18 ponies per man. This means either a lot of time spent tending beasts, or the appointment of full-time "caretakers.")

A 1,000-lb. cavalry mount ideally needs 80 lbs. of green forage, or 25 lbs. of mixed hay and grain, plus 4 gallons of water, each day. A pony needs $\frac{3}{4}$ as much food, and the same amount of water; draft and heavy warhorses need 50% more of each. To get its full daily ration, a horse needs at least one hour to eat hay and grain – 2-3 hours if it is foraging in *good* vegetation. Grain, being more efficiently processed by a horse's digestive system, makes for a faster, sturdier horse, but it costs – at least \$0.50 per pound, more in uncultivated areas, whereas foraged grass or hay are usually free (if hard to find in deserts).

Fatigue for horses is figured as for humans. If a horse gets less than its full feed requirement, but at least half, fatigue increases by 50%. *Less than half rations doubles fatigue, and no food at all triples it.*

If a horse is in good condition, this may well mean that its proud owner has spent most of the recent past riding a camel and leading the horse. Professional cavalry would usually use Cavalry Horses, although at some dates, horses of this strength might not be as fast as lighter animals, which would therefore be preferred by skirmishing troops.

Realistically, earlier periods should mean lighter horses; breeds did develop over time. During the Crusades, the Franks generally preferred local horses to those they brought from Europe, which were usually exhausted by the journey and unused to local conditions; the Arabs considered them too large and lacking in spirit. (GMs can reduce newly-arrived European horses' HT by a few points. Incidentally, European knightly armor did not become heavy enough to force the use of near-draft-horses until somewhat later.)

Two stallions in the same group will fight; most warhorses are mares or geldings. Horses should be hobbled or picketed at night to prevent straying, although this makes them more susceptible to predators. Large carnivores find them quite tasty.

Baboon

ST: 9-11	Move/Dodge: 12/7	Size: 1
DX: 14	PD/DR: 0/0	Weight: 50-90 lbs.
IQ: 6	Damage: 1d-2 cut (bite)	
HT: 16/8-10	Reach: C	

Baboons are the largest and the smartest of the monkeys, but not as large or intelligent as apes. They occur wild in Arabia, among other places. The "Apes" mentioned in the *Arabian Nights* are probably baboons; magic spells often transform victims into this shape.

Baboons have versatile hands; transformed victims can still write, and in a story, one shows off his calligraphy skill. On all fours, they measure about a yard long; standing, they can reach four feet in height.

Wild baboons have a well-organized social structure, living in

savannah or light forest in troops of 20 to 50. Members of the troop never wander far. When at rest, troops post sentries to keep watch; the troop as a whole will flee from danger, but the males sometimes hang back to hold off pursuit. They particularly fear leopards and lions, with reason. Baboons usually flee up trees from those, barking defiance, but can give a predator a serious fight; they grapple and bite in close combat. Baboons are omnivores, and have been known to attack humans.

Baboons raised from infancy may be tame, and can make loyal pets.



Camel

Known as “the ship of the desert” for its load-carrying ability and swaying gait, camels are worker animals: useful, sometimes raced for amusement, valued, but rarely loved. By and large, they should be seen as property, not companions.

The camel is superbly adapted for its environment. Adaptations include long lashes to guard its eyes from windblown sand, nostrils that can close up for similar protection, and feet that support it on soft surfaces. Camels stand 6-7 feet at the shoulder. They are stubborn and short-tempered. This makes them hard to train and manage, and they have a habit of spitting at people. The Arabian camel, or dromedary, now unknown in the wild, has one hump; the Bactrian, which is still found wild in the Gobi desert of Central Asia, has two. Wild camel herds (up to 15 strong, although 4 to 6 is more normal) will usually flee humans.

Looking after camels while traveling is much like looking after horses, but camels need less attention in deserts. As with horses, they don’t necessarily improve traveling times much, but they *do* improve a party’s load-carrying capability. Their strong odor is unpleasant to unaccustomed humans and horses. (See p. 94 for their effect on horses.) They also have a peculiar walking motion; riders may well become seasick when first traveling by camel!

See pp. B141 and B144 for game details. ST, HT, Move and weight may all be a little lower than listed, but skin may be thick enough to give PD 1, DR 1. Camels can kick for 1d+1 crushing damage, or bite for 1d-1 crushing.

Arabs sometimes enjoy camel races (although horses are thought much nobler); add a point or two of movement for a racer, but assume ST at the lower end of the range.

Camels will actually tolerate being driven for long distances with Heavy Encumbrance (p. B145) – insofar as camels tolerate anything. Loads of 400 lbs. per beast are standard for caravans, and 1,000 lbs. is claimed as possible. (This would imply an exceptional camel.) As camels regard desert terrain as normal, well-laden caravans can cover 25 miles per day, even if they are only making 2.5 mph much of the time. Stories tell of *unladen* camels covering 100 miles in a day, but that would be a superior beast, extremely well handled.

Camels like 8 lbs. of food per day. They can manage with less or none for several days, but then they will try eating anything that comes near (harness, packs, tents . . .). They can eat the toughest, thorniest desert vegetation. In summer, they prefer to drink 5 gallons of water per day, although again their versatile metabolisms let them go without for a while; they can drink up to 25 gallons at a time when they become thirsty. In winter, if they are foraging off water-rich succulent plants, they may lose interest in liquid water altogether.

Caracal (Lynx)

ST: 4-6	Move/Dodge: 10/7	Size: 1
DX: 15	PD/DR: 0/0	Weight: 20-45 lbs.
IQ: 4	Damage: 1d-3 cut	
HT: 14/7-9	Reach: C	

A smaller cat, the caracal – the name means “black ear” in Turkish – is often called the desert lynx, among other names.

And it is the Middle Eastern variety of lynx. An agile creature up to 3½ feet long, its jumping ability is impressive: 20 feet up, stories say, and 40 feet horizontally. With excellent vision, it can spot a hare from 1,000 feet away. It prefers small game (rabbit-sized – sheep at most); it will mostly avoid humans (not hard, with Stealth-18), and attacks are unknown. However, caracals can be caught and trained for hunting. It is handled much like the cheetah (including the use of the hood). It is a solitary, mostly nocturnal hunter. It was much respected for its fighting tricks – wild stories told of caracals killing lions.

Cheetah

ST: 16-20	Move/Dodge: 30/10	Size: 2
DX: 14	PD/DR: 0/0	Weight: 110-160 lbs.
IQ: 4	Damage: 1d cut	
HT: 13-16	Reach: C	

The Muslims’ ultimate hunting-beasts, cheetahs are best captured for training in adulthood (an oddity of the species). Like falcons, they can only be trained, never truly tamed. Cheetahs were very much a court status symbol; a commoner owning one would be thought presumptuous or strange.

The cheetah is the fastest land animal, averaging 50-60 miles per hour and clocked at 75 mph. For all practical purposes, it can accelerate instantly from stationary to full speed, and maintain speed over distances of up to 500 yards.

Cheetahs are daytime hunters, with a number of dog-like features: long legs; claws that do not fully retract; their lack of natural stalking and springing ability. They hunt by outrunning prey, knocking it down with a forepaw, then strangling it with a bite. Their claws are blunt; treat their swipe as a slam attack for no damage. They bite for the damage listed above. They can be

taught to ride on horseback behind the hunter, and to bring prey down after a short stalk or a long chase. They usually travel in a hood, with the eyes uncovered only when released after prey.

Dogs

Characteristics for a broad range of dogs are given on p. B142.

Most dogs in the Middle East are despised scavengers. The feral dog is found around towns, camps and any possible food supply. This is not a much-loved creature. The feral dog will have ST 2-6, 5-7 hit points, and a Move of around 9. Often unhealthy and half-starved, it can be dangerous if cornered, but prefers to avoid trouble. On the other hand, being bitten by a diseased dog is bad news in itself, and if it thinks something is vaguely edible, a wild dog will try to eat it . . . Canines in such situations generally revert to their wolfish ancestry, forming (small) packs with simple social hierarchies. It's not too unrealistic to rule that a pack as a whole will break and run if the leader animal is killed.

However, the tracking and chasing dogs used by huntsmen were highly regarded by hobbyist aristocrats and hunters. ST is 7-10, HT and hit points both around 12-13, and Move 10 or better. They are, of course, highly trainable, and their excellent senses of smell and hearing make them usefully versatile. Bred for skill and intelligence as well as for appearance, types such as the Saluki, from the Yemen, and the Byzantine "Zaghuri" were primarily for pursuit. They could also track or flush out prey. Effective against small game, they were expected to bring it down after the chase, and so were not used against very large, powerful animals.

Dogs taken on an adventure require attention more than care; they react badly to being ignored. Dogs might forage for themselves in wilderness, but can get into trouble while doing so. The GM should make sensing and DX rolls for the dog to find and catch food; a critical failure means that the dog has found something bigger or more dangerous than itself, while a critical success means it brings back something for the owner's pot.

Fastitalcon (*Aspidochelone*)

ST: 300+	Move/Dodge: 5/0	Size: 50+ hexes
DX: 8	PD/DR: 4/7	Weight: 70+ tons
IQ: 5	Damage: see below	
HT: 17/300+	Reach: C	

The fastitalcon is also known as the aspis testudo, or island turtle. This gigantic creature resembles a cross between a turtle and a whale, and is frequently mistaken for the latter.

It resembles an island as it floats lazily in the sea; the back is hard and grows many types of seaweed, and even small trees! Sailors often land on it and walk around, not realizing that they are on a beast. In the *Arabian Nights*, Sinbad the Sailor tells of an occasion when a ship on which he was traveling stopped at what seemed to be a small, uninhabited island, where he and others went ashore to light fires and explore. However, the "island" was really a fastitalcon, which awoke when it felt the fires, and dived, drowning many and leaving Sinbad adrift. (Similar stories have been told in many lands at many times.) When the beast submerges, it causes great waves and swirls of water (see *Swimming*, p. B91).

The fastitalcon is not malicious and does not attack people. It eats fish, which are attracted to the breath from its open mouth. Some people, however, claim that it *is* malicious, and eats people. In that case, its bite would do 30d cutting. Others claim that it is actually a venomous whale!

Hawks and Falcons

Falconers don't *tame* their birds (that is probably impossible); they cultivate a falcon's natural hunting instincts, direct them

after prey, and accustom them to being separated from it afterwards.

See the "Falcon" details on p. B142. These can represent any of the goshawks, sparrow-hawks, falcons, etc., used by Arab falconers (some are a little less powerful; eagles are markedly bigger). Most are rather more than a foot long, and in the wild, feed on small birds, mammals and reptiles.

In Muslim texts, trainable birds are divided into "goshawks" (which were regarded highly, and sub-divided into male, female and sparrow-hawk), peregrines (also sub-divided into three species/sizes), sakers (again sub-divided into three species) and eagles. For the first two, black or predominantly white colors were preferred; the last were fairly rare in falconry. Falcons are mostly carried under eye-covering hoods, which make them quiet (as if it were night).

Falcons catch their prey with a swift diving "stoop." Their distance vision is legendary. Falcons were sometimes trained to attack large mammals such as gazelles. This might mean a human huntsman finishes the kill while the bird harasses the animal. Asian herders in Kazakhstan preserve to this day a tradition of using *eagles* to protect their flocks from foxes and even wolves.

Falcons require a few ounces of meat per day. They can be used to catch their own food; take 1d×15 minutes in open country, and roll against falconry skill. If the roll is made by 4 or better, or another such period of effort is taken, the bird will catch enough for the falconer's dinner as well. They also require a certain amount of routine care and attention. If they get free accidentally, or forget their training, they revert to wild status; this may happen on a critical failure on a falconry roll while hunting (GM's option).

Nomad Pony

The Huns, Turks and Mongols used small, very hardy ponies for their long-range, skirmishing warfare. Treat them as the "Pony" listed on p. B144, and see p. B143 for combat notes.

In a well-equipped Mongol horde, each man might have as many as 18 remounts. Turkish ponies were also used by other Middle Eastern troops, including some Crusader "sergeants" and Turcopole light cavalry.

Weasel

ST:1	Move/Dodge:9/7	Size: < 1
DX:15	PD/DR:0/0	Weight: 1-2 lbs.
IQ:5	Damage:1d-4 cr	
HT:12/3-4	Reach: C	

The weasel, like the European ferret, is an agile, vicious little predator that can be trained to flush small game – up to and including foxes, stories say – out of narrow spaces such as burrows. It might serve to force birds out of thickets to be attacked by a falcon. It is part of the hunter's paraphernalia, rather than a pet, and would travel in a cage or box.

Carrier Pigeon

ST: 1-2	Move/Dodge: 7-15/7	Size: < 1
DX: 14	PD/DR: 0/0	Weight: 1-2 lbs.
IQ: 5	Damage: 1d-5 cr	
HT: 12/1-2	Reach: C	

The use of homing pigeons to carry messages was an ancient Middle Eastern invention – possibly Egyptian. The Muslims used them during the Crusades, a significant advantage to besieged Muslim towns, who knew more about relief forces and the general strategic situation than Franks in a similar position, at least until the latter learned the technique. Racing or "show" pigeons

were a popular hobby, with fine birds commanding high prices. Armies and cities might organize a regular "pigeon post."

Rhinoceros

ST: 125-150 Move/Dodge: 14/7 Size: 10
DX: 9 PD/DR: 2/3 Weight: 1-2 tons
IQ: 4 Damage: see below
HT: 17/40-50 Reach: C

This well-known African animal is included here because it gets a mention in the *Arabian Nights*. Its ferocity is rather exaggerated: it is described as killing elephants with its horn, and carrying them around on it afterwards! In reality, the various species of rhino are cautious creatures, usually fleeing from possible danger unless seriously provoked.

Real rhinos are most active at dusk and dawn, wandering around water-holes where they can drink and wallow in the mud, and eating greenery. They are near-sighted (Vision 9), but have acute smell and hearing (both at 16). The poor eyesight is reflected here in the low DX – they have difficulty hitting moving targets.

Rhinos attack by charging, impaling with their horns or trampling. For a "realistic" rhino, the horn does 2d+1 crushing damage, and a trample does 1d+2 crushing. If its charge misses, a rhino (other than a mother protecting young) will often forget about the target and wander off about its business!

For a "fantastic" rhino, set all characteristics around the top end of the ranges given. Its sharp horn does 2d+1 *impaling* damage, and if it penetrates the target's DR for 4 or more points, the victim is *stuck*; the rhino can wander off carrying him, and indeed must make a DX roll to get the horn back out (inflicting 1d+1

more damage in the process; a critical failure, or three normal failures in a row, means that the creature must wait 1d hours before trying again). "Fantastic" rhinos can also trample for 1d+2, and tend toward the psychopathic.

Trained Elephants

Domesticated elephants were used at some periods in Middle Eastern lands, almost solely for war and for ostentatious display of wealth. They are, of course, incredibly expensive to buy and to keep. Horses that are not used to them react to elephants as to camels – and can see them from even further away. But elephants can be spooked by fire, pain, and many other things. A panicked elephant is a threat to every human being in the area, especially as it may well be intelligent enough to deliberately dump its *mahout* (driver). For more information, see p. B142.

Giant and Prehistoric Animals

"Sinbad" movies often feature all sorts of anachronistic or outsize monsters. GMs wishing to run cinematic adventures should feel free to throw in a variety of one-of-a-kind menaces. They are generally *big* and dangerous; the smallest should need a determined group of good, spear-armed fighters to dissuade them, while the largest should only be brought in to be the subject of some heroic ingenuity (involving, say, a deftly collapsed building, giant artillery piece, or convenient hidden precipice).

There is insufficient space to cover such creatures here; usually, they can be represented by a standard-type animal with much more ST and HT. The *GURPS Bestiary* has some possibilities, especially those creatures marked as being from the Ice Age.

The Djinn

The loosest definition of "djinni" might be "spirit;" any creature of the "non-physical world," from the highest of the angels to the lord of demons. However, the usual meaning is more specific. Allah made angels from light, humans from earth and djinn from smokeless fire.

Djinn are a class of desert spirits that were sometimes worshipped as gods before the coming of Islam. In tales, they live on earth, but can also be found in the lower heavens and elsewhere. They are fully a part of the Islamic worldview, and many Muslims, especially in out-of-the-way areas, still have a very literal belief in their existence and the danger of being possessed by "evil spirits."

Djinn (singular *djinni*, feminine *djinniya*) are as variable as humanity, if not more so. There are different types of djinn; there is also great variation in djinn personalities. Each djinni should be considered to be as much an individual as a human NPC. Djinn have free will, and can become Muslims; friendly and helpful djinn are certainly possible, and some might even have the Pacifism disadvantage. (A djinni servant who will not harm any living thing is a useful but tricky ally.) However, good djinn mostly avoid entanglements with humanity; the majority of "free" djinn in stories are, at the very least, self-indulgent. It is not necessarily evil to invoke djinn in magic, but a good magician should be very careful what sort of djinni he calls, and what the terms of any deals are. The *Arabian Nights* tales are full of djinn controlled by magic rings or lamps; some of these are quite friendly to their controllers, provided that the latter do not pointlessly offend them.

For all their power, djinn are not infallible or unbeatable. They are bound by divine laws, and by invocations of power such as the Seal of Solomon (see p. 91). Ghuls know better than to fight even average, competent human warriors; heroes may take on

stronger djinn, and great wizards may be able to control *almost* anything. Djinn can also be outwitted or tricked.

The most important feature of almost every djinni is the ability to change shape to some extent. Djinn have fine control over the particles of their bodies, and use this, sometimes very ingeniously (see the descriptions below.) However, their "rest shapes" are stable; a normally observant human can recognize individual djinn who are not shape-changed as easily as human beings. Many are also hideous, or at least terrifying, to human eyes; their "rest" shapes are humanoid, but large and grotesque, with distorted features, huge fangs, and the like.

Djinn live in many odd places, including wells, abandoned houses and other ruins. Djinn lords (Marid, and perhaps those known as Jan) like vast *underground* palaces, with magical illumination and servants; these could be interesting, but *very* dangerous, for adventurers to visit. There are also a few stories of secret djinn towns, inhabited by large numbers of low-power djinn and run like human communities.

Individual djinn, or groups of related specimens, may have unusual abilities that make them more or less powerful. For example, one tale tells of a hero who fought a minor djinni – little more than a tough ghul – and hit it once with a sword, injuring it badly. The djinni continued fighting, but the hero refrained from striking again, wisely remembering a saying: "*One blow will kill a djinni; two blows will surely bring two djinn to life.*" (This power could be reflected in various ways; the best is probably to say that if a djinni with this attribute has *any* body part completely severed, both parts of the body regenerate to full-size djinn with 60% of the hit points of the original each, and all of its abilities at -1 to die rolls. This makes it a very dangerous opponent for heroes with cutting weapons.)

All djinn have magical powers, if only their shape-shifting; for game purposes, they are considered to have various spells at high skill levels. Some of them are trained magical adepts. Because of their wild and magical nature, djinn ignore prerequisites for spells (or spell-like powers), and they may actually have some degree of Magic Resistance because of their high Health.

Being creatures of fire, djinn have one other special attribute. When they die, the fire that flows in their veins often bursts free and destroys the corpse. This is unlikely to harm anyone who is not actually touching the djinni at the time, but it is a spectacular effect (and it could be a significant plot device).

Djinn sometimes marry humans; few children, however, are born of such unions. There are hints in the stories, but few actual examples; Queen Balkis' mother was a djinniya, who made her human husband, an exceptionally handsome vizier, promise never to ask what her race was. (When he forgot himself one day and asked her, she gave a sorrowful wail and vanished.) Given the different compositions of humans and djinn, GMs may assume that childbirth is improbable, or at least that it requires magic.

If djinn have languages of their own, they never use them in front of humans; they always know the languages of any human communities in the vicinity of their homes. Their names, when they allow humans to know them, often sound slightly bizarre (such as "Jerjees" or "Sakhr," although the former at least is a human name). Alternatively, they may take dramatic, descriptive names such as "Rattling Thunder."

Sorcerer djinn sometimes manufacture magical items. As djinn can be very powerful magically, often their creations are, too. Given the tricky and variable nature of these beings, their products should be among the weirdest and most unusual magic in a campaign.

Lesser Djinn

ST: 20 **Move/Dodge:** 7/7 **Size:** 1 (in solid form)
DX: 14 **PD/DR:** 3/3
IQ: 11 **Basic Speed:** 7.75
HT: 14/17 **Natural Attack:** 1d cut (bite)

Standard Abilities: Change into the form of a cloud of smoke, which shrinks enough to fit in a large bottle, or expands to at least 12' tall. In this form, they fly at a speed of 10, never suffocate, and carry loads with their normal strength (subject to standard encumbrance rules), but they cannot strike blows or cast spells. They take no damage from physical blows in this form, and only half damage from fire, but suffer the full effects of cold, lightning, and similar powers, and can be blown around by magical (or natural) winds of gale force or above.

