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The Arabian Nights: Tales Of 1,001 Nights: Volume 1 (The Arabian Nights Or Tales From 1001 Nights)



PENGUIN CLASSICS

The Arabian Nights

Tales of 1001 Nights

Volume 1

Translated by MALCOLM C. LYONS



Synopsis

Every night for three years the vengeful King Shahriyar sleeps with a different virgin, executing her the next morning. To end this brutal pattern and to save her own life, the vizier's daughter, Shahrazad, begins to tell the king stories of adventure, love, riches and wonder - tales of mystical lands peopled with princes and hunchbacks, the Angel of Death and magical spirits, tales of the voyages of Sindbad, of Ali Baba outwitting a band of forty thieves and of jinnis trapped in rings and in lamps. The sequence of stories will last 1,001 nights.

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Customer Reviews

When I ordered the Arabian Nights, I had this idea of how to read them: I wanted to read one night every night, so that it would take me 1001 nights, and I would know what King Shahriyar had to go through for three years. Well, I simply wasn't patient enough. I read the story of the first night, and I had to know how it went on. I ended up reading the first volume of this in about two weeks (roughly

70 pages a day) during finals at college. I literally could not put it down. The 1,001 Nights gave me a child-like feeling that I have not experienced since reading Mr. Popper's Penguins in second or third grade. The 1,001 Nights are truly magical; they are filled with demons, magic, other worlds, people unintentionally marrying 'ifrits, etc. But what truly makes them magical is that, even when the stories have no elements of the supernatural, they still seem convincingly bizarre and fantastic because of the vastly different culture in which the stories takes place. This different culture is sometimes disturbing (when a mistress is unfaithful it always happens to be with a conniving black slave, and women are thought to be treacherous, libidinous creatures) but always makes for a more interesting read. Also included in this volume is the famous story of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, which is not part of the original nights, but I'm still glad they put it in. The book itself is heavy and beautiful, the maps and index of words are very helpful (who would know that 'A'isha was the third favorite wife of the prophet without it?) and the introduction gives an important historical backdrop, as well as addressing the irritating fact that the nights contain so many events that are unexplained. Is it complete?

This new Lyons translation of the "Thousand Nights and One Night" is extremely important, being, as it is, the first complete English translation to appear in over a century and the fact that it is highly readable and yet still exudes the kind of mystery which, I think, is what draws all of us into this work. Robert Irwin in his "Arabian Nights Companion" (an excellent book which all fans of the "nights" should own) lamented that there was no complete English translation of the "Nights" which was acceptable (at the time of his writing). I think Lyons has remedied this problem or, at least, has provided a first rate alternative. I actually own (and, believe it or not, have read) all the English versions. Since I am not an Arabic scholar and cannot read the original, I've accepted them for what they are and have liked each of them for various reasons. Mardrus/Mathers has a nice dreamy fin de siecle feel to it (hardly authentic, though), Payne is straightforward but dull, Lane's notes are excellent but his version too expurgated, and Burton is...well...Burton. (Until now, Burton had been my favorite mainly due to its oddity and idiosyncratic foot notes.) None of them is an "authentic" version of the "Nights", and I've resigned myself to the fact that until I learn Arabic I will never get the feeling that the original hearers had when these stories were first told. But I think Lyons comes awfully close. Best of all, Lyons has chosen to render the verse literally, rather than trying to re-versify it into English, something which I hate about all other translators who have included the poetry, Burton being the worst of all.

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