films that marshal multimillion-dollar machine-generated images in increasingly strident, jam-packed homages to the sheltered enclaves of the pastoral park and the bourgeois family? And what if not the same displaced fears of the monstrous mob can account for the persistence of this duplicitous fantasy? Like its title character in his throne room/projection room, *The Wizard of Oz* continues to wield the forces of technology in an attempt to impose on its audiences a distant and deferential relationship toward the power that lies behind the screen.

## 3

# MONSTERS FROM THE MIDDLE EAST
## Ray Harryhausen's Sinbad Trilogy

It is Europe that articulates the Orient; this articulation is the prerogative, not of a puppet master, but of a genuine creator, whose life-giving power represents, animates, constitutes the otherwise silent and dangerous space beyond familiar boundaries.—Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (1978)

*I*n the realm of movie special effects, the achievements of stop-motion animator Ray Harryhausen admit no equal. For over three decades, from his breakthrough role on the Willis O'Brien vehicle *Mighty Joe Young* (1949) to his swan song, the mythological epic *Clash of the Titans* (1981), Harryhausen not only masterminded individual cinematic visions that remain unsurpassed in style, imaginativeness, and splendor but helped found whole schools of fantasy film to follow: *The Beast from Twenty Thousand Fathoms* (1953) spurred the radioactive-monster-on-the-loose craze. *The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad* (1958) breathed life into the swords-and-sorcery genre. *First Men in the Moon* (1964) paved the way for *Star Wars* and its kin. Conducting the animated portions of his films alone in all but *Joe Young* and *Titans*, equipped solely with optical technology, and backed by budgets typically in the thousands of dollars, Harryhausen brought to life the kinds of otherworldly spectacles that vast teams commanding million-dollar digital machines are presently employed to assemble. And arguably, his effects not only stand up to but surpass those of the present; eerie simulacra of the living, his stop-motion beings cast a dreamlike feel over the whole that is lacking in the literalist reproductions of computer-generated imagery. (Only in one particular, the irksome matting of live actors into location settings, do his films lose credibility; *Jason and the Argonauts* [1963], by many considered the jewel in Harryhausen's crown, outshines the rest in part because its heftier budget

enabled the crew to film the principals on location, obviating the process shots that look so fishy to modern eyes.) Given the ever-burgeoning scale of effects units, moreover, Harryhausen is certain to remain the only individual artist working in feature-length film whose contributions so powerfully account for the films' appeal; no other body of work mates the qualities of humanity, personality, and grandeur so perfectly as Harryhausen's.

Though all of the sentiments I have expressed thus far are sincere, none is particularly original; similar claims have been made by everyone from Harryhausen's lifetime pal Ray Bradbury to his faithful filmographer Jeff Rovin to the founders of his many popular Web sites. What I find remarkable, however, is that such an important and enduring figure, one so essential to the development of fantasy film, has been so disregarded outside practitioner and fan communities, his works erased from critical discourse save for a handful of throwaway references. (For instance, *Earth Versus the Flying Saucers* [1956] crops up now and again in surveys of alien-invasion films, while *Beast* makes the odd appearance in studies of *Godzilla* [1954].)[1] Though the people who create and cherish fantasy film have long paid tribute to Harryhausen's legacy in the form of retrospectives, interviews, and—as with the restaurant named "Harryhausen's" in *Monsters, Inc.* (2001)—intertextual nods, those who study the cinema have seemingly considered his films beneath notice.