Most can also change into one or two other forms, usually including a large human being; these changes are purely "cosmetic," granting no special abilities. All shape-changes require one turn of concentration, but have no skill roll or fatigue cost.

Other normal abilities: Alertness +3, Literacy, Magery 2, Night Vision, and tough skin providing defenses as noted above.

Spells: Usually 5-15 spells of any common type, at skill level 20. Favorites include Fear, various Illusions, Recover Strength, and Rejoin.

Typical Skills: Brawling-14, Broadsword-14, Carousing-17, Interrogation-11. Djinn roll against their DX or Brawling skill when trying to bite. Some also have skills such as Armoury or Leadership, used in the service of djinn lords.

This is a fairly unremarkable djinni which might be encountered in a ruin or a magician's home, or living down a well. Such beings tend to be short-tempered and easy to anger, but also whimsical; a hard-luck story or small favor might gain disproportionate assistance from a djinni. GMs can feel free to roll a ran-

dom reaction and act on it. Tales tell of well-dwelling djinn – little more than ghuls – stealing a caravan's camels for food, until tracked and defeated by a hero.

Djinn often go unarmed; their strength and magic make them terrible enough enemies, and the less fastidious of them can bite in close combat for damage as listed (using their Brawling skill to hit) when in their natural (solid) form. They can also punch and grapple; if they have a grappling hold on an opponent, they have +3 to hit with a bite if holding one-handed, +5 if holding with both hands. However, some carry bastard-sword-size blades, for show if nothing else, and can swing them one-handed for 3d+3 cutting damage (with ST 20), gaining a parry of 7.

Typical Djinn

ST: 30 **Move/Dodge:** 10/7 **Size:** 1 (in
DX: 16 **PD/DR:** 4/4 man-like form)
IQ: 14 **Basic Speed:** 10.25
HT: 15/25 **Natural Attack:** 1d+2 cut (bite)

Standard Abilities: Change into the form of a cloud of smoke, exactly as a Lesser Djinni but maximum height 25'. Can also change into one or more other forms, usually including a large human being and some kind of "natural" animal, such as an ass or a snake. These changes are generally "cosmetic," granting no additional abilities, but might give enhanced senses (GM's option). All shape-changes require one turn of concentration, but have no skill roll or fatigue cost.

Other normal abilities: Alertness +3, Literacy, Magery 3, Night Vision, tough skin providing defenses as noted above, and Breathe Water as easily as air.

Spells: Detect Magic-25, plus (usually) 10-20 spells of any common type, at skill level 25. Favorites include Complex Illusion, Darkness, Quick March, Recover Strength, Shapeshift Others, and various Earth spells.

Typical Skills: Acting-13, Brawling-15, Broadsword-16, Carousing-23, Interrogation-13, Wrestling-16. May add others according to individual interests and personality.

This is a more powerful djinni with greater powers and perhaps a more stable personality. However, any djinni encountered by chance is unpredictable and worrying. If it bothers to carry weapons, this creature will use a sword equal in size to a human greatsword, but swung one-handed for swing+2 cutting damage (giving 6d+2 at ST 30); a vulgar type could bite for the listed damage, much like a lesser djinni. Djinn are surprisingly fast, but usually too big and arrogant to dodge quite as well as they might.

The class of djinn known as the *Jan* appear to be around this power level, or greater (perhaps equal to 'Ifrit, or even Marid). Jan seem to have a particular fondness for living underground, and might specialize in Earth-related spells accordingly.

Ghuls

ST: 14 **Move/Dodge:** 7/7 **Size:** 1
DX: 13 **PD/DR:** 1/3
IQ: 10 **Basic Speed:** 7
HT: 15 **Natural Attack:** 1d cut

Standard Abilities: Change own shape to any human form; effects are much as the spell Alter Body. Take 2d turns to shift, or 30 seconds if emulating a specific being; no energy cost unless shifting more than once within a five minute period, which costs a point of fatigue. Other abilities: Alertness +2, Magic Resistance (3 levels), Night Vision, and tough skin providing defenses as noted above.

Spells: A few ghuls are sorcerers, with IQ 13, Literacy, Magery 1 or 2, and 2-12 spells of any sort, usually at level 15.

Typical Skills: Acting-13, Brawling-13, Claw-14, Stealth-13,

Survival (Desert)-14, Tracking-10. Some particularly unpleasant ghuls with a special talent for shape-changing into attractive forms have Sex Appeal-14; any that have infiltrated human society may learn other skills there.

The word *ghul* is the basis of the English word *ghoul*, but Arabian ghuls are not troglodytic scavengers. Ghuls are simply the least of the djinn. They are evil, desert-dwelling shape-shifters; their speciality is to adopt a harmless-looking human form, lure travelers astray, and then kill and eat them. They can shift their form enough to create claws on their hands, which do the listed damage in close combat; they can also bite for 1d+1. (Use their Brawling skill to hit.) Although dangerous hand-to-hand, ghuls prefer to kill from behind, and will flee if a well-armed opponent sees them for what they are. Unlike other djinn, they cannot adopt intangible forms, and thus can be killed a lot more easily.

Ghuls are relatively common (as djinn go), and much feared; wise travelers in wilder areas go in terror of them.

"Ghul" is a very general term in popular use, much like the European "ogre"; so-called ghuls can therefore vary in power, but are always evil.

'Ifrit

ST: 45 **Move/Dodge:** 12/8 **Size:** 2
DX: 17 **PD/DR:** 4/6 ("natural" form)
IQ: 17 **Basic Speed:** 12.25
HT: 32 **Natural Attack:** 4d+2 cut (bite)

Standard Abilities: Shape-changing equivalent to the Great Shapeshift spell (p. 81), with no fatigue cost or skill roll required, taking one turn for each change (treat as skill 30 for other purposes), including the ability to transform into a smoke cloud (see the Typical Djinn, p. 98); also, Breathe Water as easily as air, Literacy, Magery 3, Magic Resistance (2 levels), Night Vision, and tough skin providing defenses as noted above.

Spells: At least 20 spells, of any common type, and possibly some rare ones, all to at least skill 20, with some possibly linked to the shapeshift. In addition, Analyze Magic-25, Detect Magic-25, Identify Spell-20, Recover Strength-20, and Flight-30.

Typical Skills: Acting-15, Alchemy-18, Astrology-17, Astronomy-17, Brawling-16, Broadsword-16, Geology-17, Interrogation-16, Wrestling-17, Polearm-15, Two-Handed Sword-16. May add others, appropriate to specific interests.

The 'Ifrit (or *Efreet*; feminine *Ifriteh*) are among the most powerful and dangerous of djinn; they often use this power to enforce their rule on hordes of lesser djinn. Their "natural" form is a towering, hideous humanoid, but they can adopt human shape and size if they feel the need (which is rare). Like all djinn, they are extremely capricious. When they are evil, their evil verges on the demonic, but fortunately, they rarely concern themselves with humanity unless provoked. Great magicians can *sometimes* control them magically. They usually shapeshift for the sake of the specific powers of other shapes, rather than for stealthy disguise.

Tending toward the animalistically vicious, 'Ifrit may sometimes bite in combat, whether shape-shifted or not; they would rather adopt a deadly shape than wield weapons. Use their Brawling skill to hit. They are strong and fast, if a little unpracticed at defensive maneuvers (which they rarely feel they need).

Marid

ST: 50 **Move/Dodge:** 13/9 **Size:** 1 (in
DX: 18 **PD/DR:** 4/6 normal form)
IQ: 20 **Basic Speed:** 13.25
HT: 35 **Natural Attack:** (none normally)

Standard Abilities: Shape-changing equivalent to the Great Shapeshift spell (p. 81), with no fatigue cost or skill roll required,

taking one turn for each change (treat as skill 50 for other purposes), including the ability to transform into a smoke cloud (see the Typical Djinn, p. 98); also Breathe Water as easily as air, Literacy, Magery 3, Magic Resistance (4 levels), Night Vision, and tough skin providing defenses as noted above.

Spells: At least 30 spells, of any common type, and probably some rare ones, all to skill 25 *minimum*, with some possibly linked to Great Shapeshift. In addition, Analyze Magic-35, Detect Magic-30, Identify Spell-30, Recover Strength-20, and Flight-35.

Typical Skills: Administration-20, Astrology-18, Astronomy-20, Detect Lies-20, Diagnosis-18, Leadership-22, Literature-18, Naturalist-18, Savoir-Faire-20, Theology-20, plus others appropriate to specific interests.

The Marid are described as the most powerful of the djinn. Some accounts say that they are evil; it seems likely that they are, for the most part, simply indifferent to humanity. For game purposes, Marid are treated as "djinni lords." Marid must be aware in theory of the importance of human beings in the universe, but in practice, creatures with magical powers of this order are not going to worry too much about human interests from day to day. Such indifference can be terrifying for a human who encounters a Marid; it can destroy a mortal who irritates it almost as a man swats a fly. Of course, some Marid have the sort of personalities that *enjoy* swatting flies; conversely, a few Marid regard humans with casual benevolence. The most powerful human wizards may be able to command Marids, but woe betide any human who overestimates his own power! Marid are such powerful spell-casters that they disdain all weapons (and certainly don't go for *biting*), but some may wrestle as a hobby (and so have Wrestling-18).

Djinni lords – even those under magical enslavement – often command armies of lesser djinn; these are useful when it needs to accomplish many minor tasks, for mass battles, and as a mark of rank. A Marid will usually want to keep track of what its underlings are doing, and will generally take a "hands on" approach to management.

Si'lat

ST: 12 **Move/Dodge:** 8/8 **Size:** 1 ("natural" form)
DX: 17 **PD/DR:** 2/2
IQ: 18 **Basic Speed:** 8.75
HT: 18 **Natural Attack:** (none normally)

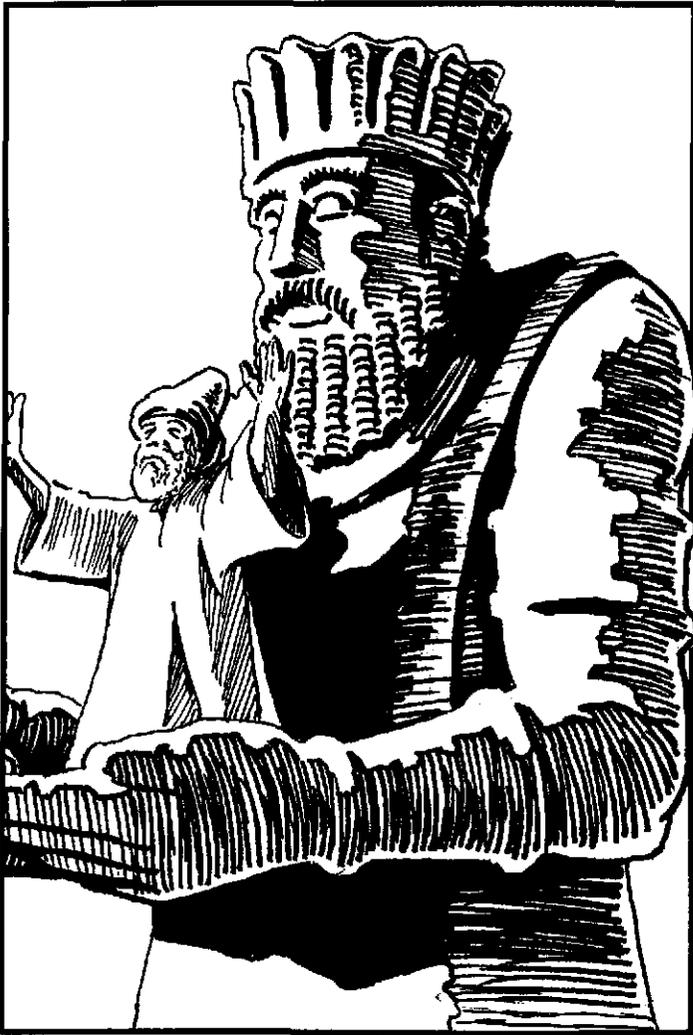
Standard Abilities: Literacy, Magery 3, Magic Resistance (5 levels), Night Vision, Breathe Water automatically when shape-shifted into an appropriate form, create a Summoning Memento (p. 91) once per week, tough skin providing defenses as noted above. May add other advantages from those available to human characters.

Spells: At least 20 spells, of any common type, and possibly some rare ones, all to skill 20 *minimum* (usually higher), with some possibly linked to Great Shapeshift. In addition, Analyze Magic-30, Aura-25, Breathe Water-25, Detect Magic-30, Great Shapeshift-45, Identify Spell-20, Recover Strength-20, and Glide-25 linked to Great Shapeshift.

Typical Skills: Acting-17, Alchemy-18, Archaeology-18, Astrology-19, Astronomy-18, Detect Lies-16, Diagnosis-16, Geology-17, Literature-18, Naturalist-16, Savoir-Faire-18, Singing-18. May add others, appropriate to specific interests or "hobbies."

Another class of expert shape-shifters, Si'lat are all females, known as "the sorceresses of the djinn"; they may simply be ordinary djinniya who have a special talent for magic. Little else is certain about them. They may be too good as shape-changers to be recognized; however, plenty of shape-shifting djinniya appear in tales, and these may often or always be Si'lat. They dislike physical combat, using magic and shape-changing rather than weapons.

Other Fantastic Creatures



Animated Statues

Primarily a feature of modern "Sinbad movies," animated statues are the result of the Animation spell (p. 88) turning a piece of sculpted wood, metal, or stone into a servant. Such effects are typically temporary, lasting for one good movie fight scene, but the spell *can* be made into a permanent enchantment.

Any animated object has IQ 9, ST equal to 5 + the base energy cost of the animating spell (less if much smaller than man-sized – GM's option), and DX of 11 for light, flexible objects, 9 for rigid but fairly soft materials such as wood, 8 for stone, and 7 for metal. It has hit points equal to 3 times its ST, but every 3 full hits removed eliminates 1 ST; a 0-hits statue is wrecked and non-functional. Statues have the normal ruggedness (or vulnerability) of their material, with a PD of 3 for metal, 2 for stone, and 1 for other materials. They move at a speed equal to their DX minus 4. They attack with a skill equal to their DX, parry (or block, if they are sculpted with a shield) at ½ DX, and dodge with their Move speed.

Hence a man-sized wooden statue, which costs a base energy of 3 to animate, has ST 8, DX 9, PD 1, DR 5 (being medium-weight wood), 24 hit points, and a move of 5; it also has a vulnerability to fire, like all wood. A twice-human-size bronze statue, costing a base energy of 18 to animate, has ST 23, DX 7, PD 3, DR 7 (that much bronze is *heavy*), 69 hit points, and a move of 3.

Animated statues are limited in versatility. If they are made with nothing in their hands, they cannot use weapons, having no

weapons skill at all (they punch for standard thrust damage). If they have weapons "built in," they cannot drop them and use those hands for something else. Treat any sculpted weapon as whatever it looks like! Their senses are equal to those of a human of their IQ. Use a *Golem* for a better long-term servant.

A human (or other) skeleton can also be animated, but it must first be "wired up," reinforced, and generally prepared, taking 1d days and \$100 worth of materials. It may have a weapon attached to its hand during this time. Animated, articulated bone is light and flexible, but also fairly fragile; such a skeleton has ST 8, DX 11, PD 1, DR 1, 24 hit points, and a move of 7. Most observers will take it for vile black magic.

Dendans

ST: 2,500	Move/Dodge: 15/7	Size: 200
DX: 13	PD/DR: 2/5	Weight: 190 tons
IQ: 10	Damage: see below	
HT: 18/2000	Reach: C	

This is a very large sea creature known mostly for swallowing ships. According to legend, a Dendan will die instantly if it eats human flesh or hears a human shout. In several tales, however, an adventurer spends time inside a Dendan, much as Gepetto spent time inside a whale in the story of Pinocchio. (Apparently legend is fallible.)

Dendans surface from time to time, for unknown reasons – this gives sailors a chance to spot them. Any Dendan can, if it really wishes, ram targets, (use its DX as its attack skill, and calculate crushing damage as for a thrust at 75% of actual ST), or strike with a tail-swipe (attack skill DX-3, crushing damage as for a swing at 50% of ST).

Demons

In Islam, the exact nature of demons is unclear, but they certainly exist. They were powerful beings who rebelled against Allah by refusing to bow down to Adam, the first man; they may have been either angels or djinn. In the latter case, they seem to have been djinn who were working as servants in the Heavens. Their lord is *Iblis*, "the Shaitan," equivalent to the biblical Satan.

Demons – if they are really different from djinn – do not occur in stories, except as intangible tempters; they are simply not permitted to walk openly on Earth. However, if a GM wants to use such creatures, any very powerful bundle of characteristics will do, provided it is played as subtle and utterly evil. It *might* be possible for a sorcerer to sell his soul to Iblis, in the manner of European black magicians, but this act would earn terrible and probably prompt punishment under Muslim beliefs.

(The "divs" of Zoroastrian myth are immensely powerful demons, dedicated to leading humanity astray; their lord is Ahri-man.)

Dwarfs of Zughb

ST: 5	Move/Dodge: 7/7	Size: 1
DX: 13	PD/DR: 0/0	Weight: 50-60 lbs.
IQ: 8	Damage: 1d-4 cut (bite)	
HT: 14/5	Reach: C	

Typical Skills: Boating-11, Brawling-13, Climbing-13, Fishing-12, Seamanship-8, Stealth-12, Survival (Island)-12, Swimming-20 (swim move 2).

In one of Sinbad's encounters, the "Dwarfs" of the Isle of the Zughb are referred to as more-or-less human, but their behavior is bizarre. They are ape-like, barely three feet tall, and covered in black fur, with gleaming little yellow eyes. Their teeth are sharp

enough to damage ships' rigging. "True" humans find them hideously ugly.

They swim out to any ship they see passing their island, scramble aboard, and take it over. As they invariably number in the hundreds, and show no signs of caring about the opinions of their victims, sensible crews put up no resistance to such assaults, since it is obvious that the Dwarfs could easily wipe them out by sheer force of numbers. The Dwarfs then carry the crews off their own ships and deposit them on the nearest beach, where the island's other menaces generally soon do them in. No one knows what the Dwarfs do with the ships they hijack; they certainly vandalize the sails and rigging, but not (at first) enough to render them unseaworthy. Presumably they plunder the cargoes and then sink or wreck the hulls.

If the Dwarfs of Zughb have a language of their own, no one else has ever learned it. It might be possible to communicate with them using gesture, but they aren't interested in cooperating with such efforts. How they learned to sail full-sized ships is unknown, but presumably they get enough practice.

Ghosts

Ghosts are not very common in Middle Eastern myth, but they were thought possible, and usually expected to be evil (perhaps because good spirits would go swiftly to Paradise). Some tales confused them with evil djinn. They would be immaterial spirits with quasi-magical powers, much as in European myth.

Giants

ST: 25-120 **Move/Dodge:** 8/5 **Size:** 2-4
DX: 13 **PD/DR:** 0-2/1-3 **Weight:** 600 lbs.-1½ tons
IQ: 8 **Damage:** see below
HT: 18/20-50 **Reach:** 1-2 (+1 with weapons)

Giants – strictly speaking, gigantic races of men – appear in a number of Middle Eastern stories. Most are brutal man-eaters, but some are mighty warriors, perhaps part-djinn or demonic, armed and fighting as intelligently as human troops. (Some giants rode elephants or other great mounts.) Some accounts (Turkish and modern) portray one-eyed giants; this would be a very rare subspecies, or a freak of nature. A very few giants may have magical devices or "tricks" that give them special advantages.

The characteristics above are for fairly quick but not very bright giants, of widely varying sizes; GMs can feel free to make individuals different in any way. (Giants are traditionally susceptible to trickery, and highly overconfident, but not necessarily *totally* stupid.) In combat, most giants either use crude clubs (require readying after each attack) for swing+3 crushing damage (giving 5d+2 at ST 25, up to 28d+5 at ST 120), or grapple and batter their victims for thrust-2 crushing (2d for ST 25, up to 14d-1 at ST 120); a few swing vast edged weapons (again, must be readied after each attack), doing swing+2 cutting. All combat skills are usually at DX level; some giants may be well-trained (or startlingly inept). Giants rarely dodge, unless faced with attacks that are on their own scale (such as catapult missiles, dragon breath, etc.).

Giant Snakes

ST: 25-50 **Move/Dodge:** 3-6/5 **Size:** 4-8
DX: 13 **PD/DR:** 2/3 **Weight:** ½-1 ton
IQ: 3 **Damage:** see below
HT: 16/20-50 **Reach:** C,1

Giant serpents are an obvious sort of monster; Sinbad met some. He described them as larger than palm trees, big enough to swallow elephants in a single gulp. Of course, since he was stranded among them for a time, fear may have colored his mem-

ory. Those described here aren't quite in that class, but they are quite big enough; GMs are welcome to scale them up or down.

