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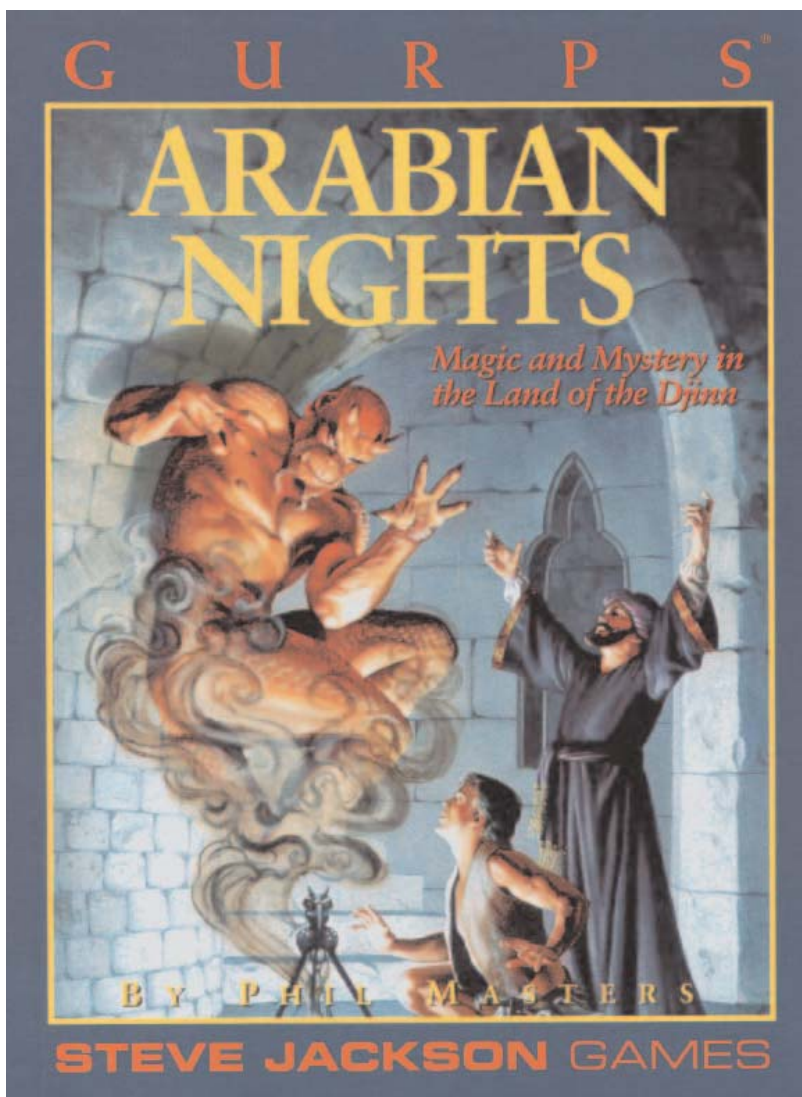
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Flying carpets and magic lamps . . . flashing scimitars and scheming viziers . . . crusaders, Mongols, and Bedouin . . . sultans, poets, merchants, and the original Assassins – all this and more can be found in *GURPS Arabian Nights*.

Confront a shapeshifting djinn, or cast spells that move mountains and tame fantastic beasts. Voyage with Sinbad or ride with Marco Polo in search of the riches of the Orient. Fight in the Crusades, when Western chivalry sought to free the Holy Land . . . and Islam held off the Frankish invasion.

This fascinating book describes both the real and the fictional world of the Arabian Nights, its tumultuous history, the religions that define its culture, beasts of fact and fantasy, outlandish magic, and unique campaign ideas. There are a thousand and one journeys in *GURPS Arabian Nights*!

This PDF is a scanned copy of the last printed edition of *GURPS Arabian Nights*. No changes or updates from that edition were made, but we have appended all known errata to the end of the document.



