

Eighth voyage of Sindbad
By Bahram Beyzaee

A REDEMPTION

Many speak of the circularity and the completeness of the Sindbad symbol- the man, the sailor, the adventurer; the leader, the problem-solver, the individual proof of resilience; the smart, the capable, the agile; the hero.

This play won't.

Throughout his travels, Sindbad the man conquers and submits; learns and teaches others; keeps his views and adapts his methods; loses himself and finds his crew; breaks to pieces and then rebirths; goes rogue, then learns to follow directions (from an animal, as it happens); gives in to longings but resists vices; goes destitute and wins fortunes. Many see him as an inquisitive soul; a brave heart; a strong character; a man to be inspired by.

We don't.

It may be because we live in the world we live in, at the time we live in, in a place we live in. It may be because drifting at sea not knowing what tomorrow brings looks too painfully similar with the plight of waterbound refugees left at the mercy of wondrous powers awaiting ashore. It may be because we know more now about the toxicity of a blindfolded and emotional leader. Or it may be because we reached a point where we understood that, once you have a roof over your head and a pot of food on the table, looking for fulfillment is a search inward, within your own self.

In any case, the Sindbad model is not what's needed- and here is why:

- the first voyage is about money. Sindbad has riches, but squanders them and then spends the whole voyage trying to get rich again.
- The second trip is about adventure, and getting more riches. Somewhere in the middle, Sindbad is discarded by his mates.
- The third voyage is about ethnicity and a big-lipped, "in the likeness of a man, black of colour" to whom Sindbad, predictably, proves to be intellectually superior.
- The fourth voyage is about moral superiority: Sindbad abstains from indulging in drugs alongside savages. Then he bludgeons a woman to death to steal her food and escape a cave.

- In the fifth trip, “the carnal man was again seized with the longing to travel” and the crew start pillaging the fauna of foreign lands; Sindbad becomes a slave to an old man who’s riding him, depicted as a half-ape (for reference, old African tribes are the only ones known to practice this with their slaves).
- Sixth voyage is about being the last to survive starvation (again), only to find more riches, and take back a woman slave.
- Seventh and last trip is about sailing away, finding a rich man, and marrying his daughter, discovering everyone is a devil, and escaping. Evidently, with riches.

True hero, then?

Not so much- but rather than passing judgement, Beyzaee rewrites Sindbad’s quest using Sindbad himself; through his lens, the new iteration progresses beyond material wealth, ambition, or romantic love, all the while gaining context, support, and humility. (It also becomes HD in the same way Hollywood takes an old science-fiction movie and reworks it into a simple-but-layered, allegorical-albeit-relatable, equidistant, and believable—as much as it can be—story).

Furthermore, the new account has a higher motif: rather than seeking adrenaline, this is a life struggle to find the meaning of life, while grappling the responsibility to find coexistence with all people. The new Sindbad is acquiring knowledge, instead of pillaging goods, and is coached all along into his eighth voyage (and death) by an omnipresent and omnipotent character (the Magician).

When the end is near and Sindbad has finished re-writing his narrative, we’re left wondering, as we humans always have and we always will: what’s the final destination? And when will we get there? Which truth is true? And is the Magician one’s own conscience, drawing closer until, we’re finally, one and the same?