Snakes are either "constrictors," which crush their prey to death, or poisonous. Some people (including most story-tellers) work on the assumption that every snake worth the name is highly poisonous, but a giant constrictor would be more than deadly enough.

Either sort can bite for *impaling* damage appropriate to its strength (snake teeth are long!). If the bite is poisonous and any damage penetrates armor, the victim must roll vs. HT-4; if the roll succeeds the poison inflicts only 1d extra damage; otherwise, the victim takes 1d for every 10 full points of ST possessed by the snake. (Note that DR from toughness does *not* protect against poison injection.) Constrictors wrap around their prey, "grappling" and inflicting crushing damage according to the snake's ST; the victim must win a contest of ST to escape.

Like any other snake, a giant snake that has just had a decent meal simply wants to crawl off and digest for a few days, during which time it is torpid and unaggressive. Sinbad described finding a female giant snake guarding its eggs in an hidden cave; such maternal instincts would make the snake unwilling to move, but dangerous to disturb.

The Old Man of the Sea

ST: 20 **Move/Dodge:** 8/8 **Size:** 1
DX: 15 **PD/DR:** 0/2 **Weight:** about 150 lbs.
IQ: 14 **Damage:** see below
HT: 17 **Reach:** C

Skills: Acting-15, Area Knowledge (Home Island)-14, Camouflage-14, Gesture-17, Stealth-15, Survival (Island)-15, Tracking-14.

A famous being encountered by Sinbad, the Old Man of the Sea may be a minor djinn or supernatural creature, or just a human being with freakish abilities. He lives on a wooded island, and appears to travelers to be a decrepit old fellow wearing a rough cloak of leaves – presumably a shipwrecked mariner.

The Old Man cannot speak, but he is adept with sign language. If he meets a lone human, he will attempt to trick them into carrying him on their shoulders for a way – say, to cross a stream. Those who help a "poor old man" in this way find that he refuses to get off. Instead, he hangs on with his freakish strength, strangling them into submission (see p. B112) and kicking them until they serve him, carrying him between forest clearings where the best fruit grows. His legs are covered in tough black skin, and he can use them to grip, strangle and kick with his full strength and with great efficiency; he never shows any signs of fatigue.

Some travelers have heard of the Old Man's evil behavior; presumably, if he meets such, or larger groups of well-armed individuals, he will avoid them. (Skills as given here should make this feasible.)

Sinbad eventually escaped after he improvised himself some wine out of handy grapes; the Old Man demanded some and drank himself into a stupor, and Sinbad threw him off and killed him by crushing his head with a stone. Sinbad was later told that he was the first of the Old Man's many victims to escape; how long the Old Man had been preying on lone travelers, and whether there are any more of his kind, is unknown. If he was a supernatural being, he may have been unaging and ancient.

Peri

The Peri is a *Persian* creature, not found (as such) in Arab tales; accounts of its nature differ widely. All agree that Peri are supernatural, humanoid and very beautiful. Some say that Peri are kindly spirits, others, that they are demonic temptresses. Peri

may all appear female, or some may be male. In some tales, Peri are winged; the Turks say that one such, caught and raped by a man, gave birth to a cannibalistic one-eyed giant.

For game purposes, a GM has three options:

1. Peri may simply be Si'lat, as the Persians know them.
2. In a game world with "standard European" races, Peri may be Elves who happen to live in warmer climates. They will then have characteristics as for "regular" Elves, plus perhaps a few local differences (and appropriate skills).
3. Peri can be spell-casting spirits in material form – mysterious beings outside the Arab worldview. This ducks the issue, but it does allow the GM the most flexibility.

Persian Dragons

ST: 100 Move/Dodge: 26/6# Size: 18 hexes
DX: 14 PD/DR: 4/7 Weight: 4,000 lbs.
IQ: 8 Damage: 4d+1 imp#
HT: 14/70-110 Reach: R,C-2

Dragons appear more in Persian than Arab myth. They vary considerably in size, shape, and presence or absence of wings, horns, and flaming breath; the most common features are floods of deadly poison and great ferocity.

Stats given here are for the three-headed *azhi dahaka*, a powerful flying Persian dragon that is an opponent for the most worthy heroes. Each head has a different breath attack requiring 2 fatigue per use (use any two per turn!). For more details, see *Fantasy Bestiary*, pp. 86-87. Other types of dragons in the Middle East include the Zoroastrian sea dragon, the *gandarewa* (p. FB87); the seven-headed *lotan*, known to ancient Canaanites (p. FB89); the *mushussu* of ancient Babylon (p. FB91); and the *thu'ban*, of the ancient Arabian desert, large enough to swallow a camel whole (p. FB93). The stories give them characters like the western type – cunning but animalistic, ravaging monsters – whereas the old manuscript illustrators were heavily influenced by Chinese art. Slightly smaller but still formidable dragons often have poison rather than flame; one has a rather unreliable power of invisibility.

Roc

ST: about 2,000 Move/Dodge: 18/9 Size: 25+
DX: 12 PD/DR: 6/8 Weight: about 30 tons
IQ: 5 Damage: 50d
HT: 15/200 Reach: 2,3,4

The roc is a favorite creature of Arabian myth, encountered more than once by Sinbad. It is simply a *very* large, carnivorous bird; indeed, some rocs are described as carrying off and eating whole elephants. Certainly, a roc's egg is as large as a small building, and Sinbad ties himself to the leg of a roc without the bird even noticing. Modern accounts have shown rather smaller rocs (say, 4 tons, with ST 150, 40 hit points, PD 2, DR 3, and a 5d attack). One movie portrays a two-headed Roc; this would be a *very* rare species.

Getting into a fight with a roc is a silly idea; the sheer scale of this creature would make it a match for a human army – and they'd need artillery to stand a chance. In Sinbad's tales, rocs wreck ships, but largely ignore individual human beings; they function as plot devices. The "50d" beak strike is listed for the sake of form. Obviously, rolling for damage if the roc actually pecks a human victim is a waste of time – the victim will be dead.

In one tale, a pair of rocs pick up giant boulders and drop them from a great height to sink a ship whose crew destroyed their egg (implying significant intelligence). Such boulders are likely to do tens of dice of damage to any human underneath – again, don't roll, a direct-hit victim is *dead*. Collateral and fragmentation damage is a matter for GM judgment.

"Roc's feathers" were a favorite curio of the Muslim Middle Ages, offered for sale by merchants throughout the Islamic world. In reality, they were the giant fronds of an eastern palm tree.

Sea-Born

These Middle Eastern mer-folk appear in a couple of *Arabian Nights* tales. Some writers have suggested that they are low-grade djinn, but all the evidence is that they are actually a race of sea-living humans, although they are certainly very magically talented. They sometimes marry land-humans, and these marriages are usually fertile. They are generally benevolent, and most are good Muslims.

Sea-Born society is much like that of land-living humans; they dwell in great cities, ruled by sultans and nobles. However, they sometimes follow odd, if rational, customs; for example, they may celebrate the death of a friend, because that individual has now gone to Paradise.

Even the most human-seeming Sea-Born have biological differences from land-dwellers, however; all "cross-race" Medical skill rolls are at -2 (see p. B56). The Sea-Born therefore prefer to be treated by their own (excellent) doctors and midwives.

At least two slightly different Sea-Born races have been described. One type has tails – presumably fish-like – and refer to land-dwellers and occasional two-legged mutants of their own race as "the tailless." Similar to merfolk (p. FF100), their advantages include Enhanced Move (Swim, about 20 mph) (10 points), Pressure Support (10 points) and Sonar Vision (25 points); dolphins are their traditional allies. Their main disadvantage is Dependency (Water, daily) (-15 points). Members of this race dehydrate and die if they stay too long on land; they take 1d damage for every day spent out of water, or 1d every twelve hours in hot conditions or if exposed to warm, dry winds, and 25% extra damage from fire. If they wish to invite land-dwellers to their homes, they have a magic ointment (made from Dendan fat) which, rubbed all over the body, grants their guests the ability to breathe water.

The other race is more surface-dweller-like, being able to spend an indefinite time out of water, and even more magically powerful. Like the fishermen in *Fantasy Folk* (p. FF60), they have ST+1 (10 points), HT+2 (20 points), and the advantages Amphibious (20 points), DR 1 (5 points), PD 1 (25 points) and Pressure Support (15 points). Their disadvantages may include Unattractive Appearance (-5 points), Bad Sight (-25 points), and Dependency (Water, daily) (-15 points). They take no "dehydration" damage, but suffer extra fire damage as above. They speak certain names of power over their new-born children, which are said to grant them their water-breathing ability for life; they may also give ordinary humans magic rings, inscribed with the same names, which grant the same ability temporarily.

Both races of Sea-Born are excellent swimmers, able to move as fast in water as on land.

Sea-Born could, with GM permission, be used as player-characters. See *GURPS Fantasy Folk* for rules on developing such non-human PCs; note that, if the campaign is going to involve a lot of time away from large bodies of water, this race may not be very practical to play.

Sea-Horses

A sea-horse has the appearance of a fairly ordinary, if exceptionally fine, wild horse, but with a very long mane and tail, and cloven hooves. Its game characteristics are those of an excellent Arabian horse. However, the species has the ability to live underwater just as comfortably as on land, and in fact usually dwells there.

Sea-horses were seen by Sinbad on his first voyage, when he witnessed a technique developed by coast-dwelling folk in a region where they were common. The humans tethered ordinary land-mares on the beach, then stationed men in hiding close by. The sea-stallions would leave the water to mate with the mares. However, the stallions would then try to drag their new mates back into the sea with them, and when they failed (because the mares were tethered), would become angry, attacking the mares viciously – at which point the hidden men would rush out and drive the sea-stallions back into the water. The colts and fillies born of such matings were considered especially fine and very valuable; another source said that they were often dark with white spots.

(In a game, such a superior horse would be a treasure in itself, with a good sale value – or a lot of usefulness to a cavalry-trained fighter.)

Sinbad did not hear of it, but other accounts suggest that a sea-horse might be tamed if caught; however, the sight of open water – the sea or a river – would cause it to revert to its wild nature. The Sea-Born might also know and tame such creatures.

The Simurgh

ST: 80 Move/Dodge: 18/10 Size: 8 hexes
 DX: 15 PD/DR: 2/2 Weight: 1,200 lbs.
 IQ: 15 Damage: 4d imp
 HT: 15/40 Reach: C, 1

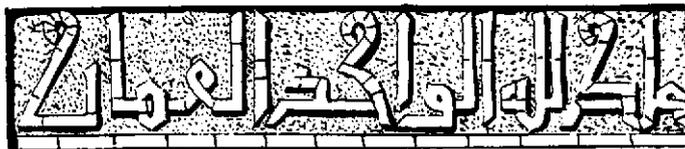
The Simurgh is another Persian myth, a great bird, the king of all birds. It is not above eating humans, but it is intelligent, capable of speech, and willing to aid those it respects. It has great wisdom and insight; one account says that it nests in the branches of the tree of knowledge, although usually it is described as dwelling in mountain regions. It is also often said that it is immortal, or at least that it lives for 17 centuries; it may be equivalent to the phoenix of other mythologies. One hero is credited with killing a Simurgh, but that was a superhuman feat.

The Simurgh is magical by nature. It has healing powers, and the ability to create a Summoning Memento (see p. 91); presumably, as the king of the birds, it can also command other avians.

Talking Apes

Among the strangest creatures mentioned in the *Arabian Nights*, these apes may be memories of ancient guardian spirits. They look like common baboons, except that they often wear fragments of clothing or make-up – kohl on their eyes and henna on their hands and feet. Sometimes, they are maimed – lame, missing one eye, or whatever. They dwell in rivers, breathing water as easily as air, and may be netted accidentally by fishermen – and they can talk. As far as can be told, their physical attributes are those of normal baboons.

Talking Apes have supernatural powers, and can – for example – sometimes foresee the consequences of a minor act in the immediate future. Some or all of them are associated with individual human beings – usually without that person's knowledge, although the ape knows, being magically aware of all that happens to "their" human – and these bring those humans good or bad luck. (The maimed ones are associated with bad luck.) Anyone



with an associated ape will usually have either Luck or Unluckiness, or possibly some other fate-warping characteristic, such as a Jinx.

The important point about this is that the apes are *transferable*. If two people each have apes, then they may swap them by making a public pronouncement of the fact – as if doing a marketplace deal. Thus, good or bad luck may be transferred. Obviously, someone who knows that their ape is real and is bringing them luck won't willingly swap, but all sorts of potential exists for trickery, ingenuity and manipulation of those who don't know the secret of the apes. This is a bit like dealing for the soul of someone who doesn't believe he has one. The apes themselves have a simple desire to get on with their lives, don't much care who they're associated with, and will tell their secrets to anyone they feel like telling.

In the *Thousand and One Nights*, a poor fisherman swaps apes – and luck – with a rich money-changer. In a game, scenarios could be built around the location, identification and trading of lucky or unlucky apes.

Golems

These beings are a more permanent and versatile version of the Animated Statue. The word "Golem" is actually of European Jewish origin, but it is used here for convenience; the creatures listed are much as seen in "Arabian" myth and movies. Golems are created by a spell (p. 84).

Most Golems are man-shaped, but some weird touches (such as, say, a head shaped like that of an animal) may be added for show. Golems tend to be larger than any human being – over 6', up to 12' or so, and broad in proportion. All are reliably obedient to their creator; they have intellect but no will, and cannot be subverted.

Stone Golem

ST: 20 Move/Dodge: 6/6 Size: 1
 DX: 11 PD/DR: 2/4 Weight: 200 lbs.
 IQ: 8 Damage: 2d-1 cr; weapon as below
 HT: 14/30 Reach: 1

A permanently animated statue, the Stone Golem has one weapon skill (maker's choice) of 11.

To build the body requires 3 weeks of work, 200 pounds of stone, and a successful Shape Stone roll.

Energy to activate: 400.

Mechanical Golem

Lesser:

ST: 25 Move/Dodge: 7/7 Size: 1
 DX: 13 PD/DR: 3/6 Weight: 300 lbs.
 IQ: 9 Damage: 2d+2 cr; weapon as below
 HT: 15/30 Reach: 1

Greater:

ST: 30 Move/Dodge: 6/6 Size: 1
 DX: 12 PD/DR: 3/6 Weight: 500 lbs.
 IQ: 9 Damage: 3d cr; weapon as below
 HT: 15/40 Reach: 1

Magically-empowered machines, these Golems have one weapon skill (maker's choice) of 13. The greater mechanical golem is larger and has more magic and less engineering to it.

To construct the body takes 5 weeks of work for the lesser and 6 to 8 weeks for the greater; it also requires \$1,000 worth of mostly metal components (\$1,500 to \$2,000 for the greater), and successful Blacksmith and Mechanic (Clockwork) rolls.

Energy cost to activate: 600 for the lesser, 800 for the greater.

CAMPAIGNS



Human beings have lived in the Middle East since before recorded history, and for all that time they have told tales of the fantastic. Apart from legends of gods and demons, there have been heroes such as Gilgamesh. Adventures among the Bronze-Age city-states would be quite possible, although they are beyond the scope of this supplement and would need a little research. The most successful nations, such as Egypt, had austere, dignified mythologies, mostly concerned with the rituals that kept *everything* running smoothly along preset paths; when adventuring in such a realm, PCs must be prepared for a lot of formality and obedience to the will of deified rulers.

Campaigns in pre-Islamic, Persian-style realms have one enormous advantage: the decor. This is a world of absolute rulers and fabulously wealthy courts, remote in time, with deserts crawling with spirits, ghosts, monsters and sorcerers. Temples should be the work of generations of slaves, huge but heavily-built, with many pillars, thick walls and no proper arches. Such a campaign, given a relatively late “date,” might also involve romanticized Bedouin nomads, with fierce codes of honor, proving their heroism to the local rulers.

Arabian Nights

The *Thousand and One Nights* is the “core” of the Arabian Nights setting.

Its most important theme is *fate*; destiny, kismet, call it what you like, the deep fatalism of the ancient Arabian worldview saturates Scheherazade’s stories. It is far more important than morality, unlike many folk-tale traditions; many successful characters in the tales are not particularly attractive to begin with, although they always prove gracious and generous when they obtain their wealth. Such luck seems utterly capricious; unlike some fantasy characters, the *Arabian Nights* hero has little sense of high destiny or inexorable doom, just random, wild chance, modified by character. The only act that reliably seems to trigger bad consequences is blasphemy.

In many of these stories the hero starts out poor and maltreated by family or neighbors. He then has a massive piece of luck – either the discovery of a great lost treasure or magic item, or aid from a passing magician or capricious djinni. Possibly after a journey to strange foreign lands, he becomes very rich, and usually marries the local ruler’s daughter.

Such heroes do not know magic themselves, although they might meet friendly spell-casters. They may have to avoid or outwit powerful opponents – such as djinn, greedy viziers, or non-Muslims. They might well have dealings with a local ruler, who is rarely truly evil, but who may be arrogant or greedy.

Thus, PCs in a truly “Scheherazadian” campaign would often start out unremarkable, frequently poor, and prove noteworthy chiefly for their vast luck and personal generosity. Campaign plots should consist of a number of fairly simple “stories,” but these should interlock or become entangled, just as characters in the tales sometimes tell further stories to each other, to pass the time or illustrate a point, spinning out the original plot to ever-greater lengths.

Any sea-going adventure should include one or two “fantastic islands” – small, mysterious locations where all manner of strange monsters and weird magics might be found (including mountains that pull every iron nail out of a ship, and brass domes with huge iron statues suspended in mid-air beneath them). This is a cherished feature of many Arab tales.

Hollywood Arabia

Lightweight fantasy films epitomize a rather different “Arabian Nights” world. The heroes are brave, virtuous and competent, usually great swordsmen and all-round weapons masters. They fight evil wizards or scheming tyrants, and eventually marry the princess for romantic love. (Heroes in the original tales often marry the princess because she’s physically attractive, rich and a source of power. Of course, the results are the same; Hollywood just makes excuses that are acceptable to its audience.) Heroes don’t cast spells themselves, but they may gain the aid of powerful djinn, or eccentric scholars may help them with magic. Weird monsters abound. Female characters are still largely decorative, and wear more revealing costumes in public than their historical counterparts. But they sometimes get to save the day by dint of courage or special knowledge, and are certainly a bit more active in the plots.

Styles of Play

Realistic vs. Fantastic

This supplement is about a fantastic, magical world, based on a real historical culture; realistic Arabian games are entirely possible. “Fantastic” doesn’t *automatically* mean “lots of magic.” Mythic heroes such as ‘Antar meet relatively little magic, and similar characters might exist with nothing but their superhuman fighting skills, long lives and worldwide travels. “Realistic” campaigns often use carefully-researched historical settings, but it’s perfectly possible to create imaginary worlds that are *not* “fantastic,” with no magic; this permits gritty, thoughtful play which is not weighed down by too much historical research.

Rare, low-powered spells need not entirely destroy a game’s sense of realism. “Historical” campaigns can have low-powered or well-hidden magic lurking in the shadows, known to the PCs if not to historians.

Ancient vs. Islamic

The *Arabian Nights* and other sources referred to here were written after the time of the prophet Mohammed, and describe a medieval Islamic world. Adventurous GMs might wish to look farther back, to the days of Egypt and Assyria, or to the rise of Persia. These eras have their advantages: polytheistic religions, with a variety of beliefs; figures such as Alexander; and in some cases a thinly populated, less-explored land, giving heroes more space to make their mark. However, such a campaign requires additional research, being beyond the scope of this book.

Literary vs. Cinematic

Oddly enough, there are few heroes in the *Thousand and One Nights* who use a sword much, and very few great warriors or thieves. This is due partly to the stories’ emphasis on fate. There is much that is fantastic, but little superhuman heroism. Heroes such as ‘Antar *are* great swordsmen, but their stories have a smaller fantastic element.

However, Hollywood and modern writers have done things differently. “Sinbad” movies are full not only of djinn, giant monsters and magic, but also of swashbuckling swordsmen and great deeds. *The Epic of ‘Antar* and *The Book of Kings* show that this is not a new idea. GMs of a swashbuckling game should feel free to introduce 200-point characters, PC spell-casters and “cinematic” rules (see p. B183).

Myths of the Fertile Crescent

GMs can base fantasy games on *early* Middle Eastern myth. Warrior-kings rule cities of mud brick; literacy is left to priests and court scribes, who work on clay tablets. Transport is mostly by foot, with the occasional baggage-mule, camel and chariot for the elite; weapons are bronze, or even stone. On the other hand, adventurers meet and talk with gods, are carried around the world or to the sky by supernatural creatures, and wield bizarre magics. Extraordinary heroes in the pattern of Gilgamesh are featured, with a tradition of long, tragically unsuccessful quests for immortality. Such campaigns should use "cinematic" rules and high starting point values.

