

THE  
CRESCENT  
AND THE  
✻ CROSS ✻

*The Eighth Voyage of Sinbad*



ROBERT ROGLAND

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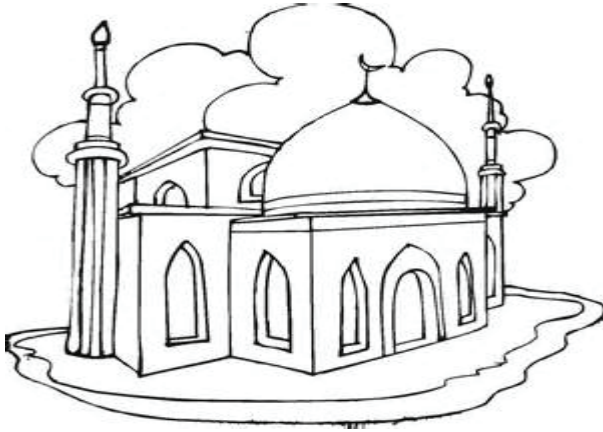


## Sinbad's Ports of Call

*The reader is invited to trace Sinbad's voyage  
with the aid of this map.*







## Chapter 1

# Sinbad Goes on Pilgrimage

**R**aging waves tossed me back and forth like a cat playing with a mouse. I clung desperately to a few waterlogged planks, all that was left of my dinghy. How long could my weary fingers hang on? The storm would not blow itself out before morning. By then, hungry fish would have consumed my lifeless carcass with relish, and nothing but a few bones would remain of Sinbad the Sailor. I had challenged the sea seven times and won each challenge. Now the sea would finally conquer.

But no! God delivered me from the hungry sea and a dozen other terrifying perils that followed on my eighth, most extraordinary voyage. Out of gratitude to God, I must tell you my story.

I imagine you've read of the many adventures and misfortunes I suffered on my earlier voyages. The Caliph of Baghdad, Haroun al-Rashid the Great, had my story recorded in the annals of the court for the entertainment and wonder of his subjects. That story has spread

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beyond his domain to lands over the sea. But if you know only my first seven voyages, you know only the smallest part of my adventures. My eighth voyage, unknown to the world till now, surpassed them all. I passed through the most horrifying dangers, saw the most astounding marvels, and brought home the richest of treasures, a treasure that will outlast death! On that voyage, I met my dearest friend. His name is Selassie. The story I am going to tell is his as well as mine.

After the harrowing dangers of my seventh voyage, I resolved never to go to sea again but to live a life of luxury and ease. Indeed, the best of all futures lay before me. I was then a Muslim. I had already made my confession that Muhammad was the messenger of Allah, I prayed toward Mecca five times a day, I fasted during the month of Ramadan, and I was wealthy enough to give generously to the poor and still deny myself no pleasure. I could fulfill all the obligations of a good Muslim and still live life to the full.

And live life to the full I did! I dwelled in a marble palace on the banks of the Tigris River. Every day I rose late from my bed of satin cushions and silk sheets. After morning prayers, I would breakfast on dates, pomegranates, and soft, warm rolls served on a silver plate. Then I would plan my day as I sat on my riverfront terrace sipping thick, rich Yemeni coffee from a golden cup.

After breakfast, I would give my household steward his orders for the day. Then other slaves would carry me in a litter into the heart of the city, where I visited the moneylenders who managed my fortune. While in the city, I also took care to give alms to beggars every day, for I wanted to earn favor with Allah.

By lunchtime, I was home. I said my noon prayers and retired to the terrace, where the midday meal was waiting. Perhaps it would be roast peacock, perhaps lamb braised in a hot Indian curry—whatever I craved was mine. Musicians and dancers entertained me while I ate. After I had dined, I would retire to my bedroom for a nap in the heat of the day. A slave would fan me with an ostrich plume while I slept.

