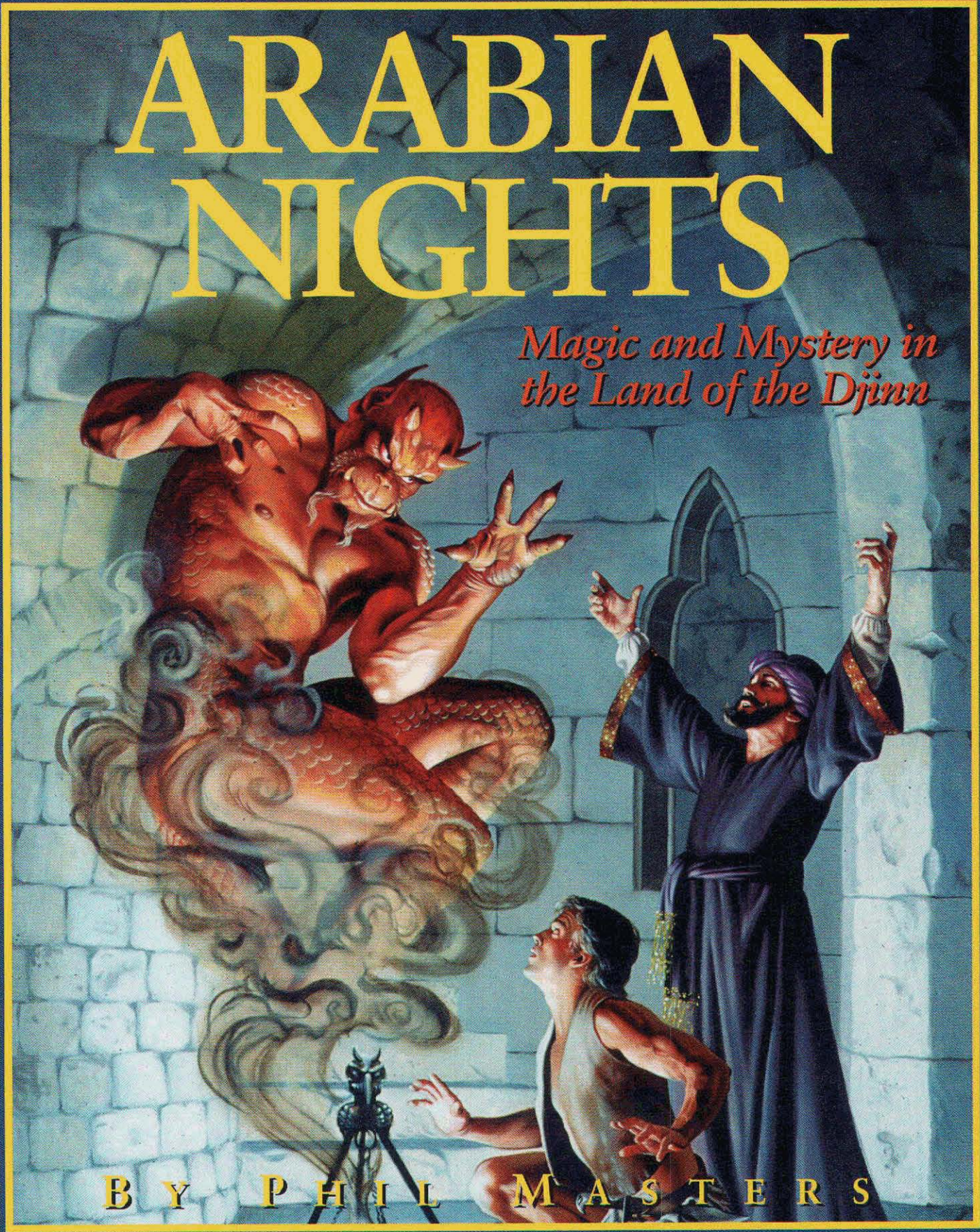
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ARABIAN NIGHTS

Magic and Mystery in the Land of the Djinn



BY PHIL MASTERS

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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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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1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 3
About the Author 3
About GURPS 3

SCHEHERAZADE'S WORLD 4
A Thousand Nights and One Night 5
Scheherazade 5
Other Views 6
Storytelling 6
RELIGION 7
Early Religions 7
Tech Level 7
Islam 8
The Calendar 8
Muslim "Heresies" 9
Sports and Games 10
Plan of Mosque 10
Other Holy Places 11
Inheritance 12
Rights to Power 12
Islamic Government and Law 13
Religion and Government 13
Warriors 13
Shari'a and Hadith 14
City Government 14
Oaths 14
The Role of Women 15
The Sahara Desert 15
Slaves 16
Societies 16
Private and Public Lives 17
The Desert 17
Hospitality 17
Farmers 18
The Cities 18
Food and Drink 18
Buildings 19
The Bazaar 19
Trade and Communications 20
Weights and Measures 20
Rugs and Carpets 20
Asian Trade 21
Map of the Conquests of Islam 21
Class Structure 22
Gunpowder 22
The Marsh Arabs 22
Science and Scholarship 23
Philosophy and Physics 23
Mathematics 23
Astronomy 23
Alchemy 23
Universities and Centers of Learning 23
Medicine 24
Greek Fire 24
Geography 25
Arabia 25
Bandits and Corsairs 25
Persia 26
Anatolia 26
Views of the World Beyond 26
The Arts 26
Ship Types 27