There are plenty of monsters, the offspring of the goddess Tiamat: dragons, storm-monsters, giant beasts (dogs and rams), scorpion-men and fish-men. (Some of these appear in the *GURPS Bestiary*.) The gods oppose them, and may help mortals against them. On the other hand, some monstrous beings serve the gods as guards. There are also "genii" – winged bulls with human heads – and bird-headed, winged men. Good spirits, the *shedu* and *lamassu*, guard sacred places and, invisibly, protect men from invisible evil spirits, the *utukku*, and from the *edimmu*, evil ghosts of those who received incorrect funeral rites.

Wizards are widely known and accepted; most are healer-exorcists, and would specialize in driving off malign spirits. Some, however, are evil, and enjoy sending curses. *GURPS Ice Age* deals with this "shamanic" type of magic; the sorcerers of Babylon and Sumer, for all their urban sophistication, had the same worldview as their Stone Age predecessors.



A "Hollywood Arabia" campaign would be melodramatic and full of swash-buckling adventure, with competent, honorable heroes making good by dint of skill and virtue. These are more like "typical" roleplaying characters, with a tendency to romantic idealism. (This means that they rarely wear much armor, but are good at dodging and fencing.) On the other hand, plot may take a back seat to melodrama, and the heroes sometimes behave in fairly stupid ways that happen to help the story along. Settings are sun-drenched desert kingdoms, implausible islands straight out of the original literature, and sometimes wilderness lands that can include Arctic wastes and "Lost Worlds."

In practice, most GMs will probably wish to mix up "Scheherazadian" and "Hollywood" approaches (plus perhaps a few borrowed pre-Islamic touches), allowing bold adventurers to make good by dint of personal effort, but with fate ever ready to stir up the shape of human lives. That approach also works well if the campaign places its (pseudo-)Arabia in a larger context . . .

Within Wider Worlds

In recent years all or most *Arabian Nights* imagery has been picked up in a block and dropped into a corner of some fantasy world. This may be a more-or-less historical or pseudo-historical Earth, or it may be a different world, where somehow, similar conditions have thrown up an area of deserts punctuated by oases and infested with djinn and flying carpets. Readers will probably be able to think of instances for themselves, from Tolkien's vague and hostile "Haradwaith" to the Islamic al-Haz and al-Wazif of *GURPS Fantasy*.

To employ such an idea, a GM should decide which "Arabian Nights" elements to use, then fit them into the game world's overall pattern. Presumably, the human cultures develop similarly in similar conditions because they fit the environment; that part is easy. Similarly, styles of magic may be a matter of local habit and tradition. (Alternatively, Muslims may have been transplanted somehow, as in *GURPS Fantasy*.) However, if the "pseudo-Arabians" have a monotheistic, Islamic-style religion, how does this relate to pantheons elsewhere? (Islam doesn't usually get along with polytheists.) If the game world deserts are full of djinn, why don't djinn appear elsewhere? What do the desert-dwellers think of Elves, Dwarves, and other non-Arabian mythic creatures? And so on.



Historical Settings

Campaigns using more-or-less realistic historical settings have considerable potential, if players and GMs are willing to accept some constraints. They too can march behind Alexander (Iskander), defend the walls of Constantinople with Greek fire, or travel the Silk Road alongside Marco Polo. Alternatively, you can put real magic into the court of Haroun al-Rashid, or mix flying carpets and Crusades.

The GM may want to prevent the PCs from changing known history by, say, saving Alexander on his early deathbed, or defeating the Roman attack on Palmyra; alternatively, this sort of thing might lead into a “parallel history” campaign. The GM might invest in a copy of *GURPS Time Travel*, and shift things into a parallel-worlds game as the PCs discover the awesome truth about what’s really going on.

The Expansion of Islam

Adventurers in at the foundation of the Islamic Empire will be involved in one of history’s most spectacular events. The transformation of the Arabs from insignificant desert nomads to potential world conquerors, in a single generation, was almost unbelievable; the struggle to hold the new empire together, and to unite the different peoples – Arabs, Persians, Moors, Asians – was immensely complex. Even without magic, the new city of Baghdad was cultured, vibrant, and full of strangeness; the eventual fragmentation of the realm, and the rise of the Turks to dominance, made the times even more interesting.

The Prophet’s Wars

This is the *very* early phase. Indeed, it could be of great importance in time travel games; rarely has so much grown from such a small identifiable beginning. In fact, from a game point of view, the very beginning of Islam may be *too* small a matter. With only the Prophet and a few dozen followers on one side, a few hundred rivals and enemies, towns and tribes of a few thousand people as the setting, and with the historical events reasonably well documented, the scope for running game events “in the gaps of history” is limited. However, as Islam grows, the options become more varied.

The Conquests

When the forces of the first caliph emerge to carve whole provinces away from the Byzantine Empire, and to bring Persia down by stages, the possibility of personal glory for PCs – with the conquerors, or working against them – is considerable. The fall of Persia provides a particularly interesting setting; Arab armies heroically defeat more numerous opponents, while Sassanid nobles struggle to preserve their civilization, or at least their personal fiefdoms, and perhaps also their Zoroastrian religion. The Arabs *have* to unite the two nations; the Persian nobility are too powerful and militarily useful to crush, and the Persian civil service knows how to run an empire.

The Abbasids

The collapse of Umayyad rule provides another period of complex opportunity. The Umayyads have the throne. Kharijites and Shiites oppose them on religious grounds; Abbasids scheme, manipulating the Shiites. Meanwhile, royal cousins, renegades and adventurers take their chances, especially at the edges of the empire, detaching whole kingdoms under whatever flags their followers respect. Still later, the rule of Haroun al-Rashid is the nominal setting for many *Arabian Nights* tales, and its many conflicts lead to the dynasty’s decay and the rise of Turkish adventurers to dominance.

Gothic Arabia

The “Gothic” world of the damned Caliph Vathek and Lovecraft’s Abdul Alhazred, author of the *Necronomicon*, are possible settings for individual scenarios – or campaigns. (Could that name be a corruption of *Abd al-Azrad*, “slave of the Destroyer” . . . ?) Such scenarios will differ from “standard” *Arabian Nights* games more in style than in content. In “Gothic Arabia,” scholars researching ancient philosophies regularly discover dark secrets and blasphemous magics. Ghuls are commonplace; Ifrit are not only evil, but diabolically cunning and sadistic; tyrannical sultans are mad and cruel, with dark torture chambers beneath their sumptuous palaces. Players must be willing to participate in the dark melodrama, and most of all, a GM must be able to impose a black mood on a wild fantasy – combining horror and high magic.

Suitable scenarios involve heroic but suffering PCs struggling against overwhelming odds to keep evil villains from engaging in mass human sacrifice, or to find some way to prevent incursions of inhuman evil. The tone should be somber. “Good” characters sometimes die horribly, and the eventual dooms of major villains, who have been far too interested in “knowing what should not be known,” are worse than their many crimes.

An *Arabian Nights* campaign could be just a mysterious bottle or brass-bound door away from the greatest horror of all . . .



An Assassins Campaign

The idea of playing fanatical religious terrorists may seem bizarre, but many roleplayers are happy to take on the role of Japanese ninja – fanatical mercenary terrorists. A campaign in which all the PCs are *Hashishin* Assassins can use this movement's history (p. 36) as a starting-point.

This poses problems for roleplayers. Many Assassin actions were literally suicide missions. The disguised Assassins would often strike at heavily guarded victims in very public places, fully expecting to be cut down immediately afterwards. This helped maintain the sect's terrifying reputation: the Assassin, fully expecting that his act would give him entrance to Paradise, following a leader he saw as *infallible*, was entirely willing to die.

However, the suicidal killers came only from the *outermost* circle of Isma'ili cultists – the *fida'is* ("fedayin"), or "self-sacrificers." Apart from these enthusiastic but under-informed followers, there were also *lasiqs*, or adherents; *rafiqs*, partly-initiated "comrades"; and various levels of *da'is*, or initiates. At the top of the hierarchy (but below the imams, the more-or-less hereditary cult leaders) were the chief *Da'is*, each of whom might command a mountain fortress. The *da'is* worked as secret missionaries for the sect, at great risk to themselves; at the highest levels, they became involved in the sect's theological discussions, but low-level members were expected only to listen and to obey.

Now, the Assassins could only be effective if they had a good idea of what was going on in the world. Furthermore, some of their missions specifically involved great skill and stealth, as when (according to legend) sleeping enemies woke to find daggers next to their heads, as an obvious and frightening warning. The sect must have had some expert spies and infiltrators. Perhaps, as lesser members were recruited and watched, the very best were deliberately *not* sent on suicide missions, in order to have a pool of useful talent available.

Thus PC Assassins might be *rafiqs* or lesser *da'is*, recently raised from *fida'i* status, slowly learning the cult's true aims and its strange philosophy (which ultimately dismissed all religion as a veil over the truth). It is hard to imagine a totally self-serving character joining the cult, but a rising *da'i* might reasonably hope to prove himself worthy of leadership, power and a place in the philosophical discussions.

Conspiracy theorists claim that the Assassins are alive and active even today. They are said by some to be the forerunners, or even the originators, of the Illuminati conspiracy.

Oh, and remember: Trust the Chief *Da'i*; the Chief *Da'i* is your friend . . .



The Crusades

The years when Europe and Islam clashed in the Holy Land have been used by countless writers and film-makers. With the spectacular scenery, famous leaders on both sides, knights in shining armor, and a touch of religion to make it all look high-minded, this has been regarded as the perfect setting for adventure tales.

Playing Crusaders

With so many (romanticized) stories around, the idea of playing "Franks" in the Crusades has a lot going for it. On the other hand, thoughtful modern gamers may not be too certain of the rights and wrongs of the matter. Even if they don't become involved in anything as amoral as the Fourth Crusade, they are still likely to be fighting on foreign soil, to capture a piece of territory. That territory may be sacred to Christianity, but few Christians could justify killing for such a possession, especially since the local non-Christians might well grant Christian pilgrims free and honored passage. (Intelligent medieval Christians were fully aware of the oddity of spreading a religion of peace and love by the sword; the great Roger Bacon called the Crusades "a cruel and useless waste of time.") The Crusaders frequently became bogged down in petty rivalries, and often failed to achieve any of their objectives. Not, perhaps, perfect role models for PC heroes.

Playing the Locals

Alternatively, PCs might be "Saracen" warriors, defending their homes and Jerusalem, the third holiest city in Islam, from marauding Europeans. The armor is stylish, and the urban culture is comprehensible. Of course, a lot of the Saracens were less than saintly, with many betrayals, plenty of political amorality, and some complete refusals to work together against a common foe. But it's hard to call them *worse* than the Franks.

The Mongol Invasions

The days when the hordes of Central Asia carved their way through the lands of Islam were bloody and unstable, a perfect justification for Saracen-and-Frank alliances. This was a time of confused loyalties; Muslims naturally fought the

Mongols, but some scholars served them as astrologers or doctors, while attempting to curb their worst destructive impulses. Mongol extermination of Assassin strongholds would have been mourned by few. The Franks feared the Mongols, while dreaming of converting them to Christianity, or of finding the legendary “Prester John” in the East. Mercenaries fought for whoever paid. Between times, trade went on, the Mongols enforcing peace where they chose not to make war. PC adventurers could find themselves on any side or none.

If a campaign is based in the steppes, involving travel among the Asiatic nomads, the Turkish legends in *The Book of Dede Korkut* could make a good reference, with or without their fantastical elements. In, say, Mesopotamia after the hordes have passed, a campaign could have some of the dark atmosphere of a post-holocaust game, with burned-out cities, mountains of skulls, desperate refugees, and scavengers, nomads and human vultures.

Campaign Design

When creating an *Arabian Nights* campaign, a number of elements are possible but not compulsory. To save trouble later, the GM should make some decisions at the beginning, and (usually) make all of the campaign’s features clear to the players before they start to create characters.

Period Style: Is the setting basically pre-Islamic (which demands extra work, but has possibilities)? Or is it based around the early Muslim period? Or does it use even later settings – the Ottoman Turkish empire, say? It *could* even be set in the modern day, or the future.

Magic and Monsters: How powerful and widely available is magic? If the setting follows Scheherazade’s tales closely, it may be very powerful and tricky for the GM to handle. Are monsters and djinn commonplace? And do rational people usually expect magic to appear in their everyday lives?

Anachronisms: GMs who want historical consistency may or may not accept many developments – they are common in some source material.

Technology and Habits: For most (but not all) “Period Styles,” the correct TL is 3. Armor tends to be light; favored weapons are swords, spears and bows; wheeled vehicles are rare, but baggage camels are common. Horses are liked better than camels, but don’t survive the desert as well. Buildings are generally flat-roofed, and made of mud brick, with some stone. Coffee is likely to be popular, except in an accurate early-period campaign; smoking is technically an anachronism until the Ottoman era, but the occasional hookah pipe is a popular cliché. Other drugs may be rare or moderately common, and more or less legal; qat might appear as a time-waster’s favorite indulgence.

Nations and Races: Is Persia ruled by Sassanid or other native nobles, Arab conquerors, or Turkish ex-mercenaries? Are the Mongols known, and are they a threat on the borders or a rampaging menace? Are there Crusaders in the Holy Land, and are they mostly viewed as honorable knights or barbaric invaders? What of the Greeks of Byzantium or the Norsemen of the Rus?

Themes

A campaign will usually have an overall theme. Possibilities include:

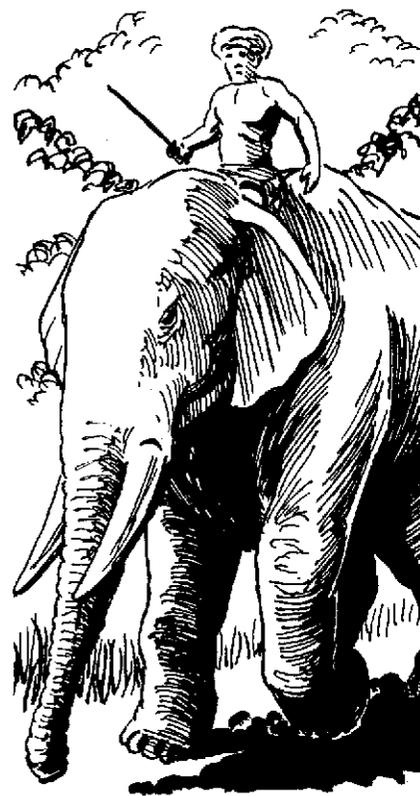
Trading or Exploration, by land or sea. The former requires adventurers with Animal and Outdoor skills; the latter demands sailors. (Given events of the original Sinbad tales, the GM has an excellent excuse to send the seagoing party practically anywhere with the aid of bizarre, unexpected weather.) Obviously, merchants (PC or NPC) are needed, and (usually) mercenaries as guards. Locals might be recruited as guides or interpreters. Entertainers may assist in sales pitches, pilgrims may work in exchange for safe passage, and Assassins may use trading as a cover. If a ruler finances the expedition, he may send a trusted Ghulam

Arabians Abroad

Exploration was not just from Europe to Arabia. The Arabs were themselves great travelers. Middle Eastern characters can easily be brought into scenarios set in much of the historical world.

For some ideas for such settings, see *GURPS Vikings*, *GURPS China*, or *GURPS Swashbucklers*. Arab PCs could be traders, interested in local products; warriors, subject to suspicion but maybe prepared to work with locals against a common enemy; renegades, trying to find a place in foreign lands because they are no longer welcome at home; diplomats, negotiating alliances; or perhaps even scholars or explorers, showing a willingness (quite rare in *any* setting before the last couple of centuries) to search out knowledge directly, rather than from secondhand sources. Medieval Muslims had limited interest in northern Europe, regarding it as cold, wet, and inhabited by barbarians, but some traveled that far. Others reached China, and on the Indian Ocean, Arab dhows were a common sight.

In intolerant times, Islam was viewed with suspicion by other cultures (partly because it was so successful); Arabian PCs abroad can always justify a Social Stigma. They may also have attitude problems of their own, due to pride in their own culture (“Odious Personal Habit: Disdainful Manner,” or “Intolerance: Active Christians”). On the other hand, the traveler can also justify a variety of skills, superior scientific and medical knowledge (not *as* superior as some think, but enough to be useful), and cultivated manners.



A Harem Campaign

For an unusual game solidly based in the Arabian setting, a campaign can be set entirely or mostly within the harem of a palace. This may sound like a seriously limited setting, but it provides numerous opportunities for subtle and complex plots.

The occupants of the harem are the wives and concubines of the ruler, along with eunuch guards and young children. Apart from the ruler himself, regular visitors would include (female) doctors, messengers, and tradeswomen. If the master of the harem is at all powerful, one of the major preoccupations of the place will be *power*; whoever has influence over the ruler has power in the land. Thus female citizens with a problem or complaint will often bring their story to the ruler's wife, who will not scorn them as women and who can influence the ruler directly. Ruthless concubines and lesser wives might plot to gain the master's attention, and to discredit those with more power. If concubines (or eunuchs) were slaves from "enemy" lands, they might well have their own particular priorities. The other slaves could form cliques and alliances. In fantastical campaigns, magical secrets might be passed around, especially among the stranger foreign-born slaves.

Obviously, characters for a harem campaign can include wives and concubines of the household, with political, stealth and entertainment skills, and eunuch guards providing muscle. But there could also be slave-girls, often of foreign origin, perhaps with (unexpected) combat skills or just able to pass to and from the outer world; young boys, still in their mothers' care, being prepared for life as rulers; visiting and related womenfolk (including brokers buying and selling handicrafts), and so on. The major theme might be amoral plotting and politics, but there is still scope for characters with morals and ideals; the main objective might be to shield a ruler from a dangerous clique (as Balkis shielded Solomon), and to make the influence of the harem benign.

along to observe. *Foreign* traders in Islamic territory are also an excellent campaign theme. This can be tied in with urban adventures; every city can be a new scenario, with its own social patterns, dangerous local customs and chances for profit.

Urban Adventures: Beggars, dervishes, entertainers, outcasts, priests and rogues are all part of the city scene, as are visiting foreigners, Bedouins, magicians, merchants, scholars and nobles. The rich may employ guards or own slaves. The local ruler will have Ghulams, who may be ordered to investigate any unusual events.

War: This primarily concerns nobles, mercenaries, Ghulams and Ghazis, who all have to worry about Assassins and perhaps magicians. Priests may preach *jihad*; naval actions require sailors. Foreigners of various types may be allies, friendly observers, or spies. Other folks try to keep out of the way for the most part, but do not necessarily succeed. They make good spies if they clearly do not *look* like fighters. Other *GURPS* supplements (such as *Japan* or *Horseclans*) include simple rules for resolving mass battles, if needed.

Research: This can be magical, scientific, or other research. The obvious participants are magicians and scholars, but priests and dervishes also study, and merchants may deal in knowledge. Poets are usually literate and often have a lot of curiosity; nobles may have good cause to finance research (or do so to show their generosity). If study means travel to distant libraries, then bodyguards, guides and experienced travelers will be recruited.

Court Intrigue: Nobles engage in deadly rivalries, invariably using lesser court figures as tools; these could be eunuchs, Ghulams, huntsmen, magicians, poets, or scholars (who work as advisors, secretaries, or court doctors, or are kept as proof of a noble's love of learning). Once a plot gets complicated and dangerous enough, practically *anyone* can find himself dragged in as a cat's-paw – or the whole business can blow up into a war.

Quests: This is something of a catchall, particularly for "finite duration" campaigns that end when some objective is attained. PCs may seek a magic item or a uniquely talented magician or doctor in a foreign land, to save someone from a bizarre disease or curse. Or they might seek something like the secret of Greek fire. A few good fighters will be needed, as well as experts in the object of the search – which might mean foreigners, dervishes, magicians, priests, scholars, or even poets. A noble might act as the leader; merchants, being well-traveled and used to assessing requirements, can be useful. A skilled rogue can sometimes reach an objective that an army of warriors cannot.

An expedition to some legendary place is one type of quest that appears in the tales – in one, the "City of Brass" in North Africa. On such missions, scholars are invaluable for their knowledge of relevant lore, history, and languages.

Outlaws: A group of PC corsairs or rogues might have the legal backing of one state to harass the trade of another (not as dangerous as playing a Robin Hood role, and with more safe havens available). Such a band might also include magicians, or outcasts, with their own motivations.

Tribal Life: These campaigns focuses on the rivalries and quests of Bedouins (or possibly Norsemen or steppe nomads). Most PCs would thus be of this one type, but they might be joined by eccentric dervishes, entertainers, Ghazis (seeking recruits), magicians, merchants, outcasts, poets (highly regarded), or priests. Other, more "urban" characters might join in on a temporary basis.