My slave would wake me in mid-afternoon at the third hour of prayer. After I finished my prayers, I would find my bath drawn—not too hot, not too cold, with rose petals scattered over the surface. After I bathed, a slave trimmed my beard and nails and laid out fresh clothes. I then spent an hour reading and meditating on the Koran, the book Muhammad claimed he received from Allah. I would conclude my devotions by praying at the fourth hour appointed for prayer.

I gave every evening over to parties and feasting. My slaves were busy during the day, inviting friends and business partners to supper. My guests would begin to arrive at dusk. We would feast, converse, and enjoy the musicians and dancers long after the star-spangled night had settled over Baghdad, the Abode of Peace. When the last guest had gone home, I would say my evening prayers and retire to bed. So I passed my days for two years, refusing myself nothing while still carrying out the duties of a faithful Muslim.

Yet as the months passed, my heart was troubled more and more about my eternal destiny. I began to wonder if I was good enough to merit paradise. The Koran said Allah could do whatever he wanted. No one could question his ways or call him to account. The Koran said he was merciful and good, but he could cast me into hell at a whim if it struck his fancy. I hoped he would look on me with favor if my good deeds outnumbered my bad deeds, but I was never sure they did, no matter how often I gave alms in the streets or helped widows and orphans in their poverty.

The more I thought on these things, the emptier my riches seemed. I gave to the poor more freely than before, but my anxiety grew. I was no longer a young man. All too soon, I would die, and then what? Would my good deeds outweigh my bad deeds in the eyes of the Almighty on the fearful Day of Judgment?

One Friday, I went to the mosque, as was my custom. The sermon dealt with the five pillars of Islam, the duties Allah demands of faithful Muslims. As the imam preached, it struck me that I had

performed only four of the five pillars. I had not made the pilgrimage to Mecca that the Koran requires of every Muslim who can afford it. Of course! That was why I felt my righteousness was insufficient to please Allah. I resolved then and there to become a Hajji, a Muslim who has made his pilgrimage.

That evening my closest friends and relations came to dine with me as usual. After supper, I sent the musicians and dancers away and motioned for silence.

“Friends, I have an important announcement to make. I will be going on pilgrimage tomorrow. I have placed the management of my affairs in the hands of Hassan, my elder brother. *Inshallah*, God willing, I will return home in six months.”

All were speechless at first; then, they burst out in shouts of congratulations and best wishes. Every good Muslim wants to go on pilgrimage, but not all can afford to make the journey. They rejoiced with me, and all begged me to pray for them while I was in Mecca. I assured them I would do so. I called the musicians and dancers back, and while they entertained, I spent the rest of the evening talking with my guests about my plans for the trip. When they departed, well after midnight, I sent them all away with rich gifts.

The next morning, I donned a simple pilgrim’s garb and filled my bag with a plentiful supply of gold sequins. I boarded a riverboat for Basra, on the Persian Gulf. I knew Basra well, for it was from Basra that I had departed on all my voyages. There I hoped to find a pilgrim ship headed for Arabia.

Many pilgrim ships departed from Basra every year, but it was not the pilgrim season. I was so anxious to fulfill my obligation to Allah that I couldn’t wait six months till the yearly hajj began—I hoped to be home by then! Since pilgrim ships were not yet sailing, I had to settle for a dhow, a merchant vessel going first to Muscat, on the Omani coast of Arabia, and then to Jeddah, on the Red Sea. From Jeddah, I would travel by caravan over the coastal mountains to Mecca.

*SINBAD GOES ON PILGRIMAGE*

I didn't mind laying over in Muscat for a few days. A great slave market ran year-round in Muscat, and I needed a personal servant. Abdullah, the boy who had been my attendant since I returned from my seventh voyage, had run away just a week earlier. Ungrateful wretch! No matter; the loss of a slave meant little to a man as wealthy as I. One slave was as good as another—or so I thought.