This snubbing of Harryhausen, I suspect, has something to do with the belief that fantasy film is a subcinematic, adolescent genre unworthy of serious attention, and that Harryhausen's films, as the most unabashed of the type, must be particularly lightweight. More specifically, critical discourse on the Harryhausen films has been derailed by two interrelated tendencies fostered by his fans and by the artist himself: the first, the tendency to consider his films solely mediums for his stop-motion art; and the second, the tendency to pigeonhole his films as purely escapist fare. In a recap of Harryhausen's career, Ted Newsom evinces both trends: "The films of Ray Harryhausen are entertainment, pure and often simple, . . . Indeed, in Harryhausen's case, the effects *are* the picture. But *what* effects!" ("Ray Harryhausen Story" 25).[2] By these standards, Harryhausen's films can be assessed only by the authenticity of their illusions: if, as most agree, the animation transports us to realms of wonder, the films are marvels; if not, as a few skeptics charge, they are flops. By these standards, one is left with two equally unsatisfying options: to divorce Harryhausen's virtuosity from the total system of his films—a schism between style and substance that, as I have argued, is particularly suspect in the analysis of fantasy film—or, what is in practice the same thing, to make his artistry stand so completely for the total film that they are reduced (or exalted) to transcendent feats of special effects bravura. By these

standards, finally, even the most characteristic approach to fantasy film—the archetypal approach—is doomed to fail, for by these standards the Harryhausen films constitute a charmed bubble, a hermetically sealed realm of fantasy as its own absolute and self-sufficient justification.

Self-evidently, I reject this quarantining of Harryhausen's films. I believe that his films, like all fantasy films, can and should be restored to the specific social ideologies within which they operate. The purpose of this chapter, then, is not simply (or even mostly) to redress Harryhausen's absence from film analysis. More vitally, I address Harryhausen's works to round out my claims about the alienating function of classic fantasy films—even when those films appear purely escapist, vehicles solely for spectacular cinematic illusions. As such, the Harryhausen films on which I will focus are those that have been the most acclaimed for conjuring thoroughly fantastic worlds: the Sinbad trilogy, comprising *The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad* (1958), *The Golden Voyage of Sinbad* (1974), and *Sinbad and the Eye of the Tiger* (1977). I will argue that these films, far from existing outside their cultural contexts, engage in the dominant discourses of their time, discourses of the Arab world as a mysterious, monstrous threat to the West. Indeed, I will illustrate that the Harryhausen Sinbad films are not only compatible with the social-historical approach but especially potent arguments for it: though they may appear simple illustrations of otherness as monstrosity, they turn out to be particularly productive of mobile, historically determinate ideologies of alienation concerning the Middle East.[3] In this respect, the Harryhausen Sinbad films speak for the importance of applying a fine touch to the analysis of fantasy-in-history; the hammer approach, which treats all monster movies as vehicles for demonizing the universal Other, will not work here.

In this respect, too, the Harryhausen Sinbad films are not merely exemplars of a fantasy film tradition of social alienation but are representative of comparable trends within American cinema as a whole. Critics have amply demonstrated that, throughout the history of American motion pictures, no region of the world has been so regularly identified with the exotic and evil as the Middle East. In his encyclopedic survey of Arabs in American film, Jack Shaheen documents over nine hundred films that represent Arabs, the barest handful of which either challenge stock characterizations—oil barons and sexual Lotharios, fundamentalists and terrorists, bedouins and belly dancers—or produce a balanced portrait of Arab nations in their internal or international aspects.[4] Yet despite film scholarship's attention to the cinema's overwhelmingly negative portrayal of Arab peoples, the Sinbad trilogy has, again, escaped notice; with that peculiar passion for purity that marks so much discourse on fantasy film, Harryhausen's Sinbad films are lauded as works of "pure showmanship" (Mandell 80) and hence removed from

the messy, impure world of politics and power. Perhaps, as Leslie Sharman writes of Disney's hotly contested *Aladdin* (1992), this denial of the ideological character of Harryhausen's films reflects the fact that most "think it ludicrous to expect cultural accuracy" from fantasy films (13). Yet as Sharman further notes, one might argue that it is "precisely because of its medium" that such films "should be questioned," for "animation is a highly effective tool for propaganda, its cosy, innocuous image having a special power to palliate unpleasantries and validate stereotypes" (13).[5] Indeed, the void Harryhausen has left in film scholarship may be the best measure of his animated fantasies' reign. To employ Edward Said's terms, viewers and critics alike have been so awed by the master's "life-giving power" over his articulated effigies, they have failed to consider how this "genuine creator," in surpassing the "familiar boundaries" of cinematic space, inscribes the all-too-familiar boundaries of Western power over a "silent and dangerous" non-Western world (57).