HISTORY OF THE ISLAMIC LANDS 28
The Expansion of Islam 28
The Legend of Prester John 29
Byzantium/Istanbul 30
The Children's Crusade 31
Map of the Persian Empire 31
The Umayyads 32
Mecca 32
The Abbasids 33
North Africa and Spain 33
"The Bride of the World" 34
The Old Man of the Mountains 35
Fatimid Egypt 36
Genghis Khan 36
Other Breaks 37
Haroun al-Rashid 37
The Crusades 38
The First Crusade 38
Saladin and the Third Crusade 39
Muslim Spain 39
Later Crusades 40
The Military Orders 40
The Mongols 41
Common Enemies? 41
Saladin 41
The Fall of the Caliphate 42
The Kingdom of Jerusalem, 1271-1291 42
Cross vs. Crescent? 42

CHARACTERS 43
Character Types 44
Female Characters 49
Psionics 50
Non-Human Races 50
PC Djinn 50
Advantages 50
New Advantages 51
Disadvantages 52
New Disadvantages 55
Skills 56
New Skills 58
Languages 59
Sample Character: Karim the Falconer .. 59
Social Status 60
Money 61
Job Table 61
Names 64
Equipment Prices and Personal Expenses 65
Weapon List 67
Melee Weapons 68
Missile Weapons 68
Fire Siphons 69
Black Powder Weapons 69
"Fire" Weapons 69
Armor 70

MAGIC 71
Magic in the Arabian Nights 72
Exorcism 72
Long-Distance Flight 73
Rune Magic and Amulets 74
Spell-Caster Characters in Games ... 75
Arabian Alchemy 75
Rules Variations 76
Prohibited and Rare Magic 76
Starting PC Wizard: Nizam the Fat .. 76
Mana Levels 77
Enhanced Magic 77
Conditions to Break Spells 78
Shape-Changing 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
Hiring a Trainer 93
Hunting in the Middle East 93
Natural Animals 94
The Djinn 97
Other Fantastic Creatures 100
Golems 103

CAMPAIGNS 104
Arabian Nights 105
Styles of Play 105
Myths of the Fertile Crescent 106
Historical Settings 107
The Expansion of Islam 107
Gothic Arabia 107
The Crusades 108
The Mongol Invasions 108
An Assassins Campaign 108
Campaign Design 109
Themes 109
Arabians Abroad 109
A Harem Campaign 110
Doing the Dialogue 111
SAMPLE ADVENTURE:
The Tale of the Poet, the Slave, and What Was Not Theirs 111
Map of the City 112
Initial Events 113
Further Notes (GM Only) 113
Adapting to Other Genres 113
Into the Desert 117
Arabs on Other Planets 118
At Court 119
Meanwhile, Back in Town 120
Reaction Modifiers 120
Sample Scenario NPCs 121
Further Adventure Seeds 122
Plots from the Epics 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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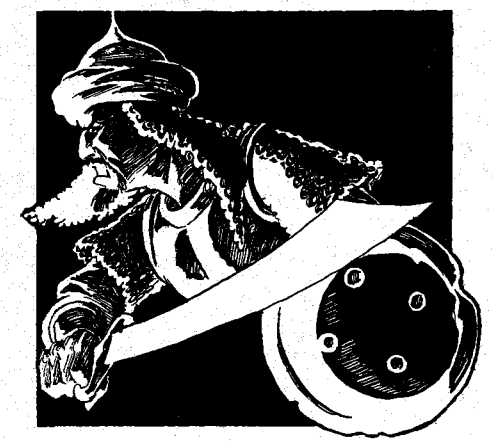
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Page References

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.***



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.

