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**CLASSIC  
FICTION**

**THE  
GREAT TALES**

NA302912D

Sir Richard Burton  
**The Arabian Nights**  
The Book of a Thousand Nights and a Night

Read by **Philip Madoc**



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1	<b>Far-famed legends</b>	6:35
2	From a lattice window	9:52
3	Scheherazade requests marriage	5:29
4	<b>The Barber's Tale of himself</b>	5:24
5	<b>The Barber's Tale of his first brother</b>	4:53
6	Yet more tricks	7:07
7	<b>The Barber's Tale of his second brother</b>	11:15
8	<b>Sindbad the Seaman – The Voyages</b>	7:24
9	Escape by flight	3:42
10	A surprise of diamonds	7:22
11	<b>The Third Voyage of Sindbad</b>	6:19
12	In the hands of a cannibal	6:00
13	A monstrous serpent	4:59
14	Reunited with the bales	8:01
15	<b>The Fourth Voyage of Sindbad</b>	6:10
16	Succour and riches	6:37
17	The widower's fate	5:21

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18	The cave of death	10:24
19	<b>The Fifth Voyage of Sindbad</b>	4:09
20	Shipwrecked into danger again	6:03
21	A treasure of nuts, cloves and spices	9:53
22	<b>Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves</b>	6:26
23	The revealing scales	9:03
24	Ali Baba discovers Kasim's fate	8:28
25	The captain makes plans	7:20
26	A second attempt	9:23
27	Morgiana boils the oil	7:57
28	The captain vows revenge	8:02
29	Just one stab	7:21
30	<b>The Tale of the Portress</b>	8:41
31	The Portress (conclusion)	6:35

**Total time: 3:42:43**

Cover picture: The Arabian Nights by Edmund Dulac.  
Courtesy Hodder & Stoughton

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Sir Richard Burton

# The Arabian Nights

## The Book of a Thousand Nights and a Night

The tales of *The Arabian Nights* first became known in Europe in the early 18th century through the French version by Antoine Galland, and were translated into English soon after. John Payne's 1882 edition gave the complete text, but it is Sir Richard Burton's translation (1885-8) which offers the most colourful and interesting version of this remarkable work, and which we have used in this recording.

Many English readers will be familiar with Andrew Lang's sanitised edition for children, and it comes as quite a shock to encounter the bold relish with which Burton retells these tales of adventure, sexuality, violence and the supernatural. The stories have a varied provenance, deriving from Middle Eastern and Indian sources, and being collected together over many hundreds of years, the earliest possibly dating back to the 8th century. It is perhaps worth noting that *The Arabian Nights* are not normally granted the status of classical Arabic literature: they have nevertheless exerted an extraordinary power over the

Western imagination.

The framework for the tales is the story of Scheherazade. King Shahryar has discovered the infidelity of his wife and, having had her beheaded, he vows to wed a new wife every day, consummate the marriage, and slay her the next morning. After three years of this slaughter, Scheherazade offers herself as the next wife, but cleverly prevents her own death by keeping the King spellbound night after night through the art of her storytelling – hence the 1001 Nights, after which the King relents and cancels his murderous vow. What makes the storytelling richer and more complex, however, is the succession of 'tales within tales' which Scheherazade relates: in this collection, for instance, the three Barber's Tales all fall within the larger setting of The Hunchback's Tale – which is itself imagined as being told to the great Harun al-Rashid, Caliph of Baghdad, in the 8th century.

Further, the tales vary greatly in style and content – hardly surprising, given the way in

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which the collection grew over eight centuries. The Barber's Tales, for instance, reveal a world of strict social hierarchy and harsh mockery of those who aspire to a sexuality beyond their sphere, while the stories of Sindbad's voyages are full of supernatural terrors (monstrous birds and serpents), miraculous escapes and acts of ruthless self-preservation (Sindbad clubbing to death the other wretched souls who are buried alive). Even that old favourite, Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, is a tale in which murderous and thieving ingenuity is rewarded by wealth untold. Clearly the moral world of *The Arabian Nights* is an uncomfortable one – notwithstanding the ostensible emphasis on pious Islamic values – yet the stories are told with a beguiling artistry that fascinates and compels the reader (or listener), especially in Sir Richard Burton's definitive version.

Sir Richard Burton (1821-90) was a remarkable man. Educated at Trinity College, Oxford, he served in the army in India, studying Oriental languages and gaining an intimate knowledge of Muslim culture. He is supposed to have been the first white man to make the pilgrimage to Mecca – in disguise – and embarked on a further career as an explorer, discovering Lake Tanganyika in 1858. He was able to continue this as a diplomat serving in many locations. Later he devoted himself mainly to literature, publishing translations from various languages. He was also, incidentally, something of an erotologist – an interest revealed in the numerous footnotes he provides in his edition of *The Book of a Thousand Nights and a Night*.

**Notes by Perry Keenlyside**

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## The music on this recording taken from the NAXOS catalogue

**RIMSKY-KORSAKOV** SCHEHERAZADE  
Philharmonia Orchestra, London, Enrique Bátiz

8.550726

Abridged by Perry Keenyside. Produced by Nicolas Soames  
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Total time  
3:42:43

# Sir Richard Burton

# The Arabian Nights

## The Book of a Thousand Nights and a Night

Read by **Philip Madoc**

Though *The Arabian Nights* are generally known as stories for children, they were originally tales for adults, full of adventure, sexuality, violence and the supernatural. They certainly inspired the imagination of Sir Richard Burton, the 19th-century explorer, linguist and erotologist who brought all his worldly experience and a superbly expressive prose style to bear on the tales of Sindbad the Seaman and Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves. Scheherazade must keep her king entertained with stories if she is to avoid the promised sentence of death.

Philip Madoc's sonorous performance allows the tales to weave their own enchantment as they have done down the centuries.



**Philip Madoc** was born in Wales, and after studying languages at university, and spending a period as an interpreter, turned to drama. His extensive theatre work has encompassed many principal Shakespearean roles, including Iago and Antony as well as 19th and 20th-century drama. His film and TV work is equally varied, including *The Spy Who Came In From The Cold*, the BBC TV's *Fortunes of War* and, most recently, his own detective series, *A Mind To Kill*. He has also read Malory's *The Death of Arthur* for Naxos AudioBooks.

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