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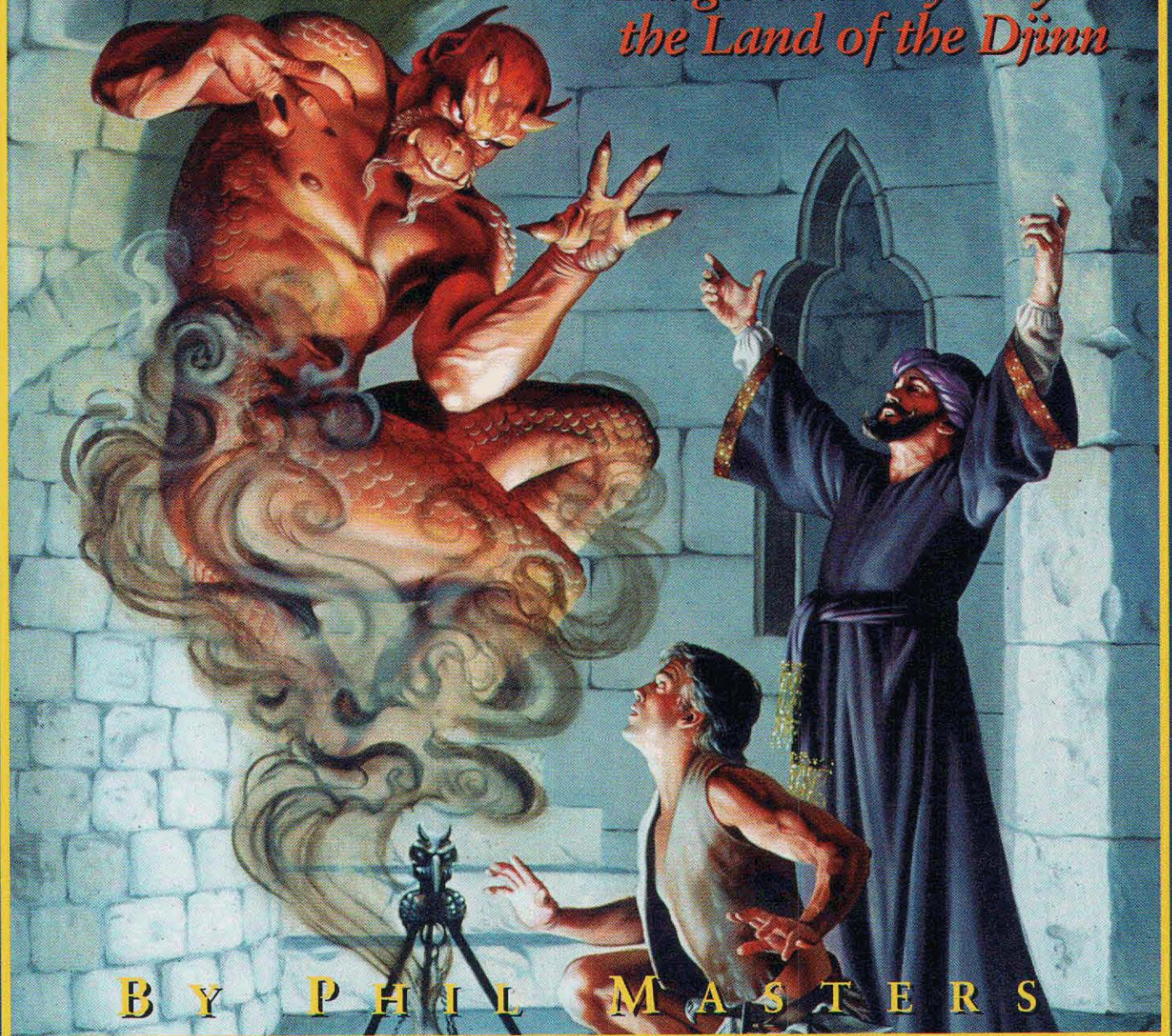


STEVE JACKSON GAMES
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G U R P S[®]

ARABIAN NIGHTS

*Magic and Mystery in
the Land of the Djinn*



BY PHIL MASTERS

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

OPEN SESAME!

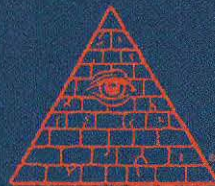
Flying carpets and magic lamps . . . flashing scimitars and scheming viziers . . . crusaders, Mongols and Bedouin . . . sultans, poets, merchants and the *original* Assassins – all this and more can be found in *GURPS Arabian Nights*.



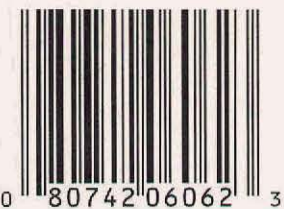
- ❖ Play a merchant, mercenary or dervish in the burgeoning Islamic civilization, as the Arabs spread across Persia and Africa to the very gates of Europe.
- ❖ Confront the terrible shapeshifting *djinni*, creatures of smokeless fire. Battle them for glory and remembrance . . . and an irresistible black sword.
- ❖ Cast spells that move mountains and tame fantastic beasts – or use wits and stealth to defeat evil wizards.
- ❖ Voyage like Sinbad – or ride with Marco Polo – in search of Chinese silk, exotic Indian blades and wild foreign magic.
- ❖ Fight in the Crusades, when Christendom sought to free the Holy Lands – and Islam held off the Frankish invasion.
- ❖ Battle alongside brave Mamelukes, Turkish slave soldiers of Egypt.
- ❖ Dream of “a rose-red city, half as old as time” – then go there, and learn what *kismet*, destiny, has in store for you.

Inside this fascinating book are descriptions of the world of the Arabian Nights, its tumultuous history, the religions that define its culture, character development, beasts of fact and fantasy, outlandish magic and unique campaign ideas. There are a thousand and one journeys in *GURPS Arabian Nights*!

Written by Phil Masters
Edited by Steve Jackson and
Susan Pinsonneault
Cover by Rowena
Illustrated by Sam Inabinet



STEVE JACKSON GAMES



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GURPS[®]

ARABIAN NIGHTS

Magic and Mystery in the Land of the Djinn

By Phil Masters

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Cover by Rowena

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the Convulsion Six and especially
Alison Brooks for prehistory, women and
detailed comments.



