

Simurgh

by Geoffrey Fox

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When the sun strikes her nest in the Tree of Life on the Qaf of Elburz Mountain, the simurgh stretches her neck and wings to shadow the valley below and then takes flight, the downdraft of those wings propelling the seeds of all the plants of the world to the places where they can grow.

Some say the simurgh is an enormous bird with four wings, teeth, and a human face, able to carry off an elephant in her talons. Others say that she is really a flock of birds flying in concert, hence her name *Si murgh*, Persian for “thirty birds”—“thirty” being a way of saying “many.” In either case, one touch of her feathers cures the direst wound, and she may rescue and even suckle lost children.

First seen and sung by seers and singers in Iran, within a few human generations villagers across the mountains in Bactria also sang of the flights of the simurgh. Soon even farther east, on the vast steppes beyond the Oxus, Turkish-speaking herdsmen were celebrating her benevolence and power. And when at last the Oguz tribes of the Turks stormed westward, wielding their recurved bows and their sharp *yatagans* from the backs of quick little horses, seizing or destroying all before them, the simurgh also followed. Easily she crossed the magic air space of the flying snake Zilant of Kazakhstan and the Roc and the dragon Dahāg of Persia, lingered among the messenger angels and the winged horse Buraq over Al-Jazira and Syria, until reaching the skies of the warrior archangels Michael and Gabriel, defenders of the greatest city of the Christian world.

For those Oguz Turks who had abandoned the old ways and now kept the Muslim calendar, it was the month Zilkade of the year 804 of the Hegira. For the Greek-speaking Christian Orthodox inside that city's thick walls, it was June of the year 6909 since God's creation of the world. For the Latin Christians who had come to defend the city or to exploit its turmoil, it was June of Anno Domini 1402, and the eleven-hundred-year-old city of Constantine was on the verge of collapse before the eastern horde.

For the simurgh, it was always Now.

