

FIRE

Sinbad's Second Voyage (from: The 1001 Nights)

A well-known part of the *1001 Nights* recounts the tales of Sinbad, an adventurer and sailor from Baghdad. Setting out as a trader aboard a merchant ship, he arrived at an island of great beauty and abundance. So enraptured was Sinbad with his surroundings, he missed the departing ship, and was stranded. Wandering through the lush jungle, he saw what he thought was a cloud blocking the sun's rays. As it came closer, he realized it was not a cloud, but a simurgh – a huge and beautiful bird born of fire. Keen to escape the island and knowing the vast distances travelled by such birds, Sinbad rushed to tie himself to its leg as the simurgh landed in its nearby nest. As the simurgh took off and flew to distant lands, Sinbad came along for the ride. On landing, Sinbad found himself in a desert. At first he was frightened, but he was soon distracted by the soil, which was made of diamonds and other precious stones. Sewing what gemstones he could into his clothes, Sinbad avoided the serpents and beasts of the desert with wit and bravery, and arrived in a merchant town. Using the diamonds he had stored, he bartered his safe passage back to Baghdad. In celebration of his return home, Sinbad gave gifts of gemstones and money to his friends and relations, and entertained them with the amazing stories of his adventures.

AIR

A Tale of Abu Muhammad Lazybones (from: The 1001 Nights)

A tale from the *1001 Nights* features an important talismanic image. It begins with the marriage of a Basra merchant, Abu Mohammad Lazybones, to the beautiful young daughter of a local Sharif. On their wedding night in the girl's room, Abu Muhammad unwittingly broke a talisman protecting her from the unwanted attentions of a *marid* - a large and powerful *jinni*. The *marid* carried the girl off, leaving her family distraught. A group of kindly *jinn* appeared before Abu Muhammad, telling him they knew where the *marid* was hiding. With their help, he flew far through the air, before being dropped into a foreign sea, where he was rescued by a passing merchant ship. The sailors aboard told him that his beloved was held in the famous City of Brass in far-off China. Continuing his difficult journey, Abu Muhammad reached the city, where he found his love in a beautiful underground chamber, surrounded by gold, pearls, and jewels. His bride told him about a magical talisman crafted in the shape of an eagle. Finding it in a nearby cave, at her instruction, Abu Muhammad sprinkled musk onto the talisman, releasing a smoke that drew a group of friendly *jinn* to its presence. The *jinn* agreed to bind the *marid* in bonds, allowing Abu Muhammad and his bride to escape safely from captivity. Taking the eagle talisman with them, the couple returned happily to Basra, where it brought them much good fortune and wealth.

WATER

The Three Fishes (from: Kalila wa Dimna)

There were once three fish living in a remote, cool pool of water. Two of the fish were wise and clever by nature, but the third was foolish. One day, two fishermen came across the pool and, seeing the fish, decided to return the next day with their nets. Hearing the fishermen's conversation, that evening the wise fish left the pond without telling the others and reached a stream nearby. Next day when fishermen came with their nets to the pool, the clever fish floated to the water's surface and pretended to be dead. The fishermen caught the fish and threw it aside. The clever fish managed to wriggle across to the nearby stream and was saved. But the third fish, the foolish one, was overcome with fear and swam in panic up and down, from right to left, until it was caught by the fisherman, and cooked.

EARTH

The Lion and the Clever Hare (from: Kalila wa Dimna)

Long ago, many animals lived together in the forest. All the animals in the forest feared the lion, who was famous for his anger and ferocity. Frightened for their lives, the animals agreed to pacify the lion by bringing him a platter of meat every morning, drawing lots to choose the unlucky victim each day. Many animals were sacrificed until one day it was the turn of a clever hare. The hare thought all night how he could save his life. Suddenly an idea struck him. The next day, panting heavily, he reached the lion. He found the lion impatiently waiting for his food. "Oh king, I am sorry to be late. There is another lion who is threatening to capture your territory, and who took the other hare that was with me, for his own breakfast," said the hare. "Show me the villain! I will kill him!" roared the lion. The clever hare led him to a well filled with water. When the lion peered in, he saw his own reflection in the water. Mistaking the image for his enemy, the foolish lion jumped into the well, where he was swallowed up in the waters. The clever hare rejoiced and went back to tell all the animals that they had nothing to fear anymore.