

## **Koran, Monsters in**

The Koran is not a book of monsters. It does, however, draw from the world of pre-Islamic Arabia, which was populated by spiritual nasties of various varieties. Except for a few, they are organized in subgroups under the larger category of “**jinn**.” This entry will focus on descriptions of the spiritual underworld as it is portrayed in the Koran and in a handful of passages from early Hadith (the written remembrances of Mohammed’s companions). Citations below without named references are to passages in the Koran. A fuller discussion, particularly as regards later developments in this area of Muslim thought and culture, will be found in the separate article, **Jinn** (see also **Arabian Nights, Monsters in**).

The Koran distinguishes three classes of created sentient beings: **angels**, humans, and jinn. Angels (made from light) do not have free will and can only do what God (Allah) commands. Humans and jinn, however, although they were created to worship God (51.56) may choose between obedience and rebellion (in spite of this apparent free will, according to 7.179, some were created for Hell). For humans, belief generally precedes obedience, and this is the primary dividing point between the faithful (Muslims) and the unbelievers (although it is possible to believe and still choose to disobey). Unbelief among the jinn is not generally an issue (37.158)—they choose disobedience in spite of their knowledge, but unlike the **demons** of Christian theology, some jinn are faithful to the creator (the first group of these, in fact, was converted when they heard Mohammed’s preaching, so God’s mercy and forgiveness are available to them as well [46.30; 72.1]).

## JINN

The jinn (the word means “invisible,” although they can take animal form—especially snakes) were created from smokeless (or scorching) fire (55.15; humans were made from black clay). The first jinni (singular of jinn) to be created was Iblis, and he is the ancestor of all the jinn. As in some post-biblical Christian mythology, Iblis was offended when God asked the heavenly assembly to bow down to Adam, even though Adam had demonstrated his admirable prophetic skills by naming them (i.e. the angels, a variation of the Genesis account where he names the animals). God was not pleased but grants him an indulgence until the final judgment. Iblis, in his rebellion, promises to do his best to lead humankind astray from the creator. Adam and Eve taste from the tree (of the knowledge of good and evil) against God’s command, as in Genesis, and become aware of either their “shameful parts,” which, apparently, they had not yet noticed, or their “evil intentions,” depending on the translation (7.11–27). Iblis comes to be known as Shayṭān (“mischief,” cognate with the Hebrew, Satan [accuser]), but lower level jinn can be referred to as shaytans as well if they are functioning to lead people astray. In this role they may also be called “whisperers,” although **the Devil** is the primer whisperer, whispering even into the hearts of jinn (114.4)

Jinn come in a variety of types, a few of which are mentioned in the Koran. An *ifrīt* is an extremely powerful, and clever, type. **Ghosts** fall into this category in modern belief, but their only mention in the Koran is associated with Solomon (27:39–40). As suggested in earlier Jewish pseudepigrapha (*The Testament of Solomon* [date uncertain, sometime between the first and fifth century C.E.]), Solomon was able magically to impress the demon world into a labor force. An ifrīt volunteers to fetch the Queen of Sheba’s extremely heavy throne and bring it to

Solomon. Later, after Solomon dies, the jinn continue on his projects for a while, unaware that the magic that compelled them has now dissipated. When they do discover their error, they are embarrassed, and depart from his service (34.14).

*Mārid* are a class associated with the sea, and play a large role in the Arabian nights but appear once in 37.6-7 (not mentioned by name in most translations). The Sunan of Abu-Dawood 5088 (told by Aisha, one of Muhammad's wives) refers to an otherwise unknown type.

Mohammed asks if any *mugharribun* have been seen, and when prompted he says that they are a type of jinn. In addition to these, Iblis has several sons, famous for various forms of mischief: Zalambur (who oversees fraudulent business deals [and in the modern world, traffic]), Awar (encourages depravity), Dasim (marital discord), Sut (lies), and Tir (disasters). In one tradition, claiming to date from the seventh or eighth century (al-Tirmidhi al-Hakeem), another son, Khannas, gets eaten by Adam and Eve (in the body of a goat), which enables him to work with his father to tempt humans from within (attributed to Al-Shafi'i, a 9<sup>th</sup> c. jurist).