Sample Adventure:

The Tale of the Poet, the Slave, and What Was Not Theirs

This scenario takes place in the (fictional) oasis city-state of Dhulibhan. The characters might live in Dhulibhan, or they might arrive there looking for employment, profit, or amusement, or after becoming lost in the desert.



The Town

Dhulibhan is ruled by the Sultan Jashak al-Nur. Natives know him to be young, well-mannered, and reasonably fair and competent. (They grumble about taxes, but who doesn't?)

If the PCs ask specifically, they might hear some court gossip – if the people they talk to are *sure* they aren't being heard by informers or sycophants. Jashak is said to be moderately romantic and intelligent, but a little lazy; he leaves most of the day-to-day administration to his vizier, Khaled ibn Khaled ibn Balthazar, who is feared as a devious politician with the subtlety and morality of a viper. The vizier is said to have built up a power base in the palace guard, with a group of Ghulams loyal primarily to him. In short, it's a typical court.

Doing the Dialogue

Given the Muslim taste for “flowery,” literary language, and the polite formality of Eastern courts, a certain melodramatic style of speech has become traditional in *Arabian Nights* fantasy – if only because translators, seeking to give an impression of “otherness,” have used it. GMs and players are welcome to maintain this tradition. *To hear is to obey* is a fairly accurate translation of a stock phrase used by an inferior to a superior; the djinni servant's slogan, *Your wish is my command*, is along much the same lines.

Lovers should always address their sweethearts as *jewel of the dawn*, *light of my existence*, or *coolth of my eyes*; poets should flatter warrior-kings as *Great Lion of the Kingdom* or *He Whose Sword Knows No Rest*. When one receives bad news, *The world darkens before his eyes*; city-dwellers are *wearers of slippers*, while desert nomads are *wearers of sandals*. The caliph is always *Prince of the Faithful*, and anyone addressing a ruler should kiss the ground and say, *I wish you joy and everlasting glory*. Sly viziers make particularly good use of circumlocution. Why just threaten someone with death for failure if one can say, *I am a merciful man, but my duties oblige me to treat imperfect efforts with more rigor than I enjoy. I cannot enjoy the simple pleasures of the table when I recall the last hirelings who failed us, or the distressingly shrill tones in which they proffered apologies. Pray, do not impair the mealtimes of a poor servant of the state?*

Other expressions include: *Bismillah*, in the name of Allah (said before any act); *Allah requite thee abundantly*, thank you; *May your shadow never be less*, may your prosperity increase so that I gain thereby; *There is no Majesty and there is no Might save in Allah*, a formula denoting displeasure, doubt as to how to act, etc.; *Verily we are Allah's and unto Him are we returning*, in times of misfortune; *Spare me so Allah may spare thee, and slay me not, lest Allah slay thee*, to plead for one's life; *O unlucky one!* an insult – the one addressed is unlucky for the speaker; *Under thy protection!* if one seizes a Bedouin's skirt when danger threatens, the man addressed will defend the stranger with his life.

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Doing the Dialogue (Continued)

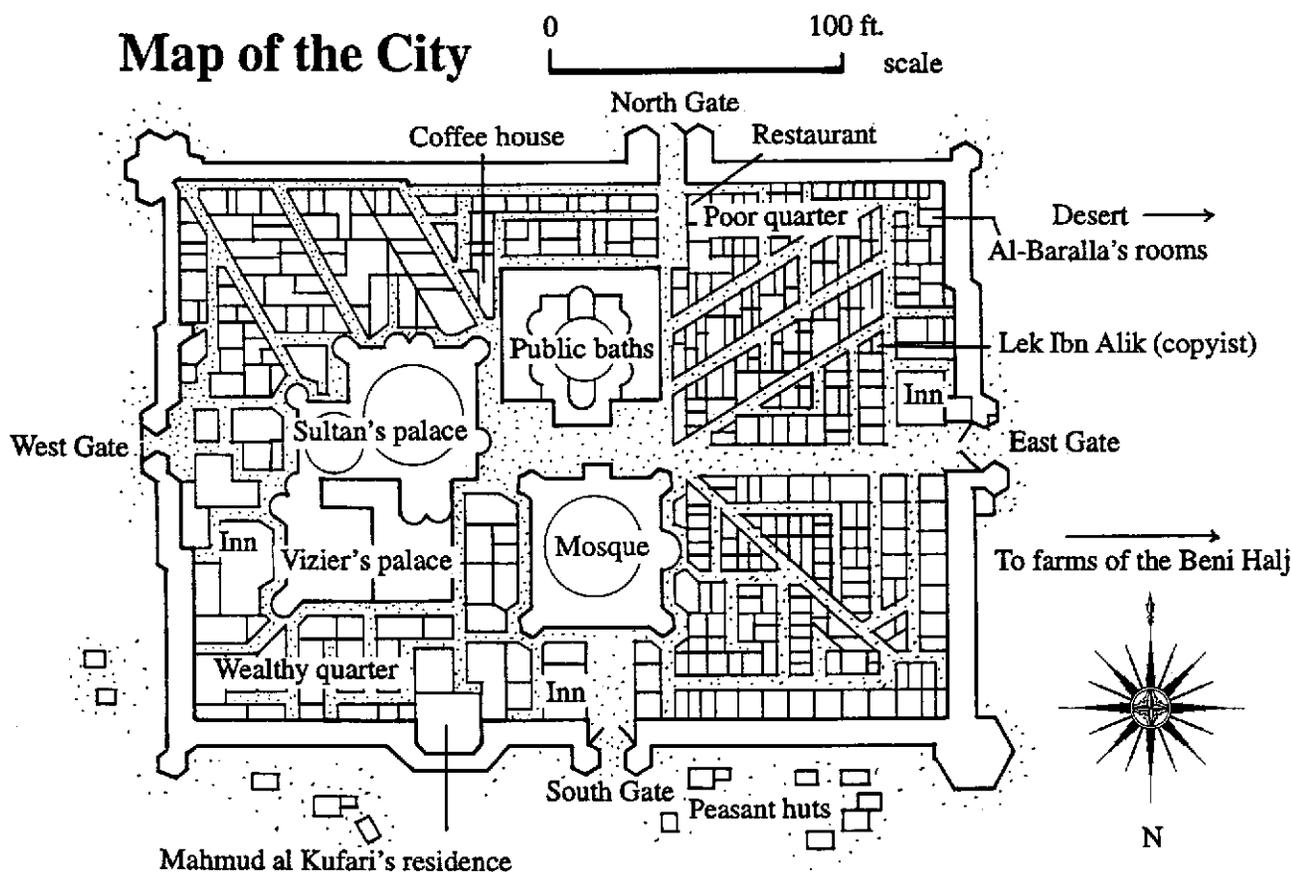
Gestures

Flowery speech means little without the formalized body language to back it up. Autocratic rulers may require their subjects to fall on their faces and kiss the ground a lot – a position otherwise associated with prayer. (Kissing the ruler's feet is marginally *less* respectful.) Lesser salutes range from placing one's hand on one's breast, through touching one's lips and forehead (with or without various degrees of slight bow), touching the ground, lips and brow with the hand, and kissing the other's hand (a "familiar" but respectful gesture), to kissing the sleeve or hem of the other's garment. The hand-gestures are always accompanied with the word *salaam* (peace be upon you), to which the correct response is *On you be peace, and the mercy and blessings of Allah*.

The town has been at peace for some years now; there are a few Bedouin ruffians in the desert, and every now and then the palace Ghulams go out and skirmish with them to keep things safer for caravans, but that's all. If the caliph ever issued a summons, or the call to *jihad* went out, then the place could raise a respectable fighting force, but mostly, Dhulibhanis prefer trade and talk to fighting. However, the desert raiders have historically been enough of a nuisance that the city has a low but adequate wall; a few peasant huts lie beyond that, but all citizens with any pride live within. The wall is patrolled by a small guard – slave-soldiers owned by the sultan, not as haughty as the palace troops, but with more freedom of action – supervised by a mercenary officer. These also guard the gates, occasionally harassing passersby but mostly mastering the art of sleeping standing up.

The sultan has appointed a governor – a scholarly fellow named al-Malloohr – who deals with routine administration in the town; he in turn supervises an assortment of cadis and minor officials. All of these like a quiet life; the cadis are generally fair but rather conventional. There's a good-sized, prosperous bazaar, which becomes a hive of activity when a caravan comes through (one day in every two weeks, on the average), and entertainers, poets and rogues can all hope to make a living here. Still, ambitious adventurers won't reckon on staying forever.

Scholarly sorts who do detailed research into local history will learn that the place had one great man in its history. Akhirem the Wise, a *hakim* and reputed wizard, came along centuries ago, when Dhulibhan was a mere village, helped the locals destroy the dangerous beasts of the area, and generally advised them so well that the place became a city in his lifetime. However, this won't look too relevant in the campaign's present day.



Initial Events

This scenario begins quietly. An ideal start is for PCs who are new to the town to find themselves riding in through the north gate early one morning, perhaps meeting others, locals, who chance to be there at the time, and employing them as guides. They can then get to see a bit of the town, maybe various eating-houses and the bazaar. Perhaps one of them has a skirmish with an Enemy, or just with local ruffians if he looks worth robbing; this could mean a few minutes explaining to a *cadi*, which in turn will bring them to the attention of the vizier (who receives reports on such things). Eventually, a group of Ghulams (in red turbans) should locate most – preferably all – of them, and courteously but firmly request that they come to the palace.

There, they are led through a side entrance and along some quiet passages to meet with Khaled ibn Khaled ibn Balthazar. He says he has discovered that the newcomers to Dhulibhan among them were the first people to come in through the north gate that morning, and the locals in the group were reputed to have been in that area early in the day. He then asks if they saw anyone heading out into the desert beyond the gate (they didn't), and quizzes them about odd scenes around the gate (or the palace, if any of them were in town the previous night). He keeps a bland face, but a successful Empathy roll will suggest that their answers disappoint him. Eventually, he says:

"I believe that some of you, at least, may be seeking profitable employment? Well, as you will have deduced that there is a matter that concerns us, we can cause ourselves no greater problems if we employ you to assist in our investigations. Of course, working for the palace, you will be well advised to be tactful, but I'm sure you would be in any event. Spreading ill-considered rumors is never conducive to social calm.

"We have a slightly embarrassing problem. A young poet, favored by the court, named al-Baralla, has lately become enamored of a palace slave-girl, a Circassian named Rosanna. It appears that they decided to elope last night. That was wrong of them, as the girl is royal property, but such is the nature of romantic young poets; the sultan might well have chosen to forgive youthful folly. However, it has come to light that the couple took with them . . . an item, of considerable value, and this is less acceptable. We would like to have this item returned, safely; the return of the couple is less important.

"Unfortunately, this matter is so – sensitive, that I cannot describe the item to you. However, I can absolutely assure you that you will know the item if you should find it. So you will be able to return it in that case, and if you do not find it, you will not know more than is good for social peace . . ."

The vizier will say no more than this, however PCs press him. He may haggle over fees for the job, but basically, he's offering 50 dinars (\$750) for the safe return of the "item" – he'd willingly offer more, but that might look questionable! – and 10 dinars (\$150) for the lovers. He'll also offer 1 dinar (\$15) per day per person of status 0+, to cover expenses, and if any of the PCs are in trouble for any reason, he'll use his influence in their behalf. Also, if any of them are injured somehow, he'll see that the palace doctor – skill level 16 – attends to them. Hopefully, this will get them interested, one way or another.

Background

What is going on? Actually, things are more complicated than the vizier knows, let alone the PCs. It's all the fault of a ne'er-do-well peasant youth.

Fadir the Wastrel lived with his parents on their small farm, by a small, deep and unreliable well in a mostly desert area a few miles from Dhulibhan. He's lazy and unpleasant; two nights ago, his father lost patience with him and threw him out of the house. Fadir, typically, decided to get back at him, and with an unusual

Further Notes (GM Only)

The main qualification to what appears on p. 112 concerns the character of Khaled ibn Khaled ibn Balthazar. As the sidebar (p. 121) indicates, his reputation for sadism does not match his true personality. Because of his Sense of Duty, he sometimes feels obliged to act forcefully on behalf of his young ruler. But he has a clear sense of morality, and his bad reputation would worry him if he weren't such an ironist. He should unnerve PCs, but he's not as dangerous as they will think.

The sultan and the vizier each have sections of the palace guard assigned to their routine needs. PCs visiting the palace may, on an IQ roll, note the distinction between blue-turbaned guards, who work directly for the sultan, and those in red turbans, who report to the vizier. There is some rivalry and even friction between the two groups.

Adapting to Other Genres

GURPS Arabian Nights isn't about a single setting; it's about a culture and a large area. It is quite possible to combine other *GURPS* worldbooks with this one.

GURPS Camelot

The tales of King Arthur and his knights include a number of anachronistic "Saracens." *GURPS Camelot* discusses the topic further. One option is to bring the two myths together, and watch the collision. Let Arthurian knights sail to Saracen lands in quest of some secret of sorcery required by Merlin, and see how they acquit themselves in desert courts (and in desert heat); or have Arabian heroes, bold as 'Antar, voyage with sea captains akin to Sinbad beyond the Pillars of Hercules, there to learn that heroism comes in many guises . . .

GURPS China

The Silk Road, which passed through Persia and skirted Arabia, bound together the civilizations of Europe and China. As the Islamic Empire expanded, it reached out toward China; there followed centuries of contact in Central Asia, interrupted by the Mongols. GMs looking for wide-ranging campaigns can combine *GURPS China* and *GURPS Arabian Nights*, basing adventures on the travels of Marco Polo, for instance. Or perhaps Arabs and Chinese could come together to battle the Mongols.

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Adapting to Other Genres (Continued)

GURPS Conan

Several nations of the “Hyborian Age” – notably Turan and Iranistan – are designed on a Middle Eastern template. Any Hyborian scenarios venturing into such lands could borrow a great deal from the *Thousand and One Nights*.

GURPS Cyberpunk

For a fascinating combination of futuristic grittiness and Islamic culture, look no farther than George Alec Effinger’s *When Gravity Fails* and its sequels. The hero, Marid, is street scum . . . but Fate, in the form of a remorseless patron, smiles upon him, and Marid begins, despite himself, to acquire some of the Moslem virtues. He also acquires some interesting augmentations . . . R. Talsorian has published a game supplement based on this background, too.

Continued on next page . . .

burst of energy, set to work dropping rocks down the well, in the hopes of wrecking the water supply before he ran away from home.

Unfortunately, one of his rocks bounced off the side of the well and shattered a centuries-old stone seal set into the side wall of the pit.

The Seal of Solomon had been placed there long ago by Akhirem the Wise, who entrapped a malevolent djinni, Baroogh Dja, there in its home. When the seal broke, Baroogh Dja erupted from the well with fireworks, then noted the quivering Fadir. At first, he terrorized the boy, but something in Fadir’s manner told the djinni that here was a human after his own bullying heart. Anyway, he was capable of a warped gratitude, in the manner of djinn; he offered Fadir his services.

After they had destroyed Fadir’s parents’ hovel, Fadir decided to go to town. The djinni flew with Fadir over the palace wall and into the sultan’s chambers, where Baroogh Dja cast Shrink on the unfortunate ruler, and they then flew off to gloat in peace.

They saw and were seen by the two lovers, who fled in magically-induced panic. However, the attackers didn’t realize that they had also been glimpsed by a palace servant, who reported that two shadowy figures had somehow entered the private rooms. There had been a commotion – and the intruders had left, *carrying* the sultan – who looked “oddly shrunken.” (The spell was still taking effect.)

The vizier wasn’t sure what to make of this, but when he heard of the disappearance of Rosanna, who had mentioned her meeting with the poet to friends in the harem, he made a plausible but wrong deduction. Perhaps he should have warned the hired PCs about the possibility of magic – but he wasn’t sure. (The “item” he spoke of was, of course, the sultan.)

As for al-Baralla and Rosanna, they left the city by climbing down from a convenient upper-story window in the city wall, with the aid of a guardsman who owed the poet a favor. (Al-Baralla, a swashbuckling romantic by inclination, has a knack for getting over walls and through windows.) Unfortunately, this left them stranded out in the desert, where the PCs should eventually find them – in trouble.

Asking Around the Palace

If the players investigate independently in the palace, they should have a chance to learn a little – although they will need to use some Savoir-Faire skill, and making contacts within the harem could be tricky, except perhaps for female PCs. However, the vizier has made sure that anyone who saw anything last night, or who spoke to anyone who did, is firmly incommunicado. The slave-girls in the harem know all about Rosanna’s association with “that sighing poet”; they *may* also comment, given time, that the two always seemed essentially sensible and moral – this elopement came as a surprise to everyone. Remember, running off with someone else’s slave-concubine is either theft or adultery, depending on how you look at it; al-Baralla, as a high-minded romantic, would normally have been expected to seek to purchase Rosanna, to petition for her freedom, or simply to request her hand in marriage. This might not please snobs, but it would be entirely legal and morally correct.

Of course, no one has seen the sultan since last night. However, the palace is big and confused enough for his absence to have been covered up – so far; there are no rumors yet that he is missing.

The palace also has a library. It holds little on magic, but as much as the PCs could ever want on local history and geography. *Finding* anything, on the other hand, will take time and some successful Research skill rolls.

Asking Around Town

The PCs will probably want to start by asking around town. There are a number of possibilities to check:

The Poet's Lodgings: Al-Baralla was living in rented rooms in a medium-poor part of town. His rent was paid by a rich local merchant, Mahmud al-Kufari, who wanted the status of a patron of the arts. The place is locked, but not very secure; there are several ways to gain access, including fast-talking the landlord, who lives nearby. If the neighbors spot “snoopers,” they may cause trouble. The rooms themselves are untidy, but have not been visited since last night. There are a number of changes of clothes, and some fairly valuable manuscripts and personal possessions. Among the manuscripts are some of al-Baralla's poems; a Literature roll at +2 will say that they are rather good, if highly dramatic. After an hour's reading by someone with the Literature skill, making an IQ roll at -2 will earn the hint that al-Baralla played a lot of variations on the theme, “The true lover comes unto his love wherever she is, The true lover climbs any wall to be with his love.”

The Poet's Patron: Mahmud al-Kufari knows nothing about al-Baralla's current whereabouts, and no more background information than the PCs. The Ghulams have already visited him, and he finds the situation deeply embarrassing and very worrying. Ingenious PCs might be able to extract some kind of practical assistance from him, but for all his worries, he remains a skilled and cautious merchant, and he will give away very little of monetary value.

The Poet's Friends: Al-Baralla is popular with the local literary community, who often meet to drink coffee or sherbet and swap quotations (Area Knowledge roll to find out where). Some of them have heard that he is in trouble, and others will guess if and when strangers start asking questions. They are unlikely to be helpful to anyone who seems ready to harm their friend (reacting at -4). If handled tactfully, they will describe al-Baralla as a fine, high-minded, romantic character. They *might* let slip that he had friends in many places, including the city guard, if questioned correctly; they might conceivably also mention that he used to boast of his ability to get over walls around palaces and such.

Adapting to Other Genres

(Continued)

GURPS Fantasy

The world of Yrth, partly populated by humans swept from Earth by the “Banestorm,” has two powerful Muslim states, al-Haz and al-Wazif. These are good examples of the incorporation of “Arabian” lands into a broader campaign. The more powerful, al-Haz, is committed to intolerantly extreme Shiite Islam, and plays host to Assassins, while the Sunni al-Wazif has a large community of “Kharijites,” who function more like the Crusader military orders than their earthly counterparts, but who are just as aggressive. There are also intolerant neighboring Christians, planning crusades and justifying Muslim paranoia.

The only catch is that the “djinn” of Yrth are not those appearing in the *Nights*; rather, they are powerful human mages. In general, the “style” of Yrth is less fantastical and high-powered than the *Arabian Nights*. However, there's still a lot of cross-over potential.

GURPS Horror

“Gothic” fiction is largely about “strangeness,” and the *Arabian Nights* are a wonderful source of the bizarre. See “Gothic Arabia” (sidebar, p. 107) for more ideas.

GURPS Imperial Rome

Rome and the *Arabian Nights* overlap both chronologically and geographically. Islam arose after Rome fell (although it met, fought and traded with Byzantium), but the Arabs regarded Palmyra as a high point of pre-Islamic Arab glory, and the *Nights* and other stories make many references to the Sassanid rulers of Persia – contemporaries and rivals of Rome. A campaign set around 200 A.D. could combine Roman and Arabian characters and myths.

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Adapting to Other Genres (Continued)

GURPS Middle Ages 1

Since the "World of the Arabian Nights" is based on medieval Islam, there certainly are links to *GURPS Middle Ages 1*. Although the latter is primarily about medieval Britain, it also discusses the Crusades and Muslim Spain (which both saw British "visitors"), and the Knightly Orders, whose connections spread across continents.