## Chapter 2

### The New Slave

**M**uscat was a ten-day sail from Basra if the weather was favorable, and favorable it was: surely Allah was blessing my pilgrimage! The Persian Gulf was smooth and calm. Delicate tracings of foam curled lazily on the face of the gleaming water, looking for all the world like a tray of Damascus silver with engravings swirling all over its surface. The sun glared down from a cloudless sky, but a steady breeze kept the temperature bearable and filled the sails of the ship as it glided south at a steady clip. As I stood in the bow and drew in breath after breath of fresh sea air, I was surprised at the joy welling up in me. Ah, to be at sea again! I had not realized how much I missed having a deck under my feet. Perhaps, I mused, I would even resume my travels after I returned from pilgrimage.

In eight days, we passed through the Strait of Hormuz, out of the Persian Gulf, and into the Indian Ocean. The water remained calm, and the breeze never slackened. I ate, prayed, and slept on deck, rejoicing in the sea and sky. Two days after entering the Indian Ocean, I awoke to see the dark mountains of the Omani coast looming in front of me. I took the helmsman's glass and scanned the beach



where the mountains plunged into the sea. Soon I could make out the whitewashed buildings of Muscat gleaming in the morning sun.

We docked at noon. After prayers, I set off for the slave market. I had been in Muscat many times before and knew right where to go: past the shipyard, past the India docks, all the way to the north end of town. A twenty-minute walk brought me to the Bazaar of Slaves. It had not changed since I was there ten years before. A half-dozen toughs, armed with curved, razor-sharp scimitars, lounged around the gate. They were supposed to be on guard, but they looked bored and inattentive. And why not? Not once in the memory of any man living had a slave ever made a break for freedom. The guards were slaves themselves, but they had an easy life and knew it.

Inside the gate, I found myself in a square open to the scorching sky. Single-story warehouses with barred windows surrounded the courtyard. In front of each building stood a platform raised four feet or so above the surface of the ground. There the slavers displayed their human merchandise. Canny buyers and eager sellers, all shouting and making deals, crowded around the platforms. Only the slaves were silent. Who would they talk to? They would have been captured only a few months earlier. Few would be from the same tribe, and few would know Arabic. The poor wretches sat quietly behind the platforms until their owner, with a wave of his hand, would order them up on the block

I sauntered down one side of the market and back up the other. When I had located the healthiest batch of slaves, I approached them to make my choice. I saw the boy I wanted right away. He was African, probably Ethiopian or Nubian, like most of the slaves there. His bearing impressed me immediately. Most children hunched in fear or cried when forced to mount the platform; those too young or too dull to know what was happening might act silly or embarrassed. But this lad was different; he stood erect and carried himself with calm dignity. He looked healthy, too. I stopped in front of him and looked him up and down.

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“Open your mouth, boy; let me see your teeth,” I ordered.

“Yes, my lord,” he replied in slightly accented Arabic, and showed me a perfect set of teeth. So he knew Arabic already! This boy was definitely the one I wanted to purchase.

The boy did not go cheap, but his owner and I agreed on a fair price, considering the lad’s age, health, and the fact that he could take orders in Arabic immediately. Next, we headed to the clothing bazaar to buy him proper apparel. Slaves at the market wear no more than a loincloth, hardly acceptable attire for a slave of Sinbad! Soon we were on our way back to the ship. I strode along in front while the boy trotted respectfully behind me, clothed in a simple white cotton tunic and embroidered skullcap, an outfit befitting his master.

Back at the ship, I told the boy that I expected him to have my meals and coffee ready at the appointed time, to shave me after breakfast, and to wash my clothes daily so that he would have fresh garments to lay out for me every morning.

“You’ll cook and clean for yourself also, of course. You’re to look clean, neat, and worthy of being the slave of Sinbad. You’ll have other regular duties after we dock in Jeddah, but that will be enough while we’re aboard ship. Of course, I’ll have special orders for you from time to time. Carry out your duties loyally and efficiently, and you’ll find me to be a kind, even generous master. Dishonesty and laziness will bring my wrath upon you. Do you understand?”

“Yes, my lord. I hope to give you good service.”

“Fairly spoken, but I’ll discover soon enough if your service lives up to your words.”

At that moment, the captain appeared on deck and announced that we would be sailing in an hour. Sailing in an hour! We were supposed to stay in Muscat for two more days.

“Why are we leaving so soon?” I asked.