## Orientalist Fantasies

The awful events of September 11, 2001, rekindled a deep-seated distrust and hatred of the Arab world that has permeated the West for centuries. As Edward Said documents in his groundbreaking *Orientalism* (1978), hostility toward Arab peoples has its roots in the conflicted relationships of exploitation and interdependence the West has long entertained toward the Middle East: "The Orient," by which Said connotes the Middle East, "is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilization and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other" (1). "European culture," he goes on to say, "gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (3). Born in the medieval vilification of Islam as Christianity's demonic adversary, Orientalism in its modern form deploys religious difference as only one facet within a network of oppositions: "The Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, 'different'; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal'" (40). In Said's view, Western discourse on "the Orient" is at once self-justifying and hallucinatory, establishing its "presence . . . by virtue of its having excluded, displaced, made supererogatory any such *real thing* as 'the Orient'" (21). To employ the model I have used throughout this study, then, Orientalism renders *as if real* ideologies that are founded in social fantasy. And accordingly, though one may cite seemingly "positive" factors within the Orientalist aegis—the Middle East as a land of mystical beauty, deep antiquity, sexual liberty, and so on—what distinguishes Orientalism as a device for the alienation of Arab peoples is its assertion of absolute differ-

ence: like the black/white divide of *Kong,* Orientalist fantasy defines the Arab world as inherently foreign, inferior, and threatening to the West.

Like all foundational works, Said's has not escaped criticism. The principal thrust of revision concerns the book's implication that Orientalist fantasy transcends history, that it is impervious to individual, cultural, or geopolitical circumstances. John MacKenzie, for instance, charges *Orientalism* with furthering the very ideology it critiques, a totalizing ideology that effectively erases Arab peoples—not least by disregarding the creative cross-fertilizations that traversed, transgressed, and transformed the East/West divide. In a related vein, Melani McAlister questions the applicability of a unified, invariant Orientalism to all times and places: "In the last fifty years, the meanings of the Middle East in the United States have been far more mobile, flexible, and rich than the Orientalism binary would allow" (270).[6] These are significant considerations, the more so when one recalls that in Said's own analysis, it is the removal of "the Orient" from history that undergirds the binary of East and West: "The Orientalist attitude," he writes, "shares with magic and with mythology the self-containing, self-reinforcing character of a closed system, in which objects are what they are *because* they are what they are, for once, for all time, for ontological reasons that no empirical material can either dislodge or alter" (70). As such, challenges to Said's thesis should be seen not as a means of denying the existence of the Orientalist binary but as a means of subjecting that binary to history, revealing its diverse sources, shapes, and uses in the formation of cultural artifacts.

In this light, if Said's work remains vital in providing a framework for excavating the material character of colonial texts, it may be criticized for overlooking its own insights into the reciprocal relations of text and context: "The period of immense advance in the institutions and content of Orientalism coincides exactly with the period of unparalleled European expansion" (41), Said argues. However, "to say simply that Orientalism was a rationalization of colonial rule is to ignore the extent to which colonial rule was justified in advance by Orientalism" (39). This model of the mutually sustaining intersection of textual and material sites is particularly amenable to the approach I have adopted in this study, an approach that considers cultural productions to be both constituted *by* and constitutive *of* their historical contexts. Applying this approach to the subject of the present chapter, two points become clear: first, that the tendency to read Harryhausen's films as "pure" fantasies is dangerously reductive in part because it reinscribes the Orientalist flight from history; and second, that the Orientalist binary alone cannot sustain an analysis of films implicated in complex, postwar American attitudes toward the Arab world. Rather, as with the binaries black/white or technical/pastoral, the films' Orientalism must be located within an

elaborate interplay of text and context, with the "fantasy" of Orientalism and the "real" of history not distinct or opposing but interrelated and interpenetrating.