Middle Ages 1 is written from the European viewpoint; it has notes on a "Crusade" campaign, with Muslims mostly as adversaries. The section on "Arabs" (p. MID114) is at least as much about Moors and Turks as true Arabs, and also incorporates some European misconceptions. (Mohammed returned to Earth after he ascended to Heaven from Jerusalem; Arab swords weren't always curved; and dervishes were often peaceable, and were frequently disdained by other Muslims.) As such, it might be useful as misinformation for players of European PCs in *Arabian Nights* campaigns.

Future *GURPS Middle Ages* books will deal with other parts of Europe, and may show even more of the Crusades from the Frankish side.

GURPS Robin Hood

The era of the Robin Hood stories is also the era of the Crusades. Robin gives allegiance to Richard the Lionheart, and recent films have added Moorish characters to the traditional plots. Travel between the two settings is clearly an option. The roguish myth of Robin Hood might confuse moral Muslim heroes, and the fatalism of Islam would confuse the dedicated freedom fighter, but a Bedouin hero would admire Robin's free-spirited honor; the two genres are compatible.

A Robin Hood-style campaign could be run in an Arabian setting, although Islam has few noble outlaw heroes in its legends; the PCs would have to be up against a really evil, *unlawful and impious* ruler.

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Al-Baralla approached one person – a professional copyist named Lek ibn Ulik – last night. He borrowed a little money, a length of rope, and some food and drink, and swore Lek to silence. In the unlikely event of Lek's telling anyone about this, he can say that the poet seemed wildly agitated, that he apparently had someone hidden nearby for the duration of the conversation (Rosanna, obviously), and that he warned Lek to avoid the palace for a while, for his own sake. Lek has taken this warning to heart, and is currently holed up at home.

The Gates: The city has four gates; all but the north were fairly busy and well-watched last night, and Khaled has had each checked – which is why the north gate was his last hope of finding a lead to the fugitives. There was only one guard on it, and the vizier guessed he may have dozed. There is nothing more to be learned here.

The Streets: The Dhulibhan underworld and beggar community know that something has stirred the guard up, and are keeping their heads down. With careful questioning, PCs might find a beggar who saw some odd activity on the east side of town, and get the idea that *something* went over that wall last night.

The Walls: These are sound, plain, functional town walls. The guards patrolling them are not especially busy, but *are* aware that there is trouble afoot, and so are slightly twitchy. Al-Baralla's guardsman friend, Jorros, a stolid fellow with a taste for poetry, is carrying on with his routine duties; it would take a lot to get any information out of him. Firstly, the poet is his friend; secondly, he guesses he could be in *big* trouble if he let anything slip.

At one spot on the east wall, there is a chamber with a large arrow-slit facing out, one level below the walkway and 12 or so feet above the ground; the gap is big enough for a slim man or woman to get through. An investigator taking at least one minute to check the room for clues, and making a Vision or Criminology roll, will notice a spot of blood on the stonework; someone grazed himself, probably scrambling through, recently. An observer sticking a head out of the gap to look down, or anyone *carefully* checking the foot of the wall from the outside, will discover a heap of rope on the ground below. The couple slipped out and climbed down; Jorros helped them, then untied their rope and threw it after them.

At times during this research, the PCs may encounter members of the vizier's guard, chasing much the same clues. (The vizier doesn't trust the sultan's men

with delicate missions.) This needn't lead to trouble, although there is scope for clashes and misunderstandings. The Ghulams' investigations are rather ham-handed – they are slave-soldiers, not detectives. And they aren't overwhelmingly popular in town; the PCs have a better chance than the vizier guessed of obtaining the first lead – the clues that point out into the desert to the east.

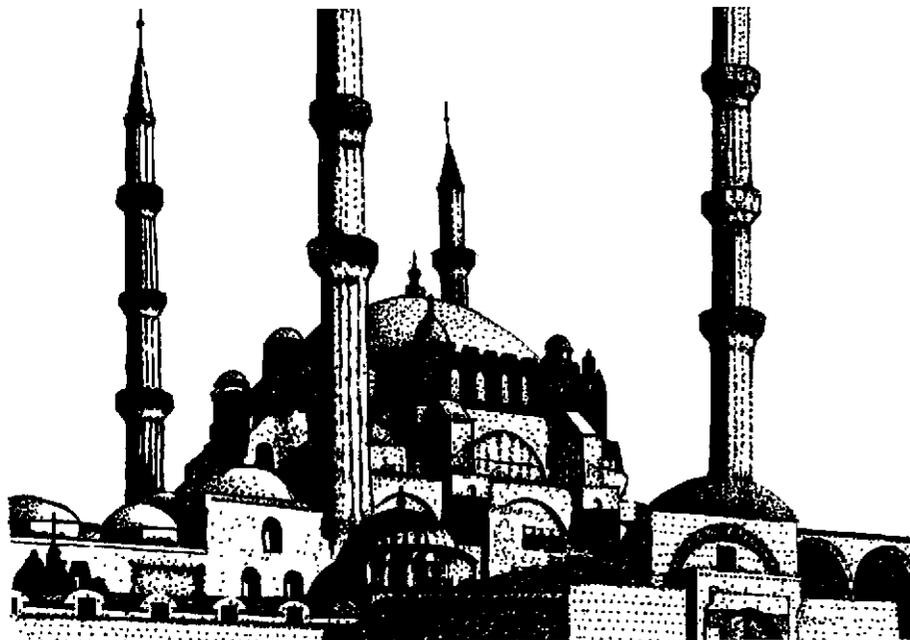
In time, rumors will begin to fly around Dhulibhan, not only that something is happening at the palace, but that it's big. Shrewd observers may note that the sultan has not been seen lately – not even at prayers in the main mosque. For him to have remained in the palace once or twice is neither unusual nor shocking, but after he fails to show up for a whole day (five prayer-times), pious Muslims may begin to murmur. The word will spread that the sultan is sick; plausible enough (and the vizier will subtly encourage the idea), but this in itself is cause for concern; there is, after all, no heir yet. Many citizens will soon be casting quiet aspersions upon the vizier; in time, civil unrest will become very likely. However, the PCs should have pursued some clues out into the desert before serious rumors begin, and more spectacular events should occur before riots can start.

Using Magic

Some PCs may be able to use spells such as Seeker and Trace to track the couple down, and the GM should not prevent this. If they look for personal items, useful in such magic, then some of Rosanna's clothes might be obtained from the harem, and there's still property of al-Baralla's in his lodgings. However, remember that most such spells take significant time to cast, and the GM makes all die rolls. Furthermore, visions granted by such magic, while helpful, may be of restricted usefulness; for example, a simple desert scene, with two figures in it, could lie in any direction. On the other hand, these spells are *supposed* to be useful; they may shorten the investigation time significantly.

Into the Desert

Sooner or later – preferably sooner – the party should venture out into the desert in pursuit of the fugitives. Their first concern may well be transport; if they do not have mounts of their own, they may try to borrow some. If they attempt to go back to the vizier, they'll find that they are stopped at a lower level of the palace bureaucracy; the official line is that Khaled is very busy at the moment (true – he's running himself ragged covering the sultan's disappearance), and the junior secretaries are too officious to let a bunch of unknown adventurers disturb him. Effec-



Adapting to Other Genres (Continued)

GURPS Swashbucklers

Although the "Swashbuckling era" was later in history than most of the *Arabian Nights*, *GURPS Swashbucklers* contains rules for things featured in "Hollywood Arabian" games, such as swashbuckling combat and sea travel.

GURPS Time Travel

"Simple" time travel campaigns might well include visits to the Middle East. For historical nexus points, look at the founding of the Persian empire, Alexander the Great, the expansion of Islam and its halting, the decay of "original interpretation" in Islam, the Crusades, and the Mongol conquests. All involved finely-balanced battles and remarkable individuals; anyone seeking to make large changes with little effort could attack these (and plenty of SF authors have used them in stories of tinkering). The *GURPS Time Travel* "Time Corps" campaign could see Stopwatch aiding a theocratic, autocratic caliphate, while *Timepiece* encourages fair, liberal legal systems under Cyrus the Great and the more civilized Khans, and encourages diverse philosophies. (But who would benefit from Muslim victories at Tours, or at Constantinople in 718? Or from the elimination of Mani, and all the subtle effects that might have on Christian theology? Who prefers Saladin, and who Richard?)

Then there are *Alternate Worlds* games. The possibilities for "Arabian" worlds are immense. These can range from appalling tyrannies, with bigot imams ruling empires where women are locked away in harems and the slightest error leads to loss of a hand, to utopias, where Islamic tolerance combines with science to send expeditions to the stars. (See Frederik Pohl's *The Coming of the Quantum Cats* and Howard Waldrop's *Them Bones*.) In between, for the "time tourists," there are "Arabian Nights" worlds – with or without functional magic, but dominated by a tolerant and slightly decadent Islamic culture.

GURPS Vikings

Consider two contemporaneous, but very different, cultures: that of the North, brawling but clever, and that of Arabia, sophisticated but not weak. The collision can lead to mutual incomprehension, but the two peoples – both obsessed with fate, both superb traders and travelers – have more in common than either would admit. Travel between the two settings is not only possible; it happened, frequently.

The notes on "Arabs" in *GURPS Vikings* (p. V102) are similar to those in *Middle Ages I* (see sidebar, p. 116).

Arabs on Other Planets

Desert worlds, Islamic stellar empires, and *jihad* through hyperspace have all been featured in science fiction. The classic instance is Frank Herbert's *Dune*; other writers have powerful robots who behave like djinn, or just name their star-hopping soldiers "Janissaries."

A harsh, simple life breeds a simple morality, and a dream of Paradise as an exquisite, water-filled garden. Some SF authors have suggested that similar conditions elsewhere might breed similar societies, or they have simply transplanted Arabs, Turks and Persians, complete with culture and religion, out into space.

If Islam is the product of a desert environment, would similar prophetic ideas spring up on desert worlds? In the "Dune" series, the Fremen of Arrakis resemble Bedouins, and the future offered them by their prophet is another well-irrigated Paradise. The story mixes 7th- and 20th-century elements, as the Fremen control an essential resource beneath the desert sands, and their rebellion owes as much to the WWI-era struggle with the Ottomans as it does to the rise of Islam. The interstellar empire has some very Turkish features. Herbert even adapts a lot of Arabian vocabulary (*Hajj*, *Feday(k)in*, *shari'a*, *Shah-Nama*).

Of course, Herbert has to set up some fairly specific conditions to get such a close resemblance, but desert planets have their peculiar appeal. The old-fashioned version of Mars, going back at least to Edgar Rice Burroughs, is often just Arabia-in-space; in a more up-to-date version of the solar system, a partly-terraformed Mars could have something of the same look. With theocracies and empires also very interesting to SF gamers, the world of an *Arabian Nights* game need not be Earth.

There's plenty of serious interest in the possible near-future of Islam, and how it might take to space travel; will there be Muslim colonies in space? Would the idea of the pilgrimage to Mecca survive in an interstellar community? How would Middle Eastern culture adapt to a cyberpunk world? However, actual *Arabian Nights* imagery fits best into a more space-operaic setting: the luxuriant, elegant courts, the theocratic empires fragmenting in feuds and religious debates, the sheer *look* of the thing, all work in space opera. The Jabba the Hut scene in *Return of the Jedi* is only a beginning.

tive use of Administration or Fast-Talk might eventually gain use of the most untrustworthy couple of camels in the palace stables. Loan or rent will also be tricky (who'll trust a bunch of strangers with a valuable animal?); shared camels may well be the order of the day.

This is also where Survival skill comes in useful; even a quick trip in such conditions calls for a roll or two. Fortunately, the local terrain is not the worst possible (there is some cover and a few small oases), but see p. B130 for some rules to use if the PCs don't seem to be taking the desert seriously.

The Beni Shazzarin

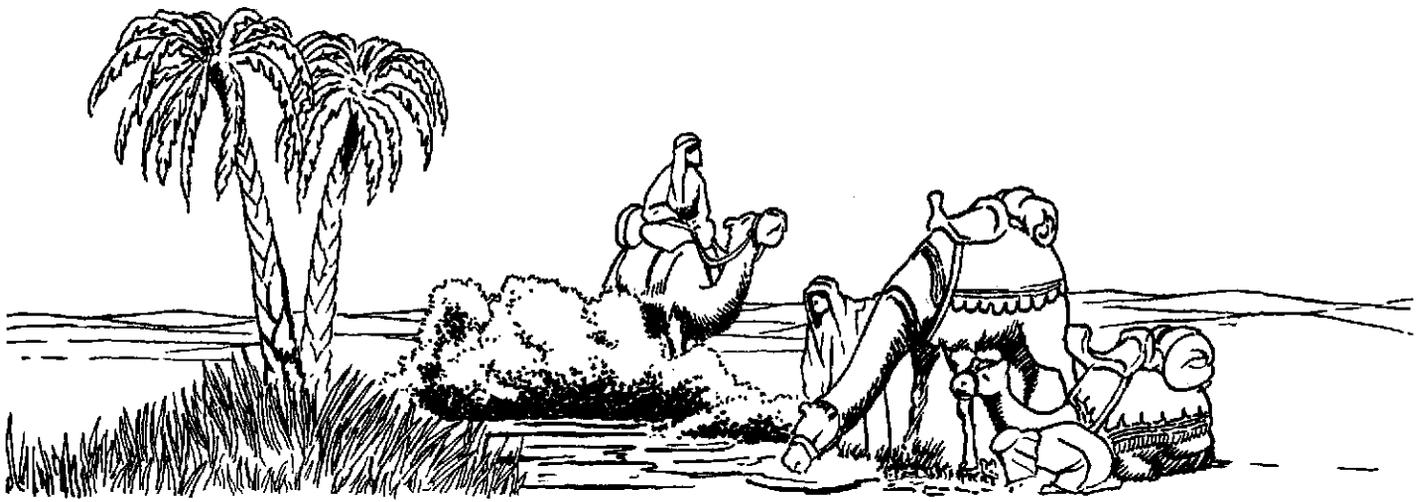
Eventually, given minimal competence (Tracking rolls are at +2 – al-Baralla and Rosanna don't know how to cover their tracks), the PCs should catch up with the fleeing couple. They are about five miles out of town when the PCs come up to them (which may be relevant if magical tracking is being used). However, there is a visible complication; a band of Bedouin warriors on horseback is pursuing them. There is at least one Bedouin per PC, probably more.

These are the Beni Shazzarin, warriors of a small local tribe with a tendency to banditry. They spotted the couple, and decided to ask what they were doing out here on foot, in what the Bedouins consider *their* territory. The couple naturally got scared as they saw the riders coming, and fled, and the Beni Shazzarin, who regard townfolk with amused contempt, have been casually chasing them for some minutes now. The PCs *may* fight to drive the riders off, but this number of competent mounted warriors will be tough opposition. Although the Bedouins lack long-range missiles, they will not be simple to pick off with archery; they are well mounted, natural guerrilla fighters, in country they know, with a fair amount of cover. Furthermore, killing some of them but letting the story get back to their tribe is a bad idea; the Beni Shazzarin believe in blood feud.

It might be wiser to negotiate; the tribesmen are not especially bloodthirsty, and their leader is susceptible to sentimental arguments. A display of al-Baralla's poetic talent might well render them friendly, if the young man is given a few minutes to gather his wits, and a drink of water to help him speak.

If the PCs talk with the Beni Shazzarin on reasonably friendly terms, they may learn one other thing of interest. Last night, the Bedouins were riding past a small oasis that they know as "the Well of Baroogh Dja," when they saw an outburst of flames and lightning. They naturally rode on by as quickly as possible; they are brave, but only a madman, a fool, or a hero challenges the supernatural. If asked, they will say that the place is a cluster of poor farms, under their protection. The farmers pay "tribute" to their tribe when asked.





The Couple's Story

Assuming that they survive, al-Baralla and Rosanna will be grateful enough to the PCs to tell their full story. They are indeed in love, and they met secretly last night, but with no intention of running away. However, while they hid in the garden, they saw a terrible sight: a young man, dressed in rags and laughing insanely, flying over the wall on a whirlwind. Worse, he saw them. He paused for a moment, then crashed through a window into the sultan's personal quarters. There followed a scream of horror from that room; the couple, fearing black magic, decided to flee – hence their situation. They admit they were panicking, but “something terrible struck our hearts” (in fact, Baroogh Dja hit them with a Fear spell); they fled. They fervently deny taking more than a little food as they went. They will be puzzled if the PCs quote the vizier's comments on their actions, and naturally worried when they realize that they are somehow being blamed.

What they saw was, of course, Fadir being carried in by Baroogh Dja, to attack the sultan. However, the PCs won't know any of this yet.

The PCs may or may not believe this, but either way, they should attempt to discover more – perhaps with caution.

The Well and the Farms

Should the PCs learn of the pyrotechnics at the well (from the Beni Shazzarin or, if the GM feels like dropping hints, from other sources – say, peasants coming to town), they may choose to investigate. The place is known to traders and others, and simple to find. The community knows itself only as “The Farms of the Beni Halj”; the Bedouin name, “the well of Baroogh Dja,” preserves a memory of times past, which might help the PCs later.

There are a few acres of reasonable fields, growing dates and pasturing goats and sheep, and a handful of poor huts. *Large* boulders have recently and dramatically demolished one of these. Although the peasants will spend much time shouting and little time making sense (fun for the GM to roleplay), the PCs should eventually piece the story together. Two of the peasants threw out their son, Fadir the Wastrel, the night before; shortly afterwards, there was a great series of explosions and flashes of lightning. Everyone emerged from hiding to see a great, hideous being destroying Fadir's parents' hut. It turned into a great storm cloud, picked up and dropped a couple of rocks on the house, then flew away. One peasant swears that it was carrying Fadir – “to perdition, more than likely!” This account should grow in the telling; the PCs may guess that this is a djinni, probably involved in the rest of the plot, but they will probably come away with the idea that the opposition is far more powerful than it really is . . .

One of the PCs may wish to investigate down the well, which seems to be blocked up. The climb should be fairly routine, especially given use of a rope for extra support. If he takes some kind of illumination, the PC will discover a number

At Court

Adventurers finding themselves in an Islamic royal court should quickly recognize that it is luxurious, *perhaps* decadent, complicated, and probably dangerous to those who are not very careful. *Arabian Nights* fiction often involves devious and brutal palace politics, and the enclosed world of the harem and the absolute power of the ruler encourage this.

The court is both the home of a rich and powerful individual, and the seat of government. In fact, especially in historically accurate settings, this should be reflected by the presence of two parallel power structures: the government of the state, which administers the country, and the palace staff, who have more immediate responsibility and power over the court itself. The latter administers the harem, where the ruler's women and young children dwell in seclusion; court eunuchs, nominally without much power, have enormous influence through their access to the ruler's “off-duty” life and to his heirs.

The office of vizier, or “prime minister,” is at the top of the government. It appeared in the Abbasid era as a more powerful version of the usual court adviser and secretary. Usually, a ruler would have just one vizier, although a few large and opulent courts might have several – perhaps to prevent any one from becoming too powerful. Some viziers were skilled administrators; others were corrupt, and bought the position in order to be able to sell favors. Unskilled rulers might have to resort to violence to bring down an ambitious vizier – or face being brought down themselves. In fiction, viziers are often shown as devious schemers, which is not too implausible. The palace administration, meanwhile, is run by the Chief Chamberlain.

Those being honored at court will be given huge and astonishing meals and many gifts – especially expensive and impressive “Robes of Honor,” worth hundreds or even thousands of dirhams. These gifts of expensive garments are a peculiar and very frequent feature of both historical and fictional descriptions.



Reaction Modifiers

As in any culture, NPC reactions in an *Arabian Nights* campaign are partly governed by local and cultural prejudices. Some skills, such as Poetry, tend to create a favorable impression, and there are many variations on Social Stigma and Reputation (see Chapter 2 on all of this). Other possible modifiers include the following:

Anyone riding a really good-quality horse, or one that looks well-cared-for and interesting, will attract the attention of horse lovers, and they will react to the rider at +1. A lot of Bedouins and most nobles are horse lovers.

Anyone carrying a trained falcon will be noted by most Bedouins, nobles, and “courtly” NPCs; if the bird looks reasonably well-treated, they will react to the falconer at +1.

(Dedicated hobbyist NPCs may double or even triple the above two bonuses.)

Pious Muslims react at +1 to anyone who is seen to be generous with alms. The newly-rich who shower the mob with gold can become very popular (+3 reaction from “the masses”). If players make a point of claiming these bonuses, the GM should make a point of raising their living expenses accordingly.

