



# **The Arabian Nights: Tales from a Thousand and One Nights - Unabridged Edition**

*Andrew Lang*

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Richard Burton's translation of "The Arabian Nights" is one of the oldest in existence and some people have a problem with this version; it's too old, antiquated, etc.; but for this reviewer, the very fact that it's an early translation lends the tales much of their charm; it underscores the fact that "The Arabian Nights" go back for hundreds of years, all the way back to "once upon a time". Richard Burton introduces us to Sharazad, that seductive storyteller who took the bull by the horns and dared to marry the sultan Shariyar who had been driven mad by the infidelity of his former wife and tried to exorcise the demons of her adultery by marrying a new wife every morning and slaying her that same night. Sharazad knows that a good tale can tame the savage beast much in the way music can, and she keeps the Sultan enchanted night after night with the tales that still enchant us in our own time. We all know about Aladdin and his magic lamp, and Ali Baba and the forty thieves, but there are loads of other treasures in this collection; my personal favorites, aside from Ali Baba, are the story of Ali the Persian (short, succinct, and very funny), and The Lady and Her Five Suitors, a hilarious tale of a woman who lures five men into a trap and then runs off with her boyfriend. And Sharazad, smart lady that she is, took care to insure her own future; not only does she regale her sultan with a thousand and one tales in as many nights, she also presents him with three children during that time, wins the heart of the sultan, and, we suppose, lives happily ever after. No one knows where the tales originated. Burton suggests that the earliest may date from the 8th century A.D., and the latest may have been as recent as the 16th century, only 200 years before Antoine de Galland translated the tales into French and unfolded them like a magic carpet before the astonished and delighted eyes of his European readers. Burton translated them into English in 1885 and they have been weaving their own spell of enchantment for us ever since. When we open "The Arabian Nights" we step onto our own magic carpet and we're off on a ride of fun and fantasy that lasts until the last page when we close the book and come back down, reluctantly, to earth.

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