

# SUN AND SAND

Welcome!

Those of you who have done these Labor Day puzzles before may have figured something out about me by now: I love stories.

The tales of the *One Thousand and One Nights* are special to a fabulaphile. In addition to being a collection of fairy tales, romances, and anecdotes both bawdy and historical, the *Nights* depict a world in which stories *matter*. In this world, stories entertain, redeem, and save lives. Shahrazad avoids execution and wins a husband by spinning yarns, and a multitude of kings, commoners, and supernatural beings are dissuaded from regrettable acts when offered a colorful narrative in exchange.

And that's pretty common currency in the *Nights*, because *everyone* in these stories has their own strange story to tell. It's not unusual for an evening's offering to begin something like: then Shahrazad said "It is related, O King, that Ja'far said to the caliph: the jeweler then told Ali ibn-Bakkar...", etc., etc. Tales within tales, to dizzying depths.

Another feature of the stories worth mentioning is, of course, that Shahrazad tends to stop narrating right in the middle of them. Her husband Shahrazar can't bear to leave a story unfinished, so they pick up again the next night after the interruption.

This particular extravaganza shares that episodic structure. Rather than one big set of puzzles, it's been divided into two smaller sets, each with its own final answer, and then an overall solution. The first set must be solved to reach the second. And there's another shared device: the cliff-hanger. I thought there was more to do with this material than I wanted to squeeze into one outing, so the narrative, such as it is, will remain unfinished this time through. I hope that solvers will find this year's conclusion, though, a satisfying stopping point. It will end with a four-word phrase. The first solo and team solvers to email me the phrase at mhalpin at fuse dot net will receive a fabulous prize -- a city in a bottle, perhaps, or the egg of the phoenix, or... well, we'll see.

Happy Solving!

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