Such a claim is consistent with current readings of Orientalist cinema on the whole. On the one hand, there can be no question that cinematic discourse on the East has proved remarkably durable; indeed, as Robert Stam and Louise Spence argue, "since the beginnings of the cinema coincided with the height of European imperialism" (637), it is unsurprising that the cinema itself should have become both analogue to and instrument of Western power:

> The cinematic and televisual apparatuses, taken in their most inclu-sive sense, might be said to inscribe certain features of European colonialism. The magic carpet provided by these apparatuses flies us around the globe and makes us, by virtue of our subject position, its audiovisual masters. It produces us as subjects, transforming us into armchair conquistadores, affirming our sense of power while making the inhabitants of the Third World objects of spectacle for the First World's voyeuristic gaze. (636)[7]

Within the compass of this panoptic authority, the Orientalist cinema's master-narrative takes shape, as summarized by Ella Shohat in terms perfectly suited to the basic plot of all three Sinbad films: "Heroic status is attributed to the voy-ager . . . come to master a new land and its treasures, the value of which the 'primi-tive' residents had been unaware" (27). Furthermore,

> The colonial films claim to initiate the Western spectator into an unknown culture. This is valid even for films set in "exotic" lands and ancient times that do *not* employ Western characters . . . yet whose oriental heroes/heroines are played by Western stars. . . . Any possibility of dialogic interaction and of a dialectical representation of the East/West relation is excluded from the outset. The films thus reproduce the colonialist mechanism by which the Orient, rendered as devoid of any active historical or narrative role, becomes the ob-ject of study and spectacle. (31–32)

Yet for all the power and persistence of this master-narrative, it cannot be mapped intact onto Orientalist films arising from diverse periods and circumstances. The risks of doing so are implicit in Shohat's synopsis—for as she makes plain, the Orientalist project relies precisely on the illusion that its own discourse is time-less and monolithic, rather than being embedded in the particularities of an imperial history. Therefore, even when the Middle East is imaged as, in L. Carl Brown's words, "a strange, never-never land" with "little or no impact on what

Americans [see] as the 'real world'" (20)—an image that had its bellwether in the 1921 Valentino production of *The Sheik*, and that persists in films such as *Ishtar* (1987) and *The Mummy* (1999)—to circumscribe these films within "the domain of fantasy, pure and simple" (22) is to reproduce the films' own discourse, to minimize their intricacies and dull their cultural instrumentalities. (One has only to recall the climactic scene in *The Sheik*, which eerily echoes *The Birth of a Nation* in picturing the white-robed minions of the "good"—European—sheik riding to deliver the heroine from defilement at the hands of the "bad"—dark-skinned—desert bandit, to locate this seemingly escapist romance in the specifics of 1920s American discourse on race and difference.) As Matthew Bernstein sums up, "simplifying films to a structured opposition between East and West cannot account for these films' specific articulation of power relations [or] for their compelling appeal to audiences" (11). However Orientalist cinema may attempt to distance and dismiss, close reading of individual films enables one to excavate the tensions, emphases, and ellipses within these films and in so doing to reveal their placement within the shifting dynamics of American-Arab relations and representations.

A brief history of U.S. involvement in the Middle East during the period of the Sinbad films' production will help ground an analysis of postwar Orientalist cinema as a situated, interested activity, one that both reproduces and produces American discourse on the Arab world.[8] Prior to World War II, though the United States had long looked to the Middle East as a fertile ground for trade and missionary labors, in the eyes of most Americans the region seemed, as Burton Kaufman writes, "a strange and alien place with which the United States had far less contact than with Europe" (1). In the interwar years, ceding control over the region to Britain and France, the United States remained, in Barry Rubin's words, "far more spectator than actor in the Arab world" (247). For a number of interrelated reasons, however, the end of World War II marked the genesis of a profound change in the United States' relationship toward the Middle East. To begin with, the battle over the creation of the state of Israel tested the nation's claim to moral leadership in the postwar period. At the same time, the shift from contesting the Axis Powers to containing the Soviet Union began to bring the strategic importance of the Middle East into focus; due to its geographic proximity to the Soviet Union, its evident political instability, and its seemingly limitless oil reserves, the Middle East appeared a likely battleground in the struggle between capitalism and communism. This possibility was heightened by the gradual withdrawal of the region's colonial overseers, which created a power vacuum that, in the eyes of leaders such as Dwight D. Eisenhower, "must be filled by the United States before it is filled by Russia" (qtd. in Fraser 73). At the dawn of the Cold

War, the Middle East was thus positioned to assume a significance undreamed of in the prewar period.