Conversely, those who are believed to be rich get a -1 reaction from good Muslims and the herd if they give less than generous alms, -2 if they give nothing, and -3 if they seem to enjoy their meanness. The *Miserliness* disadvantage (p. B34) can quickly make for reaction problems.

Buffoonery, clowning around, and silly jokes get you +1 reaction if you just want to socialize, but -1 if you then look for sympathy or practical help. Behaving with quiet dignity, on the other hand, is often good for +1; a successful *Savoir-Faire* roll shows that the character has what is needed, or GMs may ensure that the player roleplays the attitude. (This can be true in almost any society, but it’s something that the *Thousand and One Nights* emphasizes.)

A known *hajji* who acts piously, or *anyone* in a green turban who behaves with dignity and apparent piety, will get a +1 from good Muslims. However, even the impious would be offended if they found someone was *impersonating* a *hajji* – -3 or worse.

of smallish rocks in the bottom of the well, and a small, smooth-walled niche in the side. A careful search of the rubble in the water will turn up a circular stone slab, now cracked in two, which evidently used to close off the niche; examined in daylight, the slab can be seen to be carved with the Seal of Solomon. (A skilled stonemason could repair this; see p. 91 for notes on its potential usefulness.) If the PCs don’t find the seal-stone, the peasants will eventually do so while clearing out the well; one of them will use the larger part as a doorstep.

Meanwhile, Back in Town . . .

Fadir and Baroogh Dja have not been idle. Fadir spent a few hours terrifying the miniaturized sultan, then decided that he could do just as well as this *insect* at running the city. Fadir has always been a big admirer of the vizier’s sadistic reputation; he got the djinni to disguise him as Khaled with an *Alter Body* spell as a sort of warped tribute, and took the sultan’s clothes. Then he and the djinni returned to the palace. Baroogh Dja, in the guise of a huge human warrior, butchered a couple of guards, and they took over. Khaled ibn Khaled escaped through a secret door, but now Fadir, still disguised, is acting as such a tyrant that the vizier doesn’t dare come out of hiding. He believes, with cause, that most of the townsfolk would lynch him first and ask questions later.

So the PCs will arrive to find the town in chaos; “everyone knows” that the vizier has finally shown his true colors and taken over, and he’s acting worse than anyone expected. The sultan has vanished, presumed horribly murdered (wilder witnesses say they saw it happen); the vizier is indulging in every available vice, plundering the homes of free citizens, and laughing all the time. People say that they always thought he was power-mad, but at least he was *quiet* about it before.

The surviving witnesses from the palace, if traced to their hiding places, will spend most of their time talking about the huge, ugly swordsman who assisted the “vizier” and lopped off a clutch of heads. They may, if carefully questioned, recall that the vizier was richly but somehow oddly dressed (on an IQ roll, they’ll realize he was wearing the sultan’s evening clothes). However, working out how all this ties up with what they have learned so far is up to the PCs.

Putting Matters Right

Hopefully, most PCs will decide at this point that they should *do* something, for the sake of their own security if not out of altruism. Furthermore, they may well have an idea what is going on.

Unfortunately, Fadir now commands not only a djinni, but much of the palace guard (the more reflexively loyal of the vizier’s Ghulams, plus the less choosy of the sultan’s men). He’s not too bright, but he has a certain bullying shrewdness, and he has numbers on his side. He has also acquired a lightweight chainmail shirt (see p. 70). As the palace is designed to be defensible, and the “vizier” has retired there for an unknown period after his spree, the heroes will need a plan.

The Vizier

At this point, the *real* vizier may find the PCs; he hopes that, as outsiders, they will be more likely to listen to him than the locals. He will tell them all he knows – which isn’t much more than anyone else; however, he *does* know a number of secret doors and hiding-places around the palace, which could be very useful. Apart from anything else, it can get the PCs past the palace guard and into a final confrontation, without combat. Khaled is also a clever advisor, and will act as a useful restraint on headstrong types who suggest under-prepared, head-on assaults. He can also take control of loyal guards, which could be useful.

The Djinni

The big problem is Baroogh Dja. He is a Lesser Djinni; tackling such a being head-on is possible, but dangerous. Unless the PCs include several very good fighters, ingenuity is in order.

If the PCs spoke with the Beni Shazzarin, they may have one advantage; knowledge of the djinni's name. This doesn't give them absolute power over him, but it will give him pause, and could allow an outrageous bluff. (Djinn aren't immune to Fast-Talk.)

Scholarly folk may guess that Baroogh Dja was bound in his well by Akhirem the Wise. This too could be useful; the djinni could be bluffed with the name, or threatened with some credibility. There is also the possibility of recovering the broken Seal of Solomon, getting it repaired (which requires a Professional Skill: Stonemason roll, which in turn probably means locating a craftsman in town), and using it to turn the djinni.

Obviously, if any of the PCs know any Djinni spells, they may be able to balance the odds considerably. Remember, however, that these rarely work automatically, and Baroogh Dja has the sense to flee from a powerful wizard in smoke form, then sneak back for a counterattack. Furthermore, the wizard will probably have to be protected from Fadir and his guards.

If all else fails, or for a quicker happy ending, note that the djinni is only serving Fadir on a whim. If Fadir insults him, as may happen if he, say, reacts too slowly to an attack, Baroogh Dja may simply call Fadir an ungrateful human, then fly off and never be seen again.

The Sultan

There is also the small matter of Jashak al-Nur. He is currently being held, naked and still shrunk to 6" tall, in a bird cage in his private apartments. Needless to say, he feels humiliated, angry and frightened. If the djinni is killed or knocked out, he will regain his full size, which will allow his anger to overcome his fear. But whatever his size, he may become a useful hostage for Fadir or Baroogh Dja. Saving his neck – despite his own reckless anger – could be a good climax to the adventure.



Sample Scenario NPCs

Guards

Guards for both the town and the palace are competent soldiers, with 11-13 in each of ST, DX and HT, and sword, spear, shield and bow skills around 13-14. They have a random assortment of Psychological Disadvantages, but all have a Duty, and most put that above their personal feelings. On routine duty, they wear pot-helms and padded cloth torso armor, and carry small shields and broadswords. In the unlikely event of their equipping themselves for war from the palace armory, they would appear in a mixture of chainmail and padded cloth, with plenty of weapons. The palace stables have a number of Heavy Horses (p. 94), with full war training; some guards are trained in Riding.

The Vizier

Khaled ibn Khaled ibn Balthazar has IQ 15, with 11 in all other attributes. He has Peripheral Vision, and the other advantages logical for his position. His skills mostly relate to running the kingdom – and he's *good* at it, with Detect Lies, Intelligence Analysis and Interrogation as well as Administration, Area Knowledge, Calligraphy and Diplomacy – but he has Stealth and Shortsword, too. His disadvantages are his Duty to the Sultan, a Sense of Duty to match, and a -2 Reputation on 10 or less because people think he's a devious sadist. The *truth* is that he has certain Quirks; he's habitually ironic, he never makes a direct threat, and he likes being the power behind the throne. In other words, he *sounds* like a suave, dangerous tyrant, but doesn't really act like one. (He also has a taste for bizarrely spiced food, and he doesn't eat goat; dining with him can be an unnerving experience.)

The Sultan

Jashak al-Nur is a fairly average fellow not particularly skilled at kingship, but he tries, and he trusts his vizier. He can use a sword or hold a polite conversation. He is Stubborn, and romantic to the level of a quirk; he'll certainly forgive al-Baralla for falling in love with Rosanna. He has Charisma and is liked by his people; he may grow into his title.

The Poet

Al-Baralla is an average male with IQ 12. He's Attractive and Literate, and also highly romantic and in love with Rosanna. Now, frankly, he's out of his depth, but he's genuinely brave, and won't panic easily. His skills are Poetry-17, Bard-14, Calligraphy-12, Climbing-12, Stealth-11, Shortsword-11, and Buckler-10.

Continued on next page . . .

Sample Scenario NPCs (Continued)

Rosanna

The slave-girl is Circassian by birth, and Beautiful, with DX 12, Common Sense, and +3 Musical Ability. She can also handle a knife, and she has Sex Appeal-14. She has two important Quirks: she enjoys any kind of attention, and she's slightly paranoid – she tends to assume she'll be blamed for anything bad that happens when she's around. She is genuinely fond of al-Baralla, but she also sees life with him as potentially a lot more fulfilling than life at court; she wasn't planning this elopement, but she sees its potential.

The Beni Shazzarin

These desert rogues all fit the "Bedouin" NPC archetype; they are armed with broadswords, spears or javelins, and small or medium shields – adding up to Light Encumbrance (Move and Dodge 5). The group leader, Rajj ibn Shazzarin, is just charismatic enough for the others to follow him out of habit (Leadership-10); he's also Impulsive, and has an Arabian Code of Honor, so PCs may be able to appeal to his "better nature" with good effect.

The Bedouins are all riding Light Horses (see p. 94), which are reasonably well trained for combat – they won't spook in ordinary fights, although magic or extreme violence might worry them. With these riders, who have some traveling kit and so forth, they have medium encumbrance, and so Move 12.

Fadir the Wastrel

This young peasant has ST 11, DX 10, IQ 9 and HT 11, plus Luck, and also Odious Personal Habits (ill-mannered, gives -1 reaction) and Status -1; he's Lazy, and a Bully. His skills are Brawling-12, Agronomy-10, Fishing-10, and Spear-8.

The Djinni

Baroogh Dja is a Lesser Djinni (see Chapter 7), with the standard ability to shapeshift into the form of a whirling cloud of smoke, and also into the form of a burly, unattractive human male. He can fly in "smoke" form, and he has the spells Breathe Water, Simple Illusion, Detect Magic, Recover Strength, Weaken, Rejoin, Fear, Alter Body and Shrink, all at skill level 20. He now carries a sword (courtesy of the palace armory). He's a malicious prankster who enjoys having power over others; although he's not especially brave, he regards humans with so much contempt that he won't back off from a simple fight until he's seriously hurt.

Endings and Rewards

Assuming that things come off reasonably well, the PCs will be rewarded. They will be entertained lavishly, with luxurious feasts and gifts of fine clothing. (These could verge on white elephants; it would seem impolite to sell the gift of a sultan, but heavily embroidered court robes are weighty to carry around, and little use for a working adventurer.)

As to remuneration: if this scenario was used to start a campaign, it's probably better not to follow the original sources too closely. Making the characters very rich tends to limit future options too much, and the sultan doesn't have any daughters of marriageable age. But Dhulibhan is a small kingdom, and its shrewd vizier is likely to put a damper on the wilder suggestions of its romantic young sultan. The PCs should receive, say, a few months' income; they should also be offered jobs as guards by any passing caravans, and other interesting missions – after all, they've proved their competence. There's also a promise; they'll always be welcome in this court.

Further Adventure Seeds

Djinn Palace

An elderly scholar comes to the PCs with a proposal for a shared venture – for money, as repayment for a favor, or as purely speculative research. He has obtained a manuscript which, when translated from an obscure tongue, conveys certain secret words of power that give access to the underground palace of a djinni lord. (The gates are normally magically hidden and sealed.) His researches suggest that the djinni in question is dead, trapped elsewhere, or otherwise absent at present – but its treasures and secrets should all still be in its home. A relatively easy journey, followed by a quick and lawful invocation, will give everyone access to vast wealth and astonishing secrets.

But . . . even before the palace has been found, the journey is beset by bandits or monsters. Rival scholars, sharing some but not all of the old man's knowledge, try to steal the manuscript. The simplest but deadliest complication would be for the djinni lord to be free and at home. This need not be fatal for the party, as the djinni might be whimsically amused by their effrontery. But the lord of the palace might nonetheless impose some bizarre punishment on them – say, carrying them off to some distant land, or forcing them to undertake some quest, or using them to explore some area defended by anti-djinn magic. Even if the lord is absent, the castle can be defended by all kinds of traps and magic; Lesser Djinn or enchanted human "servants" and "concubines" could be encountered, all with their own priorities. And, of course, anything plundered from such a place could lead to still more adventures, as "wild magic" built into items, or subtle, clue-laden manuscripts, send mortals deeper into the shadowy world of djinn lore.

The Writing in the Wall

The PCs are approached by a rich scholar, who has recently had a piece of rather odd luck. A storyteller he heard quoted a passage that the scholar has identified as part of a lost historical account; discovering any more of it would be an academic triumph. Unfortunately, the storyteller has now traveled on to another town, but the scholar will pay well to discover his source.

The first part of this mission is easy. The storyteller is traveling slowly, and bazaar gossip will soon lead the PCs to him. He in turn will happily explain more, for a small donation. Some months ago, he spent a night in a small caravanserai, which had evidently been built with old stone. He is literate and knows some old



Plots from the Epics

Even the best epics have a few loose ends, which PCs might tie up. Browsing through the sources for this setting can provide some useful plot ideas.

The Sword of 'Antar

In the bazaar, a magician is showing off a few tricks to entertain an audience and earn a few dirhams. Then, as a PC is passing, he fumbles a spell, and a huge djinni appears in the middle of the crowd.

Fortunately, it does not attack; it merely laughs. "Ha!" it cries. "Called from Heaven to this midden. And to think, I was just eavesdropping on a fascinating conversation among the angels – they were talking about the fate of this world, too. It seems that there will soon be a great conqueror here – great as men ever are. Yes; he who wields the sword of 'Antar shall rule this land within a twelvemonth!" Then it laughs again and vanishes.

Well, it *may* have been lying, but no one wants to take the chance. The hunt is on for the sword of 'Antar. Anyone with Literature skill knows the stories: a great black blade, forged out of a stone fallen from the sky, that could cut through *anything*. Quite a prize in its own right. However, no one knows what *happened* to it after 'Antar died. PCs should take an interest in the search; even if they do not want the sword themselves, there are plenty of people who ought *not* to get it, and rewards are being offered.

It is sought by the caliph's Ghulams, Bedouins who claim 'Antar as their forebear, Persian nobles dreaming of renewed power for their race, Turkish mercenaries hired by who-knows-who, cruel Mongols with a sense of their own conquering destiny – and any number of ragamuffin adventurers. Libraries and ancient ruins alike see sudden duels and impromptu alliances. The sword itself will make its wielder powerful, but not invincible; others will continue to bid for it, even after it's found. Twelve months is a long time; the djinni's joke will lead to much spilled blood.

That Lamp

When Aladdin died, his lamp must have remained in the imperial treasury in China. However, its powers and uses were seemingly forgotten. Anyone who tracked it down, through a maze of Chinese bureaucracy or in the tents of Mongol conquerors, would have vast power to command.

Other devices from the *Arabian Nights* could also be worth locating. For example, although the djinn-controlling ring and the bag of endless food are destroyed at the end of the tale of "Judar and his Brothers," there remain a deadly sword, the Celestial Orb, a vial of magic kohl, and a copy of *The Lore of the Ancients*, all unaccounted for.

languages slightly, and a block with an inscription caught his eye. The passage he read caught his imagination, and he worked it into a story.

This excites the scholar more, and he employs the PCs to investigate further. This means finding the caravanserai, locating the block of stone in the wall, taking rubbings of it and any other visible pieces (perhaps after persuading the scholar that removing a large block of stone from the walls of a government-run building is inadvisable), and then locating the ruins from which that stone was salvaged for further research. Needless to say, wilderness ruins are favorite haunts of djinn . . .

The Lands of the Turks

The PCs (who should not include any Turks) form a friendship with a Turkish mercenary captain, who offers them a job. His son is engaged to be married to a chieftain's daughter back in their homelands beyond Persia – a matter of old family agreements. Unfortunately, the girl in question, although not unwilling, is a romantic, melodramatic sort, who has said that she will only marry a man "who comes to her with no warrior of the Turks at his side, and who gallops to her three days before his father in his desire for her hand." She will also take any delay in the wedding as an insult. The captain's son, a romantic himself, has accepted this challenge; unfortunately, it has become more than a nominal request, as the girl's cousin, a violent outlaw with his own interest in her, has sworn to prevent the match. With a small following of cutthroats, he is prowling the hills by the road to the girl's tents, fully prepared to slaughter any contenders for her hand. He knows the hills well, and has friends among the ruffians of the area.

Sending the boy in with a Turkish escort would, of course, break the girl's conditions, and she'd certainly hear of any "cheating" from tribal gossips; on the other hand, the PCs aren't "warriors of the Turks."

The young groom (who's naive and brash, but not stupid) can be taken to the wedding by stealth or subterfuge; alternatively, a tough, powerful PC party might just fight their way through. (However, enemy archers will be aiming for the groom.) Once there, they'll be honored guests at the wedding; the boy's father will show up with his mercenary troop after the requisite three days. Some roleplaying may be required if the bride complains about the groom bringing a bunch of foreign rogues to her big day, and the cousin may make some desperate last-ditch attempt to stop things.

GLOSSARY

Most of these terms are Arabic, except where indicated otherwise. In most Arabic words, consonants (usually three of them) define the "root" meaning, and vowels qualify that. For example, see *Katib* and *Kitab*, or *Islam* and *Muslim*.

Abbasid: The dynasty founded by Abu'l-'Abbas, descendant of Mohammed's uncle 'Abbas; ruled from 749-1258 A.D.

Aghlabid: The ruling dynasty of Tunisia, Sicily and eastern Algeria, 800-909 A.D.

ahl al-Kitab: "People of the Book;" tolerated non-Muslims.

Ahriman: See Angra Mainyu.

Ahura Mazda: Zoroastrian god of light, good, truth and purity.

alchemy: An early form of chemistry, associated with philosophy and magic.

algebra: A mathematical system using symbols for generalizing operations and relationships between numbers; from Arabic *al-jabr*.

al-Kohl: Antimony powder used as a cosmetic around the eyes; basis of English word *alcohol*.

Allah: The single all-powerful deity of the Muslims.

Allah Karim: Allah is all-beneficent.

Allahu Akbar!: "God is Greatest!" – the battle-cry of Muslim warriors.

Almohad: Dynasty ruling the Maghrib and Spain, 1130-1269 A.D.

Almoravid: Ruling dynasty in the Maghrib and Spain, 1056-1147 A.D.

alquerque: Checkers

'amir: Literally "Leader." Used of Caliphs ("Leader of the Faithful") and descendants of Mohammed; in the Middle Ages, became a general term for military officers, comparable to the European "knight." Later (usually given as "Emir"), mostly used for independent chiefs and local rulers.

Angra Mainyu: Zoroastrian god of evil, lies, darkness and corruption.

attar: An essential oil made from flower petals (especially roses).

ayatollah: A Shiite leader who serves as administrator, teacher and judge.

Ayyar: Warrior bands, followers of *Futuwwa*.

baggala: A larger version of the dhow.

barque: A three-masted sailing ship

bazaar: (Persian) A town's market area.

Bedouins: Nomadic desert tribes, living by herding and raiding.

Berbers: Dark-skinned desert tribes of the Sahara in North Africa.

Bey: (Turkish) Governor, chieftain.

Bismillah: "In the name of Allah"; a Muslim invocation.

boom: A larger version of the dhow.

brigantine: Smaller galley ship, used by corsairs

Buyid: The dynasty ruling Iran and Iraq from 932 to 1062.

cadi: Magistrate, judge.

caliph: Deputy of the Prophet, who rules Muslims in Mohammed's stead; formerly a mainly temporal rather than a spiritual leader.

caravanserai: Shelter for caravans.

casbah: In North African towns, a citadel and the area round it – often the town's bazaar.

chador: All-enveloping veiled dress for women.

corsair: A privateer or pirate

cubit: The distance from elbow to middle fingertip (about 18 to 22 inches).

da'is: Initiates in the Isma'ili cult.

danaq: A coin equal to one-sixth of a dirham.

Daylamis: A people from a mountainous region of northwest Persia, south of the Caspian, called Daylam. Noted as rebellious and tough; often employed as mercenary infantry; converted late to Islam, sometimes took to sects such as Isma'ilism. The Buyid dynasty was of Daylami descent.

dervish: A wandering or monastic Sufi.

Dhimmi: "Protected" non-Muslims.

dhow: Lateen-rigged sailing ship

dinar: A gold coin weighing .15 oz.

dirham: A silver coin weighing .1 oz.; there were 12-20 dirhams to the dinar.

Diwan: A list; hence, a collection or anthology, an office, or a government department. Alternatively, a large sofa (as found in palace offices – hence the English "divan").

djellaba: A hooded, baggy robe for outdoor wear.

djibbah: A topcoat.

djinn: Spirit-beings, created of smokeless fire. The singular is *djinni*; the feminine is *djinniya*.

emir: See *'amir*.

fakir: See dervish.

Fatimid: The dynasty ruling the Maghrib, Egypt, and Syria from 909-1171; they claimed to be caliphs.

fals: Copper coins used to make change.

fellah (pl. **fellahin**): A peasant farmer (especially in Egypt).

felucca: Small oared ship

fidai's (pl. **fedayin**): Literally, "self-sacrificers," suicidal killers from the outermost ring of the Isma'ili cult.

frigate: Small galley used by corsairs

fursiyya: Horsemanship, military/hunting skills.

futuwwa: Warrior codes, "chivalry," military virtues.

galleots: Smaller galley ships, used by corsairs

galley: An oared ship

genii: Persian winged spirits.