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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3	HISTORY OF THE	
About the Author	3	ISLAMIC LANDS	28
About GURPS	3	The Expansion of Islam	28
SCHEHERAZADE'S WORLD 4		<i>The Legend of Prester John</i>	29
A Thousand Nights and One Night	5	<i>Byzantium/Istanbul</i>	30
<i>Scheherazade</i>	5	<i>The Children's Crusade</i>	31
Other Views	6	Map of the Persian Empire	31
<i>Storytelling</i>	6	The Umayyads	32
RELIGION	7	Mecca	32
Early Religions	7	The Abbasids	33
Tech Level	7	<i>North Africa and Spain</i>	33
Islam	8	<i>"The Bride of the World"</i>	34
<i>The Calendar</i>	8	<i>The Old Man of the Mountains</i>	35
Muslim "Heresies"	9	Fatimid Egypt	36
<i>Sports and Games</i>	10	Genghis Khan	36
Plan of Mosque	10	Other Breaks	37
<i>Other Holy Places</i>	11	Haroun al-Rashid	37
<i>Inheritance</i>	12	The Crusades	38
<i>Rights to Power</i>	12	The First Crusade	38
Islamic Government and Law	13	Saladin and the Third Crusade	39
Religion and Government	13	<i>Muslim Spain</i>	39
Warriors	13	Later Crusades	40
Shari'a and Hadith	14	<i>The Military Orders</i>	40
<i>City Government</i>	14	The Mongols	41
<i>Oaths</i>	14	Common Enemies?	41
The Role of Women	15	Saladin	41
<i>The Sahara Desert</i>	15	The Fall of the Caliphate	42
Slaves	16	The Kingdom of Jerusalem, 1271-1291	42
<i>Societies</i>	16	<i>Cross vs. Crescent?</i>	42
Private and Public Lives	17	CHARACTERS	43
The Desert	17	Character Types	44
<i>Hospitality</i>	17	Female Characters	49
Farmers	18	Psionics	50
The Cities	18	Non-Human Races	50
<i>Food and Drink</i>	18	PC Djinn	50
Buildings	19	Advantages	50
<i>The Bazaar</i>	19	New Advantages	51
Trade and Communications	20	Disadvantages	52
<i>Weights and Measures</i>	20	New Disadvantages	55
<i>Rugs and Carpets</i>	20	Skills	56
<i>Asian Trade</i>	21	New Skills	58
Map of the Conquests of Islam	21	Languages	59
Class Structure	22	Sample Character: Karim the Falconer	59
<i>Gunpowder</i>	22	Social Status	60
<i>The Marsh Arabs</i>	22	Money	61
Science and Scholarship	23	Job Table	61
Philosophy and Physics	23	Names	64
Mathematics	23	Equipment Prices and Personal Expenses	65
Astronomy	23	Weapon List	67
Alchemy	23	Melee Weapons	68
<i>Universities and Centers of Learning</i>	23	Missile Weapons	68
Medicine	24	Fire Siphons	69
<i>Greek Fire</i>	24	Black Powder Weapons	69
Geography	25	"Fire" Weapons	69
Arabia	25	Armor	70
<i>Bandits and Corsairs</i>	25	MAGIC	71
Persia	26	Magic in the Arabian Nights	72
Anatolia	26	<i>Exorcism</i>	72
Views of the World Beyond	26	<i>Long-Distance Flight</i>	73
The Arts	26	<i>Rune Magic and Amulets</i>	74
<i>Ship Types</i>	27	Spell-Caster Characters in Games	75
		<i>Arabian Alchemy</i>	75
		Rules Variations	76
		Prohibited and Rare Magic	76
		<i>Starting PC Wizard: Nizam the Fat</i>	76
		Mana Levels	77
		<i>Enhanced Magic</i>	77
		Conditions to Break Spells	78
		<i>Shape-Changing</i>	78
		SPELLS	79
		New and Modified Spells	80
		Animal Spells	80
		Body Control Spells	82
		Djinni Spells	82
		Earth Spells	83
		Air Spells	84
		Enchantment Spells	84
		Illusion and Creation Spells	85
		Knowledge Spells	85
		Meta-Spells	86
		Mind Control Spells	87
		Movement Spells	87
		Necromantic Spells	88
		Protection and Warning Spells	88
		Sound Spells	88
		Magic Items	88
		ANIMALS, MONSTERS	
		AND DJINN	92
		"Domesticated" Animals	93
		Prices of Animals	93
		Unusual Animal Companions	93
		<i>Hiring a Trainer</i>	93
		<i>Hunting in the Middle East</i>	93
		Natural Animals	94
		The Djinn	97
		Other Fantastic Creatures	100
		Golems	103
		CAMPAIGNS	104
		Arabian Nights	105
		<i>Styles of Play</i>	105
		<i>Myths of the Fertile Crescent</i>	106
		Historical Settings	107
		The Expansion of Islam	107
		<i>Gothic Arabia</i>	107
		The Crusades	108
		The Mongol Invasions	108
		<i>An Assassins Campaign</i>	108
		Campaign Design	109
		Themes	109
		<i>Arabians Abroad</i>	109
		<i>A Harem Campaign</i>	110
		<i>Doing the Dialogue</i>	111
		SAMPLE ADVENTURE:	
		The Tale of the Poet, the Slave, and	
		What Was Not Theirs	111
		Map of the City	112
		Initial Events	113
		<i>Further Notes (GM Only)</i>	113
		<i>Adapting to Other Genres</i>	113
		Into the Desert	117
		<i>Arabs on Other Planets</i>	118
		<i>At Court</i>	119
		Meanwhile, Back in Town	120
		<i>Reaction Modifiers</i>	120
		<i>Sample Scenario NPCs</i>	121
		Further Adventure Seeds	122
		<i>Plots from the Epics</i>	123
		GLOSSARY	124
		BIBLIOGRAPHY	126
		INDEX	128

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 I*.