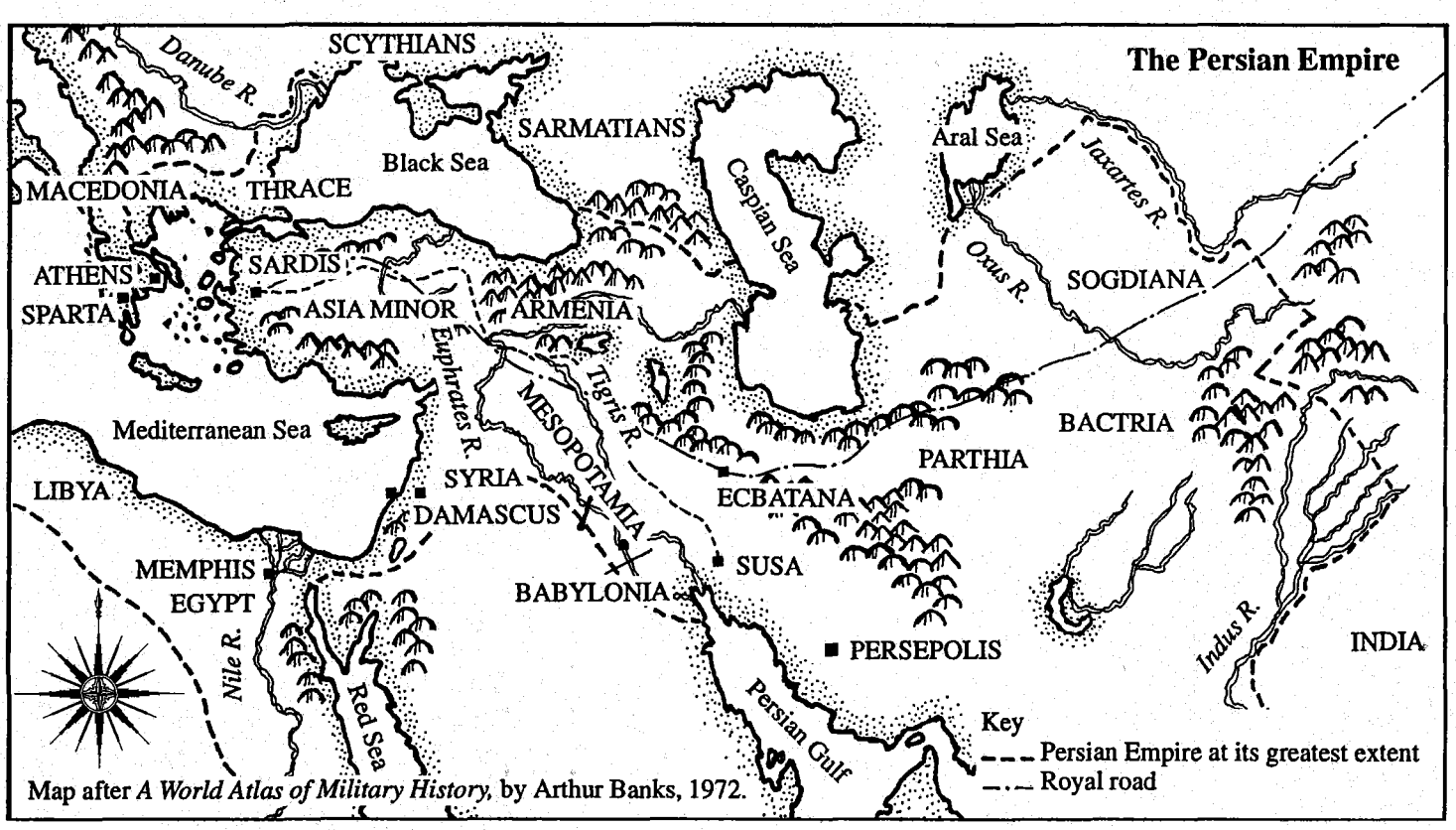
Advantages: Allies (Father is vizier, sister is another queen), Beautiful, Literacy, Patron (The sultan), Reputation (+3 among citizens of her home country – saved them from the sultan's madness), Status 6, Wealth (Very Wealthy), Voice.

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.





Map after *A World Atlas of Military History*, by Arthur Banks, 1972.

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 random 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 man-like form)
DX: 16 **PD/DR:** 4/4
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.
Cheetahs, 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; *friars*, 60.
Cities, 14, 18.
Claim to Hospitality advantage, 51.
Cleopatra VII, 32.
Clerical Investmentadvantage, 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'is, 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 Zughb, 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.
Futuwwa, 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.
Hajj, 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.
Hospitallers, 35, 36, 40.
Housing, *prices*, 66.
Hunchback disadvantage, 55.
Hunting, 93.
Huntsmen, 46.
Iblis, 74.
'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; *items*, 88; *prohibited*, 76; *rare*, 76; *rules variations*, 76.
Magicians, 46.
Mahdi, 32.
Makkuk, 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*, 78.
Shari'a, 14.
Sheep, 15, 17.
Sheikhs, 9, 18, 22, 35, 45.
Shi'atu 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.
Sinbad 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*.
Soukh, 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, steppe*.
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.
Weasels, 96.
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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