Ghazi: A fighter for Islam.

ghul (fem. **ghuleh**): An ogre or demon of the desert; the embodied horror of the grave and graveyard.

Ghulam: Slave-soldiers serving a ruler.

Hadith: Traditional law; the "Sayings of the Prophet."

hajj: The pilgrimage to Mecca which every Muslim should make at least once in a lifetime during the last month of the lunar year.

Hajji: Title which any Muslim who has made the hajj may add to his name.

hakim: A "sage" – a wise scholar, physician, and spiritual guide. Often a wanderer. The ideal Muslim intellectual.

halal: Rules similar to Jewish kosher law, governing the slaughter of animals and prohibiting pork to Muslims.

hashish: A concentrated form of hemp, used as a drug.

Hegira (**Hijra**): Mohammed's move from Mecca to Medina in 622 A.D.; the Muslim calendar counts this as year 1 A.H. (After Hegira).

hookah: A pipe for smoking, in which a long flexible tube draws the smoke through water in a bowl or vase and cools it.

hourai: A virgin of Paradise who will wed the happy Faithful

howdah: A seat for riding on the back of a camel or an elephant.

Iblis: The Muslim Satan; from a root meaning "the Despairer."

'Ifrit (fem. **'Ifriteh**): One of the most powerful types of djinn, divided into two races and generally but not always hostile to mankind.

imam: Prayer leader; to the Shiites, the caliph is Chief Imam.

Inshallah: "If Allah pleases."

Iskander: Alexander the Great, or a ro-

manticized version of him found in various epics.

Islam: "Submission (to the will of Allah)"; the religion of Mohammed.

jan: Another type of or word for djinn.

jihad: "Struggle in the way of God"; holy war against unbelievers.

Kaaba: The small "House of God" in the center of Mecca.

kaffiyeh: The shawl worn over the head (instead of a turban) by Bedouin men, and by many Muslim women.

katib: A reader; hence, a scholar, the clerk of a court, the sermon-reader in a mosque, etc.

Kharijite (or Khawarij): "Seceder" – an early, puritanical Muslim sect.

Kohl: See al-Kohl.

kismet: Fate or destiny.

Kitab: Book.

Koran (Arabic Quran): Literally, "recitation"; the Word of Allah as revealed to Mohammed, composed of 114 surahs of thousands of verses.

Kufic: An early script.

Maghrib: Northwest Africa; Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia.

Mahdi: The messianic leader-savior expected by certain Muslim sects.

mahout: An elephant driver.

Malik: King.

Mameluke: A white slave; hence, a slave-soldier; hence, the Egyptian dynasty founded by such.

Marid (fem. Maridah): Another of the tribes of the djinn, generally but not always hostile to humans.

mawla: A "client," subservient to/protected by a conquering Arab tribe.

mihrab: A niche in a mosque wall, marking direction of Mecca.

minbar: A pulpit or raised platform.

Moor: A person of mixed Arab and Berber descent, especially one who invaded Spain in the 8th century.

mosque: A Muslim place of communal prayer.

muezzin: One who announces prayer times to the Faithful.

mufti: An expert legal scholar/advisor.

muhtasibs: Government officials charged with enforcing Islamic morality and the rules of religion.

mullah: A "lord."

Muslim (or Moslem): A devotee of *Islam*; literally "One who submits."

odalisque: (Turkish) A female harem-slave; a slave-concubine.

Ormazd: See Ahura Mazda.

Parsee: One of the surviving Zoroastrians in India.

Peri: (Persian) A supernatural being, similar to a European "fairy."

pollacca: A type of ship sailed on the Mediterranean.

qanat: (Persian) Systems of underground water-conduits, used to supply large cities.

qat: A mild drug, at first stimulating but later depressing.

ra'is: Chief of civilian administration in a city.

Ramadan: The 9th month of the Muslim calendar, during which Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset.

rattl: Approximately one pound.

rawi: Professional story-teller.

razzia: Tribal raid, usually for livestock.

sahra: Wilderness.

saique: A two-masted ship.

salaam: "Peace" – used as a greeting ("Peace be upon you").

Saracen: A European (Crusader) term for the Muslim peoples, especially Arabs and Turks.

sayyid: A descendant of the Prophet.

serai: Shelter.

seraglio: (Turkish) The Ottoman sultan's harem.

Shari'a: "The road to the watering place," "a clear path to be followed"; the system of Muslim law.

Shi'at 'Ali: The Party of 'Ali.

Shi'ite: One who believes that only the Koran is an infallible guide for men's actions.

Sih: Minor spirit-magic, "glamor."

Sharif: A direct descendant of Mohammed.

sheikh: Literally "elder;" may be used for a teacher or a tribal leader.

sherbet: A drink of watered fruit juice and sugar.

soukh: A market-place – equivalent to the Persian *Bazaar*.

Sufi: An Islamic mystic.

sultan: A Muslim ruler, equal to most kings but (theoretically) subservient to the caliph. The word originally simply meant (state) power; it came to be used of monarchs around the 10th-11th centuries.

sunna: The practice or tradition of the community of believers.

Sunni: One who believes that the Koran and the *sunna* together are the proper guide for one's actions.

surah: A chapter of the Koran.

tartan: A type of ship sailed on the Mediterranean.

Tiraz: Cloth arm-bands decorated with writing (often religious), sometimes used as amulets.

Tuaregs: Desert-dwelling people of North Africa, noted for the blue veils worn by their menfolk, and for their pride and secretiveness. As they live in a similar environment, their culture has a slight resemblance to that of the Bedouin, but they are racially Berbers.

Turcoman: (Turkish) A Muslim Turk, usually living a less nomadic life than in pre-Islamic times; often, a member of one of the "Oghuz" tribes.

Turkopole (or Turcopole – Byzantine-derived European): Light cavalry in the service of the Crusaders. Originally Syrian Christians and local converts (the term means "Sons of the Turks"), later possibly including some Franks.

Ulama: The class of Muslim religious scholars – the "guardians of tradition."

umma: The Muslims as a community.

vizier: Government minister, usually the chief such.

yashmak: A woman's veil, which leaves only the eyes exposed.

Zoroaster (also Zarathustra): Founder of the Zoroastrian religion of Persia.



Weapons and Armor

aina: (Persian) Circular plate reinforcement for lighter body armor (literally "Mirror").

al-qutun: Literally "cotton;" padded cloth body-armor, known in Europe as "Aketon." The European "Gambeson" was similar, but added sleeves.

bunduq: Gun, or bullet (originally, blow-pipe).

char aina: Plate Corselet (literally "Four Mirrors;" a late development – plate segments over mail).

kontos: (Greek) Long lance/spear.

midfa: Primitive hand-gun.

nawak: A type of crossbow.

galachur: Curved, two-edged longsword, Asiatic in origin.

qaws Farangi ("Frankish bow"): A crossbow, usually based on the European pattern but with an Eastern-style composite bow.

qaws ar-Rikab: Stirrup crossbow.

rumh: Light lance/long spear.

saif: Straight longsword, used by early Arab troops.

scimitar: Short, curved sword with the convex edge sharpened.

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Non-Fiction

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scholarly, but devout Muslim; it includes translations of many key passages. On Sufism, *The Way of the Sufi*, by Idries Shah (Jonathan Cape, 1968) is a Sufi's own view.

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Ancient Stories

The first fictional source to look at must obviously be the *Thousand and One Nights*. This has been translated several times, but finding a complete, uncensored, readable version is another matter. Some versions, such as Lane's bowdlerized 1839-41 edition, are more interesting for their footnotes than their text. (Fortunately, Lane also put his knowledge of the East into his other works.) Burton's version is odd, and hard to find in complete form; his wife edited a large but expurgated edition of it. The following were used heavily in the preparation of this book:

- Tales from the Thousand and One Nights*, trans. N.J. Dawood (Penguin, 1973)
Scheherezade, trans. A.J. Arberry (George Allen & Unwin, 1953)

Other myths have been translated, but much less often, and they are less widely available. For more background, here are some additional sources:

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Modern Fiction

Almost every contemporary fantasist (along with many SF authors and a remarkable number of major "mainstream" writers) has raided the *Thousand and One Nights* at some stage, with very variable results. The following is an arbitrary selection:

- Borges, Jorge Luis: "Averroes's Search." (In the collection *Labyrinths*.)
Cullen, Seamus: *A Noose of Light*.
Dennis, Ian: *Bagdad, The Prince of Stars*. (Combined as *The Prince of Stars in the Cavern of Time*.)
Effinger, George Alec: *When Gravity Fails, A Fire in the Sun, and The Exile's Kill*. (For those interested in a view of the Arabia of the future.)
Langley, Noel: *The Land of Green Ginger*.
Lee, Tanith: *Death's Master, Night's Master, Delusion's Master, Delirium's Mistress*. (These draw most on pre-Islamic Persia. Lush, lurid, and unusual.)
Lewis, C.S.: *The Horse and His Boy*. (The Calormenes are Arab-inspired; the Calormene girl Aravis tells a story very nicely in the style.)
Pratchett, Terry: *Sourcery, Pyramids, Small Gods*. (Brilliant, absurd humor.)
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Sterling, Bruce: "Dinner in Audoghast." (In the collection *Crystal Express*.)
Tarr, Judith: *A Wind in Cairo*. (Stock modern fantasy, but with a historical setting and lots for horse-lovers.)

Historical Novels

GMs running historical or semi-historical campaigns have a vast assortment of possible inspiration to choose from, of varying quality; the Crusades are especially well covered. Any book shop or library will be worth a look.

Poetry

The Islamic literary tradition is highly poetic, but classical Middle Eastern poetry is heavy going for westerners. Some Penguin Classics can be a start; try, for example, *The Conference of the Birds*, by Farid ud-Din Attar, translated by Afkhan Darbandi and Dick Davis, a long, metaphorical presentation of Sufi ideas, including many images of medieval Persian life. *Mirror of the Invisible World: Tales from the Kamseh of Nizami*, translated by P.J. Chelkowski, is well worth tracking down.

One Muslim poem that has become well-known in the west is the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam. Edward Fitzgerald trans-

lated some of this set of unconnected four-line verses, and produced in the process one of the most quoted poems in the English language ("A flask of wine, a book of verse - and thou/Beside me singing in the wilderness . . ."). Potentially anyone's quickest introduction to the myth of the East, but more accurate translations are available, including one by Peter Avery and John Heath-Stubbs in Penguin.

English-language poetry that uses more-or-less Arabian images could be a further source of "atmosphere." If in doubt, look for English writers from around the end of the nineteenth century.

Films

Inevitably, the Western cinema has taken to the Arabian Nights myth; equally inevitably, it has distorted it. "Arabian" fantasies hit the screen every few years. At best, they have flair and spectacle; at worst, they are disasters. Those made by special-effects master Ray Harryhausen at least have weird and wonderful monsters. The following is a very incomplete list:

- The Thief of Baghdad* (1924): A classy silent. Impressive for its day, with magnificent sets and the advantage of Douglas Fairbanks buckling his swash.
The Thief of Baghdad (1940): A classic of fantasy cinema, with state-of-the-art special effects for its time. The characters and style look a bit dated now, but the movie just about defines the genre clichés.
Son of Sinbad (1955): A lousy movie, not bad enough to be fun, in spite of a young Vincent Price and some pretty photography. Cheap sets, no camels, and convincing proof that '50's Hollywood starlets couldn't belly-dance. The plot, for what it's worth, has no magic, some swashbuckling, and explosive "Greek Fire."
The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad (1958): Harryhausen doing what he did best. The heroes behave stupidly, and there's a cute djinni, but the monsters are big, garish and fun.
The Thief of Baghdad (1961): Another remake, with body-builder Steve Reeves; a much-changed, lower-magic plot, but some spectacle and panache.
Captain Sinbad (1963): Uncertain in tone, with some good moments and reasonable special effects. However, the script has no connection with Islam or the original tales.
Sinbad and the Eye of the Tiger (1977): A late and slightly tired Harryhausen epic, this one nonetheless has plenty of magic-by-animation.

The Thief of Baghdad (1978): Yet another version, mixing and matching plot elements; it suffers from poor special effects, but has some good supporting performances.

Arabian Adventure (1979): Lots of swash-buckling, big sets, weird machines and magic, including flying carpet dog-fights. Not actually very good, but worth a view for reference.

(There are also a number of nominally relevant "historical" movies to choose from, many of them about as realistic as a Harryhausen spectacular. For the record, this author has a soft spot for the Eurocentric, historically confused 1961 *El Cid*, starring Charlton Heston and Sophia Loren.)

Music

Music is important to the "Arabian myth." Nothing evokes images of "the East" more effectively than shimmering brass and exotic rhythms. Putting something appropriate on the stereo could set the mood for a game session instantly.

A rummage through the "world music" section of a good record store may turn up some authentic (modern) Middle Eastern music. North African "Rai" uses electric instruments but traditional techniques. Perhaps more widely available is Peter Gabriel's *Passion*, containing music written for the sound-track of the movie *The Last Temptation of Christ*, and its companion disc, *Passion Sources*, which contains plenty of traditional eastern music (both on the Real World label, distributed by Virgin Records.)

However, if it's the Western myth of the exotic East you're after, then the first place to go is Nikolas Rimsky-Korsakov's "symphonic poem," *Scheherazade*. It's been recorded many times, and any classical music store should have a copy. Western, subtly exotic, and gorgeous.

Other Game Materials

Tales of the Arabian Nights, by Eric Goldberg, West End Games, 1985. Excellent for the flavor, and as GM inspiration; uses a "book of tales" with over 1,000 paragraphs describing encounters. Can be played at more than one level.

Although not as much is available for Arabian Nights settings as for other types of fantasy, roleplayers should be able to find game-aids as needed. Many manufacturers have a few "Arab-style" figures in their fantasy lines; it's also worth looking at wargame-oriented sections of catalogues, as Eastern armies are often used on the tabletop.

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ERRATA

This is the known errata for the print version of *GURPS Arabian Nights* when this PDF was created:

Page 3, sidebar: At the end of the paragraph on Page References, add: “Similarly, references beginning with FB refer to the *GURPS Fantasy Bestiary*, those beginning with FF refer to *GURPS Fantasy Folk*, and those beginning with V refer to *GURPS Vikings*.”

Page 5, sidebar: Drop the word “Basic” from Scheherazade’s Disadvantages.

Page 30, sidebar: Insert at the beginning of the last paragraph: “Constantinople fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1453 AD.”

Page 31: The map shows The Achaemenid Pageersian Empire; its key is slightly confused. The route marked with a dot-and-dash line is in fact the Silk Road; the Royal Road is the thin dashed line running from Sardis to Susa.

Page 35, Timeline: In place of the word “filler,” insert: “1071: Battle of Manzikert. Seljuk Turks, under Alp Arslan, defeat and capture the Byzantine emperor Romanus Diogenes, and found the Sultanate of Rum in Anatolia. Byzantium goes into a decline.”

Page 41, sidebar: *Saladin*’s Charisma should be +1 and his Chess skill should be 16.

Page 50: Under *PC Djinn* change the cost to play a Lesser Djinn to 469. Change Increased Strength to Enhanced Strength +10 (110 points). 3 Extra Hit Points costs 15 points. Damage Resistance 3 costs 9 points. Change Bite Attack to Sharp Teeth.

Page 52: In the first paragraph describing the Destiny advantage, the cross-reference to p. 74 is NOT to a sidebar!

Page 55: The last paragraph relating to the Cursed Disadvantage has unbalanced parentheses. Drop the one immediately before the words “Oh dear.”

Page 58: Under New Skills, there should be a reference to the new Augury skill described on p. 74.

Board Games defaults to IQ-5.

Move *Horse Archery* from New Skills to its own section as a Maneuver. See *GURPS Compendium I*, pp. 152ff., for more on maneuvers. The heading becomes: “Horse Archery (Hard) Defaults to Bow-4; Prerequisites: Bow 12+, Riding 12+; Cannot exceed Bow skill.” Change the second paragraph to read, “This reduces the penalties for using a bow from horseback (p. B137). For example, 1 point decreases the penalty for turning in the saddle to fire to the rear to -3 (and removes the Riding penalty); 2 points will reduce the penalty to -2, and so on. Other trick shots will take only half the usual penalties (round up) if the archer can make his Horse Archery roll. The character can also use horse-archer tactics and will recognize others’ use of them on an IQ roll.”

Wrestling is Pagephysical/Average and defaults to DX-5 only.

Page 67: In the notes on weapons, immediately after the paragraph beginning “Spear: Both the javelin . . .”, insert the following: “Some troops use much longer spears, represented on the table by the Long Spear (8’-12’) and the Kontos (about 12’). The latter is physically identical to many knightly lances, but used differently. Both of these are too heavy to parry with.”

Page 68: In the Missile Weapons table, change the sub-heading “Throwing (DX-3)” to “DX-3 or Throwing Skill.” In the same table, immediately above the line for the Mace, insert the sub-heading “Axe Throwing (DX-4)” (i.e., this is the appropriate skill for these two weapons).

Page 70: Replace the paragraph beginning “Arquebuses changed the face of battle . . .” with the following: “The weapon detailed here – the Midfa – is very experimental; for details of rather more sophisticated arquebuses, see *GURPS High Tech*. If gunpowder is still at the introductory stage in a campaign world, but guns are being developed by compe-

tent armourers, and troops are becoming more practiced with them, characteristics such as RoF and range will evolve slowly towards those of a TL 4 arquebus.”

Pages 76-77, sidebar: Note that *Nizam* has more than 40 points in Disadvantages, which is nominally only acceptable for NPCs. This can be dealt with by adding the following text to his description: “(Nizam’s player spoke nicely to the GM to get permission for his exceptional Disadvantage level. In truth, as an Arabian Nights magician, he may be expected to be a little strange . . .)”

Raise Mathematics to 15, Research skill to 15, Detect Magic to 15, Seeker to 16, and Trace to 16.

Page 82: The Alter Visage spell has “8 Body Control Spells” as a prerequisite, which is hard for those who don’t own *GURPS Magic*. In that case, allow “Any 10 Spells” instead.

Page 83: The Entrap Djinni spell has Magic Resistance given as a prerequisite, which is, of course, impossible (at least for human characters). Replace this with “Effective Will Roll (IQ modified by Strong or Weak will) of 15+”.

Page 93: The section on “Prices of Animals” has a reference to “Obedience Modifiers.” These are explained in the *GURPS Bestiary*, which is a useful reference for anyone planning to use domesticated or trained animals in a game.

Page 98: Under Lesser Djinn, add after “never suffocate,”: “never require food, drink, or other sustenance.”

Page 102: The first type of Sea-Born should have the extra racial advantage “Amphibious (10 points),” but Sonar Vision is not compulsory for them – mark it as “optional.” As for the second type; change the paragraph to the following: “The other race is more surface-dweller-like, being able to spend an indefinite time out of water, and even more magically powerful. To follow the stories, the only compulsory features for this race are Amphibious (20 points) and Pressure Support (15 points), although they are always citizens of the undersea realm, and may have Duties there, treat their own nature as a minor Secret, or be pestered by land folk with special interests in the sea (minor Enemies). Alternatively, they may be played as like the fishermen in *Fantasy Folk* (see p. FF60) – but these are all Unattractive, and have other features that don’t fit the Arabian Nights tale. They speak certain names of power over their newborn children, which are said to grant them their water-breathing ability (and pressure support) for life; they may also lend ordinary humans magic rings, inscribed with the same names, which grant the same abilities temporarily.”

Page 104: Immediately between the chapter heading (“Campaigns”) and the start of the text, insert the sub-heading, “Pagere-Islamic Fantasy.”

Page 106: In the first sentence under Within Wider Worlds, change “has been picked” to “has often been picked,” “a corner” to “corners,” and “world” to “worlds.”

Page 107, sidebar: In the first line, replace “world” with “worlds.”

Page 110: In the third paragraph from the bottom of the page, insert after “North Africa,” “is the destination.” Also, in the first line of the last paragraph, replace “focuses” with “focus.”

Page 122 sidebar: There is no “Bedouin NPC archetype” in the book; change the first part of the first sentence on The Beni Shazzarin to: “These desert rogues are ST 12, DX 13, IQ 10, and HT 12, with the skills Broadsword 14, Spear, Spear Throwing, Shield, Animal Handling, Area Knowledge (local desert), Riding, Survival (Desert) 14, and Tracking 12, all at characteristic level except where noted otherwise); they are armed with . . .”

Page 122, sidebar: The chapter reference under “The Djinni” should be to chapter 5, not 7.