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.

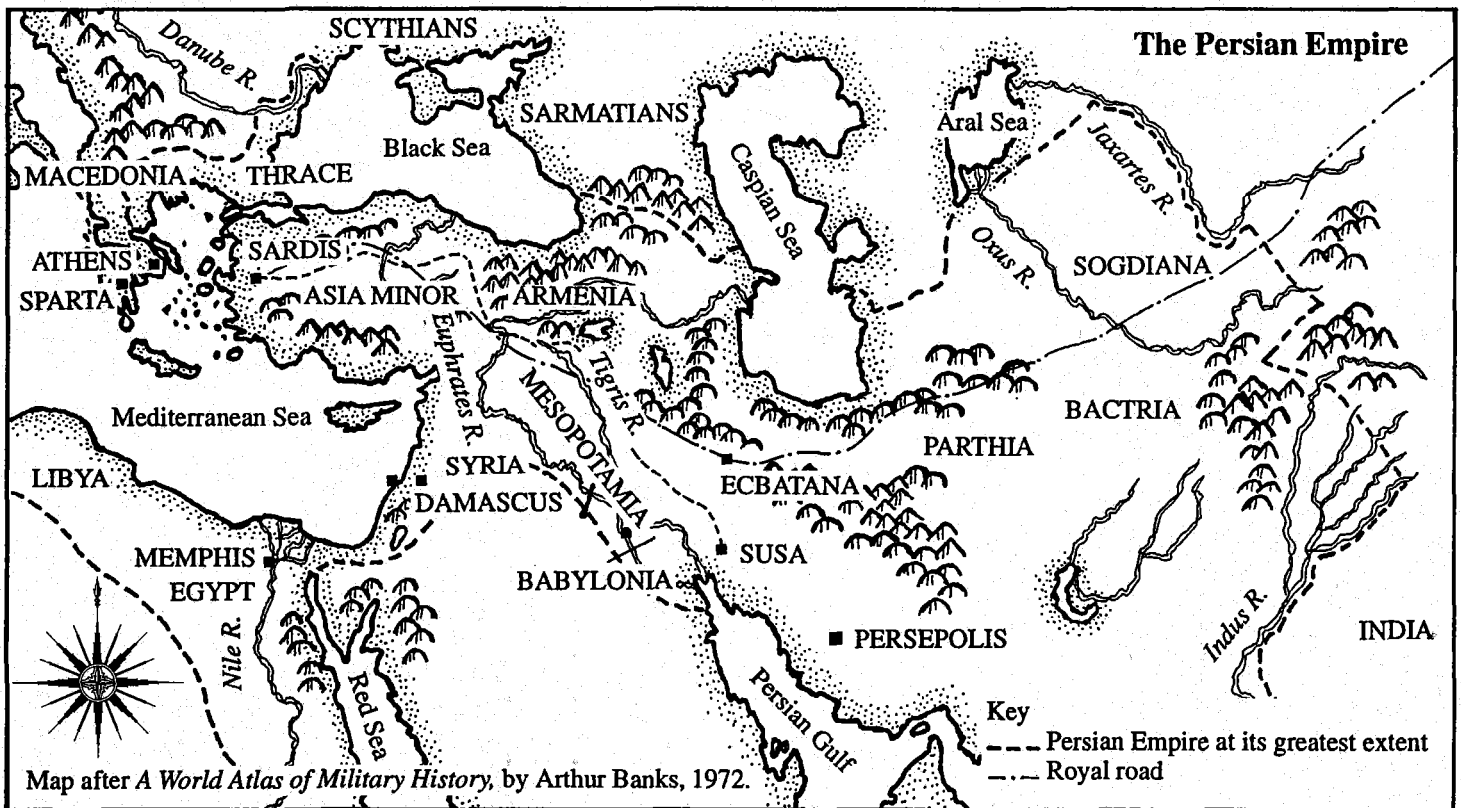
Advantages: Allies (Father is vizier, sister is another queen), Beautiful, Literacy, Patron (The sultan), Reputation (+3 among citizens of her home country – saved them from the sultan's madness), Status 6, Wealth (Very Wealthy), Voice.

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.





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.