“I have seen an omen in the heavens that tells me the monsoon

will arrive early this year. Today's sky may be blue and cloudless, but this morning I saw four terns circling over the harbor. Other skippers think I'm a superstitious old salt who ought to give up sailing, but I believe in bird signs. Four terns mean there will be four more weeks before the weather turns bad. May it please Allah to spare mariners then! We've got to get out of the open ocean before the monsoon begins. If we sail today, we'll be at the Bab al-Mandab in a month. Once we pass through it into the Red Sea, we can find a sheltered harbor if we need one. We have just enough time if we sail today." I knew enough not to argue with a captain who believed in bird signs. Besides, I too had been surprised by tempests that swept down without warning and wrecked my ship (you have read about my seven voyages, haven't you?).

"Take no chances," I told the captain. "Play it safe." Of course, the sooner I got to Jeddah, the sooner I'd get to Mecca, so our early departure was good news to me in every way.

After sunset, some miles off the coast and heading southwest under a sky sparkling with stars, I finally had a chance to talk more with my new slave. He had cooked and served me supper, had boiled and poured my coffee, and was busy washing up when I sat down on the deck in front of him and began to ask questions.

"I'm surprised you know Arabic, lad. When did you learn it?"

"I learned it traveling with my father, lord."

"Was your father a merchant?"

"No, lord, he was a military man."

"Ah, then you were captured in a tribal war."

"More or less, lord," the boy replied. "My father was on a secret mission, with only four men and me, when a band of slavers fell upon us."

"And your father? Was he killed or captured?"

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“I don’t know, lord. We were attacked at night, and I was carried off in the confusion. I don’t know. Oh, lord, I miss my family so!” The boy was hardly able to get the last sentence out before he began to sob.

“Don’t cry, boy,” I said, patting him on the back. “I know it’s hard; I was orphaned myself at an early age. I’m no substitute for a father, of course, but you’ll find me a kind master, and you’ll learn how to be a man under my teaching. Someday you may even be able to buy your freedom. By the way, what’s your name? I should call you by your name.” “My name is Selassie, lord.” “That isn’t an Arabic name. I’ll give you an Arabic name meaning the same thing. What does your name mean?”

“*Selassie* means “Trinity” in my language, lord.”

“Trinity! Then you are not a Muslim but a Christian!”

“True, lord. I am from the kingdom of Axum in Ethiopia. We are a Christian people.”

I was dumbfounded. I had purchased a Christian slave and was going to Mecca on pilgrimage. Christians are not allowed in Mecca, upon pain of death.

“You’ll have to become a Muslim, Selassie. I can’t have a Christian slave. I’m going to Mecca; I can’t take a Christian there.”

Selassie swallowed hard before replying. “With all respect, my lord, I am a Christian, and I must remain a Christian.”

I flew into a rage. “Do you dare to defy me? I’ll throw you overboard right now if you don’t agree to become a Muslim!”

Selassie sat hunched over, his head between his knees, for a long time. His body trembled slightly as he thought about the frightening prospect ahead. Then he rose and bowed low before me. When he spoke, his voice was steady.

“My lord, the Bible, God’s Word, says we ought to obey God rather

than men. I will obey you in all things except in denying my Savior. I believe you are a kind and just man. Do to me as you will.”

In hot wrath, I snatched the boy up and held him by the ankles over the ship’s rail, where he could look down at the dark, angry waves sloshing back and forth just a few feet beneath him. I expected him to cry out in fear and beg for mercy, but he did nothing of the sort. He remained silent, his face a picture of peace. I was amazed. I set him down on the deck and began to pace back and forth. I couldn’t throw him into the sea; I just couldn’t. But what would I do?

Finally, I spoke: “God is merciful, Selassie, and I will be merciful too. But I can’t take you to Mecca. I’ll have to sell you when we reach Jeddah. We’ll be there in ten days. Till then, you will serve me as I command.”

I didn’t know then, in the silver moonlight of that quiet evening, that we would not reach Jeddah in a fortnight, nor in a month, nor ever.