Yet this new vision of the Middle East did not coalesce immediately. For a variety of reasons—the nation's need to recover from the trauma of world war; its policing of the more evident threat in North Korea; and, frankly, its suspicion of what seemed the byzantine nature of Arab politics—there remained, in David Lesch's words, "a good deal of confusion" over "what exactly [American] policy toward the Middle East should be" (80). Thus during much of the 1950s, a wariness of entanglement in the Middle East marked the nation's policy. For instance, though the United States granted Israel immediate recognition after its 1948 declaration of statehood, significant military aid to the Jewish state was not forthcoming until the 1960s. Then, too, through much of the 1950s, the United States sought ways to act within the protective embrace, or under the cover, of its wartime allies. For example, 1950 saw the signing of the Tripartite Agreement, by which the United States, Britain, and France agreed to limit the buildup of arms in the region. In 1955, meanwhile, though the United States may well have been instrumental in engineering the Baghdad Pact, a military alliance between Britain and the so-called northern tier of the Middle East (Turkey, Iraq, Pakistan, and Iran), the United States itself remained conspicuously absent as a signatory. That America's leaders were watchful of developments in the Middle East is proved by the nation's covert support of the 1953 revolt against Mohammad Mossadegh, the nationalist leader of Iran; that such actions remained fitful suggests a wariness of arousing anti-American sentiment, an uncertainty over the workings of power in the region, and a hope that the European presence might render sustained intervention unnecessary.

The 1956 Suez crisis at once exemplified and ended this policy of selective detachment, as it made plain what the United States had been reluctant to admit: the former imperial powers had lost their ability to police the region. The seeds of the crisis were sown in 1952, when a military coup led by General Muhammad Naguib overthrew Egypt's King Farouk. Naguib was succeeded in 1954 by Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser, who displayed the traits that America and its European allies most feared: an unflinching support of Arab self-determination and a willingness to court favor and cut deals with the Soviet Union. At the center of nationalist and Pan-Arab movements for the next fifteen years, Nasser took a dramatic step toward curtailing Western influence in the Middle East when he nationalized the Suez Canal Company on July 26, 1956, an act calculated both to defy and to drain a European community deeply dependent on the flow of oil through the Suez. Within months, Britain and France, in concert with Israel, had launched an attack on Nasser's nation; had the United States backed the

offensive, Egypt would certainly have been forced to yield. But despite Nasser's links to the Kremlin, despite a growing impression among U.S. policy makers that the Egyptian president was, as John Foster Dulles saw him, "an extremely dangerous fanatic" bent on regional domination (qtd. in Freiberger 167), the United States refused to enter into the conflict, seeking instead to negotiate a peaceful resolution and, failing that, to bring economic pressure to bear on its allies in order to end the hostilities. The United States' motivations for this course of action were complex and far from consistent; though the desire not to rouse anti-American emotion dictated prudence, the belief that world socialism stood behind Nasser's regime might have seemed to call for an armed response. That such a response did not develop indicates that, as late as 1956, the conception of the Middle East as deadly nemesis had not yet become fully ingrained in the American cultural imagination.