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,

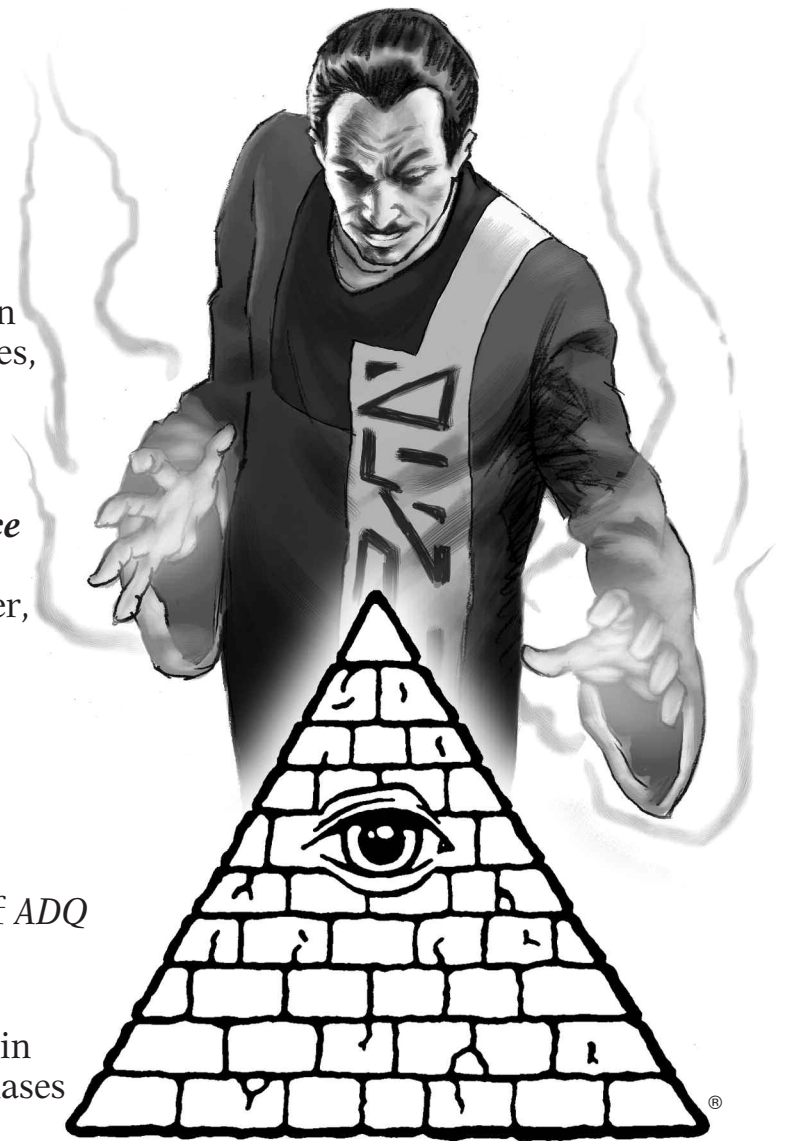
INDEX

- Abbasids, 18, 30, 33, 34, 36, 38, 42.
 Abraham, 8.
 Abu Bakr, 31, 32.
 Addiction disadvantage, 53.
 Adventure seeds, 122.
 Aga Khan, 9.
 Ahriman, 7.
 Ahura Mazda, 7.
 Aisha, 33.
 Akhenaton, 8, 30.
al-kohl, 24.
 Aladdin, 5, 73, 90, 123.
 Alchemists, 48.
 Alchemy, 23, 24, 75; *skill*, 56.
 Alcohol, 10.
 Alcoholism disadvantage, 53.
 Alexander the Great, 7, 26, 29, 31, 107.
 Alhazred, Abdul, 107.
 'Ali, 7, 30, 32, 33, 36.
 Allies (Family) advantage, 50.
 Ally Group advantage, 51.
 Alms, 9.
 'Amir, 14, 51, 22.
 Amulets, 74.
 Anatolia, 26.
 "Andalusia," 39.
 Angra Mainyu, 7.
 Animal Handling skill, 93.
 Animals, 92-96; *giant*, 97, 101; *natural*, 94; *prehistoric*, 97; *prices*, 93; *unusual companions*, 93.
 Animated statues, 100.
 'Antar, 6, 22, 49, 105, 113, 123.
 Arabia, 25.
 Arabian horses, 94.
 Archery, 10.
 Aristocracy, 22.
 Armor, 7, 68, 70.
 Armoury, 56.
 Artist skill, 56.
 Arts, 26.
 Asia Minor, 26, 29.
 Assassins, 9, 35, 36, 37, 42, 44, 55, 108.
 Assyria, 31.
 Astrolabe, 21, 67.
 Astrology, 23, 74, 75; *skill*, 56.
 Astronomy, 23; *skill*, 56.
 Automatic Fire, 24.
 Averroes, 35, 39.
 Avicenna, 34.
 Ayatollahs, 9.
 Ayyar, 13, 16.
 Baboons, 94.
 Babylon, 7, 29.
 Baghdad, 34.
 Balkis, Queen, 50, 74.
 Bandits, 11, 17, 25.
 Barbarossa, Frederick, 40.
 Barbers, 66.
 Barmecides, 37.
 Baths, 66; *public*, 20.
 Bazaar, 14, 18, 19.
 Bedouins, 11, 13, 15, 17, 24, 25, 26, 45, 50.
 Beggars, 44.
 Belly-dancing, 26.
 Berbers, 15, 33, 65.
 Black Powder Weapons skill, 56.
 Black Stone, 8, 11.
 Blood money, 14.
 Board Games skill, 58.
Book of Kings, 6, 105.
The Book of Dede Korkut, 109.
 Borneo, 27.
 Bronze-Age campaigns, 7.
 Buildings, 19.
 Byzantium, 13, 21, 24, 30-33, 35, 38, 39, 40, 48.
 Cadis, 14.
 Caesar, Gaius Julius, 32.
 Cairo, 36.
 Calendars, 8, 23.
 Caliph, 9, 12, 14, 38, 48.
 Calligraphy, 26; *skill*, 56.
 Camels, 15, 17, 21, 95.
 Campaigns, 104-123.
 Caracals, 95.
 Caravanserais, 18, 21.
 Carpets, 11, 20.
 Carrier pigeons, 96.
 Castration, *see eunuchs*.
 Cattle, 17.
 Chainmail, 25.
 Cheating, 95.
 Chemistry, 24.
 Children's Crusade, 31, 36.
 China, 27, 33, 34, 44.
 Chosroes I, 7, 32.
 Christianity, 8.
 Christians, 13, 18, 23, 27, 30, 33, 35, 36, 38, 39, 42, 48, 73; *fraternal*, 60.
 Cities, 14, 18.
 Claim to Hospitality advantage, 51.
 Cleopatra VII, 32.
 Clerical Investment advantage, 50.
 Clients, 13, 33.
 Climate, 25.
 Clocks, 23.
 Clothing, 65.
 Code of Honor (Arabian) disadvantage, 53.
 Communications, 20.
 Compulsive Behavior disadvantage, *Carousing*, 53; *Generosity*, 54; *Spendthrift*, 54.
 Compulsive Vowing disadvantage, 55.
 Concubines, 110.
 Constantinople, 33, 34.