A *qarîn* (also called hamzaad) is a peculiar type of jinn that is created each time a human is born. They function as devilish versions of guardian angels, although they are even more intimately connected to their assigned human. They appear several times in the Koran (e.g., 41.25; 43.36-39; 37.51-55), and most English translations call them "companions" (which is a proper translation—the word can also refer to people). Their job is generally to try to lead their assigned humans astray. They continue with them throughout life and are with them before God at the judgment. Humans who are not faring well at that point will often try to blame their *qarîns*, who in turn, will testify that they did not compel their humans to do anything—they only whispered suggestions to which the humans complied from their own will (50:27). If someone rebels from God, a *shaytan* is appointed for him as a *qarîn* (43.36; this implies a slightly different

model for the qarîn than is generally accepted). Since all humans have a qarîn, Mohammed was asked how he managed with his. He responded that, in his case, his qarîn had been converted and was a Muslim, enabling him to be free from error (Sahih Muslim [a collection of Hadith], 2814). Jesus apparently had the same advantage as perhaps did other prophets as well.

The idea of the qarîn certainly existed in pre-Islamic Arabia, and some Egyptologists have speculated that its origins are in the Egyptian concept of the Ka (sometimes translated “soul,” although this hardly does it justice). Like humans, jinni are gendered, and sex between them and humans is a possibility. Early on, traditional Islam viewed the qarîn as inversely connected to their human partner by gender, so that a woman receives a qarîn (masc.) and a man a qarîna (fem.—although note that Mohammed referred to his qarîn as masculine). In adulthood, they often mate sexually, usually in dreams, with their human partner; resulting children are composite in some way. Both varieties will be jealous of their human’s physical spouse; the man’s qarîna might attack her. A bachelor is sometimes said to be married to his qarîna (see **incubus/succubus**). Qarîn are particularly bothered by their woman’s natural children, so infant deaths may be blamed on the mother’s jinn companion.

#### “MONSTERS” OTHER THAN JINN

Since angels have no freewill, they cannot be in rebellion against God. This does not mean that all their activities are positive from a human point of view. The two angels of Babylon, Harut and Marut, apparently taught magic to both humans and jinn, intentionally trying to lead people astray, which, in this case, must have been God’s intention. Careful to protect God from the accusation of misdirecting people, they always accompanied their deception with the

warning, “We have been sent to deceive you” (2:102). Apparently, however, their dupes were not listening during the disclaimer portion of their presentations.

The angel Malik also does God’s will, so the faithful would have no issue with him. The damned (both humans and jinn), however, are not so understanding, since he is the warden of Hell (43.77, where the damned ask to be annihilated, but are compelled to live on in torment). Modern Christian folklore, of course, assigns this role to the Devil, but biblical Christianity and Islam agree that he will be one of the suffering damned rather than ruling. Malik does not work alone; he is accompanied by 18 other angels (74.30). There is also an angel of death (32.11), whose actions are not generally welcome among humans.

Although not particularly monstrous, 27.82ff contains what may be a version of the Beast in the *Revelation of John* (certainly monstrous there). He appears, turned into a final messenger, just before the end to remind people that they have erred in not accepting God’s revelations.

In most of the Koran, false gods are simply idols, and the point is frequently made that they cannot in any way assist those who believe in them. But there are a group of passages (e.g. 28.63) that have the gods themselves denying on the day of judgment that they were truly worshipped, although they do admit that they led people astray. A few passages in Hadith also seem to animate the gods occasionally. These beings are usually called “partners” and may have independent existence. The angels deny that it is they that are being worshipped, saying it was the jinn (34.40f; see also 6.100). There is no other indication that these gods were seen as having any real existence, even as sub-deities.

## IN FICTION

Jinn have been hugely popular as fictional villains, usually with only the faintest allegiance to Islamic beliefs regarding them. For a more general summary the reader is referred to the article on jinn. This list will be limited to cases where one of the discussed subcategories is specifically mentioned (not expecting such portrayals to be any closer to tradition). Neil Gaiman's 2001 novel, *American Gods*, contains a scene in which a taxi-driving ifrīt switches identities with a passenger. *Slaves of Sleep* and *Masters of Sleep* (two connected novels) by L. Ron Hubbard (1939) feature both ifrīts and marids. Wes Craven's film, *Wishmaster* (1999) is worth mentioning only because it illustrates the traditionally valid principle that the jinn may give you what you ask for, but you will not get what you expected. Not surprisingly, Salman Rushdie's 1988 *Satanic Verses* features its contingent of jinn as well. **Alan Humm**

### References and Suggested Reading

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