 Corsairs, 25, 27, 44.
 Court, 119.
 Crossovers, 113, 118.
 Crusaders, 25, 27, 29, 39, 40, 42, 54.
 Crusades, 30, 38, 42, 50, 96, 107, 108.
 Cubit, 20.
 Cursed disadvantage, 55.
 Da'ir, 35.
 Damascus swords, 69.
 Dancing, 26; *skill*, 57.
 Daylami, 13, 46.
 Demons, 100.
 Dendans, 100.
 Dervishes, 12, 26, 44, 48, 57, 60.
 Desert, *Arabs*, 73; *life*, 17; *tribes*, 25.
 Desert Nomads, *see Bedouins*.
 Destiny advantage, 52.
 Dhow, 27.
 Dialogue, 111.
 Diet, 17.
Dirham, 20.
 Divination, 74, 83, 85-86.
 Djinn, 50, 72, 73, 74, 82-83, 89, 92, 97, 98, 106.
 Dogs, 96.
 Domes, 19.
 Dower, 12.
 Dragons, *Persian*, 102.
 Dreams, 74.
 Drink, 18; *prices*, 66.
 Druze, 9.
 Dwarfs of Zughd, 50, 100.
 Eccentrics, 76.
 Education, 10.
 Egypt, 7, 13, 23, 29, 30, 31, 33, 34, 40, 42.
 Eighth Crusade, 36, 41.
 El Cid, 35, 39.
 Elephants, *trained*, 97.
 Entertainers, 45.
Epic of 'Antar, 6, 49, 105.
 Epics, 123.
 Ethiopia, 27.
 Eunuchs, 22, 45, 110; *disadvantage*, 54.
 Europe, 27.
 Exorcism, 12, 72.
 Extremely Hazardous Duty disadvantage, 55.
Fakirs, *see Dervishes*.
 Falconers, 46.
 Falcons, 96.
 Fanaticism disadvantage, 54.
 Farmers, 18.
 Fastitacalon, 96.
 Fate, 6, 12, 52, 75.
 Fatima, 8, 9, 30, 32.
 Fatimids, 9, 34, 36, 39.
Fellahin, 25.
 Female characters, 49.
 Fencing skill, 57.
 Feuds, 17.
 Fiction, 26.
 Fifth Crusade, 36, 40.
 Fire-priests, *see Magi*.
 Fire-Siphon skill, 58.
 Fire-worshippers, 8, 13, 27.
 First Crusade, 35, 38.
 "Five pillars," 9.
 Flying carpets, 87, 106.
 Food, 18; *prices*, 66.
 Fourth Crusade, 36, 40.
 France, 33, 34.
 "Franks," 38, 46.
 Furnishings, 19.
Futuwawa, 16.
 Galley, 27.
 Games, 10, 58.
 Garden, 19.
 Genghis Khan, 36, 41.
 Geography, 25.
 Ghazis, 46, 55.
 Ghosts, 101.
 Ghulams, 13, 37, 46.
 Ghuls, 97, 98.
 Giant snakes, 101.
 Giants, 101.
 Gilgamesh, 7, 104, 106.
 Goats, 17.
 Golems, 103.
 Government, 13, 14.
 Great Wall of China, 36.
 Greece, 29.
 Greek fire, 22, 24.
 "Greeks," 48; *see also Byzantium*.
 Guilds, 16, 19.
 Gunner skill, 57.
 Gunpowder, 7, 22.
 "Gypsies," 17.
Hadith, 15, 16, 23.
 Hagar, 8.
 Hairstyles, 66.
 Haji, 9, 11.
Hajji, 11.
Hakim, 23, 24, 48.
 Hammurabi, 30.
 Hand-washing, 18.
 Harem, 10, 20, 34, 110.
 Haroun al-Rashid, 34, 35, 37, 38, 107.
 Hashish, 53.
 Hashishin, *see Assassins*.
 Hegira, 8, 29.
 Hell, 10.
 Heraldry skill, 57.
 Heresy, 9, 16.
 Hermes Trismegistos, 24, 75.
 Hindus, 13.
 Holidays, 8.
 Honor, 17, 53.
 Horse Archery skill, 58.
 Hospitality, 16, 17, 53.
 Hospitallars, 35, 36, 40.
 Housing, *prices*, 66.
 Hunchback disadvantage, 55.
 Hunting, 93.
 Huntsmen, 46.
 Iblis, 17.
 'Ifrits, 99.
 Ilkhanid, 36.
 Illuminati, 37.
 Imam, 9, 10, 15, 48.
 Incendiaries, 56, 58, 69.
 India, 27.
 Inheritance, 12.
 Inns, 20.
 Intolerance disadvantage, 54.
 Ishmael, 8.
 Iskander, *see Alexander the Great*.
 Islam, 9, 13, 22; *science*, 7; *technology*, 7.
 Island turtle, 96.
 Isma'ilis, 9, 37.
 Jan, 97.
 Jerusalem, 11, 32, 33, 35, 36, 39, 40, 42, 108.
 Jews, 23, 24, 30, 39, 48; *women*, 49.
Jihad, 9, 39, 42.
 Jinxed disadvantage, 55.
 Job Table, 61-63.
 Judaism, 8.
 Judo and Karate skill, 57.
 Kaaba, 8, 11.
Khamseh, 6.
 Khawarij, 9.
 Khazars, 33.
 Koran, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 26, 33, 36, 60, 65, 74, 74.
 Language, 3, 10, 59, 111.
 Lasso skill, 57.
 Law, 13, 14, 15, 16, 29.
 Legal Enforcement Power, 50.
 Libraries, 23.
 Literacy advantage, 50.
 Long-distance flight, 73.
 Lucky students, 76.
 Lying, 26.
 Lynx, 95.
 The Maghrib, 33.
 Magi, 8.
 Magic, 12, 13, 49, 55, 79-91, 106; *enhanced*, 77; *rare*, 76; *rules variations*, 76.
 Magicians, 46.
Mahdi, 32.
Makkah, 20.
 Mamelukes, 13, 36, 37, 41, 42, 65.
 Mana levels, 77.
 Mancala, 10, 58.
 Manners, 18.
 Marco Polo, 21, 29, 35, 107.
 Marid, 97, 99.
 Mark Antony, 32.
 Marriage, 15, 16, 17.
 Marsh Arabs, 22.
 Martyrs, 10.
 Mathematicians, 21.
 Mathematics, 23.
 Mecca, 8, 25, 29, 32, 33.
 Medicine, 7, 24.
 Medina, 8, 11, 29, 33.
 Mercenaries, 13, 16, 37, 46.
 Merchants, 46.
 Midfa, 22, 69.
Mihrab, 11, 20.
 Military Rank advantage, 50.
 Minaret, 11.
Minbar, 20.
 Mithraism, 7.
 Mohammed, 8, 22, 25, 27, 29, 32, 33, 74.
 Mohammedan, 9.
 Money, 61.
 Mongols, 37, 41, 48, 52, 57, 58.
 Monsters, 92.
 Mosques, 10, 20, 23.
Muezzin, 11.
Muhtasibs, 14.
Mullahs, 9, 48.
 Music, 10, 26.
 Muslim Empire, 15, 29.
 Mysticism, 12.
 Names, 64.
 Navigation, 21.
Necronomicon, 107.
 Nile, 18.
 Nobles, 47.
 Nomads, 17; *ponies*, 96; *steppe*, 26, 44, 48, 57, 58, 65; *see also Bedouins*.
 Non-human races, 50.
 Norse, 44, 47, 50.
 North Africa, 33.
 Oases, 17, 18, 25.
 Oaths, 14, 55.
 Observatories, 23.
 Odious Personal Habits disadvantage, 52.
 Old Man of the Mountains, 35.
 Old Man of the Sea, 101.
 Omar Khayyam, 34.
 Opium, 53.
 Ormazd, 7.
 Outcasts, 47.
 Outsiders, 47, 76.
 Palaces, 20.
 Paradise, 10.
 Parsees, 13.
 Patron advantage, 51.
 Peasants, 18.
 "People of the Book," 13, 60.
 People's Crusade, 35, 38.
 Performance skill, 57.
 Peri, 101.
 Persia, 26, 30, 31, 32, 37, 42, 47; *people*, 29, 31, 33, 34, 57, 101.
 Petrification, 83.
 Philippines, 27.
 Philosophy, 21; *skill*, 58.
 Physical appearance, 44.
 Physics, 23.
 Pigeon, 73.
 Pilgrimages, 9, 11; *routes*, 21.
 Pilgrims, 17, 32, 47.
 Piloting (Magic Carpet) skill, 57.
 Poetry, 26; *skill*, 57.
 Poets, 47.
 Police, 14.
 Polo, 10.
 Polytheism, 7, 73.
 Possession, 12.
 Prayer, 9, 10, 12.
 Prester John, 29, 42, 109.
 Priests, 48.
 Printing, 67.
 Prophecy, 74.
 The Prophet, 9, 29, 30, 73; *see also Mohammed*.
 Prophets, 9.
 Psionics, 50.
 Qat, 53.
 Queen Balkis, 98.
Ra'is, 14.
 Rabbis, 48.
 Racing, 10.
 Ramadan, 9, 11.
Rawi, 6.
 Reaction Modifiers, 120.
 Religion, 7-13.
 Reputation advantage, 51.
 Rhinoceros, 97.
 Richard the Lionheart, 35, 40.
 Riding skill, 57.
 Robes of honor, 119.
 Rocs, 73, 102.
 Rodrigo Diaz de Bivar, *see El Cid*.
 Rogues, 48.
 Roman Empire, 32.
 "Romans," 48; *see also Byzantium*.
 Rome, 29, 31.
 Rugs, 11, 20.
 Rune magic, 74.
 Rustem, 6, 32, 44.
 Sabbath, 10.
 Sahara, 15.
 Sailors, 48.
 Saints, 11, 12, 44.
 Saladin, 35, 39-41.
 Salt, 17.
 Sample adventure, 111.
 Sassanids, 7, 30, 107; *dynasty*, 29, 32.
 Savoir-Faire skill, 57.
 Scandinavia, 27.
 Scheherazade, 5, 49.
 Scholars, 48, 75.
 Scholarship, 23.
 Science, 23, 48.
 Sea-born, 50, 102.
 Sea-horses, 102.
 Seal of Solomon, 91, 97.
 Second Crusade, 35, 39.
 Secret disadvantage, 55.
 Seljuks, 37, 39, 41, 58.
 Seventh Crusade, 36, 41.
Shah-Nameh, 6.
 Shapeshifting, 78, 80, 81; *Shapeshifters' Duels*, 198.
Shari'a, 14.
 Sheep, 15, 17.
Sheikhs, 9, 18, 22, 35, 45.
Shi'ana Ali, 32.
 Shiites, 11, 14, 30, 33, 34, 36, 37, 39, 52.
 Ships, 27.
 Shops, 20.
 Si'lat, 99, 102.
 Silk Road, 21, 107, 113.
 Simurgh, 103.
 Simbad the Sailor, 5, 20, 21, 100, 102, 113.
 Siphon-ships, 24.
 Sixth Crusade, 36, 41.
 Slaves, 13, 14, 16, 22, 25, 26, 53, 60; *concubines*, 22; *prices*, 67; *soldiers*, 13, 22; *wives*, 16.
 Social Status, 60.
 Social Stigma disadvantage, 52.
 Societies, 16, 19.
 Solomon, 74.
 Solomon's Seal, *see Seal of Solomon*.
South, *see Bazaar*.
 Space, 118.
 Spain, 32, 33, 39, 47.
 Spells, 79-88; *casters*, 75; *components*, 72; *conditions to break*, 78; *new*, 80-88; *rare*, 77.
 Sports, 10.
 Steppe nomads, *see Nomads*.
 Steppes, 26.
 Storytelling, 6; *see also Lying*.
 Succession, 14, 37.
 Sufis, 11, 16, 23, 44, 53, 65; *saints*, 73; *sheikhs*, 60.
 Sultans, 49.
 Sumer, 29, 30.
 Sunni, 14, 31, 33, 36, 37, 39, 52.
 Swimming skill, 57.
 Talking apes, 103.
 Tamerlane, 42.
 Taxes, 9, 13, 21.
 Teamster skill, 57.
 Tech level, 7.
 Templars, 35, 40.
 Teutonic Knights, 35, 40.
 Theft, 14.
 Third Crusade, 24, 35, 39.
Thousand and One Nights, 5.
 Tigris and Euphrates, 18, 22, 29, 30, 34.
 Timur the Lame, 42.
 Trade, 15, 20, 21, 27; *routes*, 15.
 Training animals, 93.
 Traitors, 15.
 Tribes, 17.
 Tuaregs, 15, 65.
 Turcomans, 50.
Ulama, 9, 13.
 Umayyads, 33, 34, 39; *dynasty*, 32.
 Universities, 10, 23.
 Viziers, 49, 119.
 Weapon Master advantage, 52.
 Weapons, 7, 67-68; *tables*, 68-69.
 Weights and measures, 20.
 Well of Zamzam, 8.
 Wine, 18.
 Wives, 110.
 Women, 10, 11, 15, 34, 49, 53.
 Wrestling skill, 58.
 Xerxes, 31.
 Yahweh, 8.
 Yathrib, *see Medina*.
 Zoroastrianism, 7, 13, 107.

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