Ironically, however, by exposing the pretense of British and French ascendancy, the United States catapulted itself into the position whereby its own nascent fears of Middle Eastern instability and extremism began to be realized. In 1957, less than a year after the Suez crisis, the United States took two actions that revealed its anxieties about the volatile nature of the Arab world: on the one hand, the CIA backed a Syrian military coup against a procommunist government; on the other, the Eisenhower Doctrine, which promised economic and military aid to Middle Eastern countries threatened by Soviet influence, was signed into law. Within the next year, the United States had twice applied the doctrine, once by activating sea forces during a Jordanian monarchical crisis and once by deploying ground troops to Lebanon during that nation's civil war. Within the next few years, the United States had further alienated the Arab nations by stepping up financial and military support of Israel. By the early 1960s, America had thus committed itself to the course of action most likely to confirm its own monstrous image of the Arab world: taking on the role of diplomatic, economic, and military heavy in the Middle East, the nation had played a part in igniting the passions that are still felt, and in increasingly terrible forms, to this day.

Thus it was that, as T. G. Fraser notes, the 1960s and the early 1970s "saw the Middle East develop from an area where the United States had interests but no deep commitments into one of Washington's main priorities in foreign policy" (77). The nation's already hazardous position in the region was exacerbated by a number of developments during the 1960s: the birth of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in 1960; the growth of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) from 1964 to 1968; and the Arab-Israeli war of 1967, by which Israel dramatically increased its territory, military dominance, and reputation for imperialism. A year after the war, Lyndon Johnson drew an ominous

parallel: "Today in two areas of danger and conflict—the Middle East and Vietnam—events drive home the difficulty of making peace" (qtd. in Spiegel 119). In part, this difficulty was occasioned by the United States' new role as Israel's largest supplier of arms; the trade-off in securing Israel as a partner was, in Kaufman's words, "further polarization of the Arab world, further Arab militancy, further Soviet influence in the Middle East, and further erosion in American relations with most Arab nations" (64). In the eyes of U.S. policy makers, the early years of the 1970s produced yet more evidence that the Arab world represented a mortal threat to the United States and its principal Middle Eastern ally: the 1970 hijacking of airliners and the 1972 kidnapping of Israeli Olympians by Palestinian militants added the random ingredient of terror to the already explosive mix. The nadir of U.S.-Arab relations arrived in 1973, the year in which Syria and Egypt launched devastating military strikes against Israel in what is variously termed the Yom Kippur, Ramadan, or (more neutrally) October War. Not only did this conflict place the United States and the Soviet Union on full nuclear alert but the ensuing OPEC oil embargo of 1973–74 meant that all three tenets of the nightmare vision Leon Hadar identifies as the "Arab bogeyman" scenario had fallen into place: "Washington was programmed to expect that, without American military and diplomatic leadership, any Middle Eastern crisis might lead to a world war, an oil embargo, or the destruction of Israel" (10). Whereas in the 1950s the Middle East had been to a great extent an enigma, by the early 1970s developments in the region were routinely magnified into potential global conflagrations.

Not surprisingly, this period also saw the rise, or the hardening, of anti-Arab stereotypes throughout American society; if during the 1950s Arabs had lurked as strange, vaguely hostile figures on the margins of American consciousness, during the late 1960s and early 1970s the market was saturated with high-profile images casting them as public enemy number one. At the most restrained, Arabs were chided for pursuing policies of "oil warfare," their "strategy of squeeze" indicative of "the rise of Arab power" ("Arabs'" 88). Far less charitably, letter-to-the-editor writers cursed Arabs as "the rulers of the world," who threatened to turn the nation into "an Arab lackey licking the oil off their feet," and whose actions led one writer to long for the good old days of Western domination: "I understand more clearly now the rationale of imperialism."[9] In (pseudo) scholarly discourse, meanwhile, throwbacks to eighteenth-century Orientalism proliferated. Cast as "a human type which readily and frequently throws off the restraints of discipline and . . . is likely to go on a rampage" (Patai 162–63), Arabs were constructed as the West's absolute antithesis: "The Westerner is stupefied by Arab violence. After a Palestinian terrorist attack he will say, 'But it's all so

senseless!' This is to expect something logical from the fundamentally irrational. When projected outwards Arab violence is non-selective; the identity of the victims is immaterial. For the Arab, violence in itself is consolatory" (Laffin 131). Such convictions were echoed throughout the canons of visual culture: pictured as vulturous, turbaned sheiks in political cartoons, reduced to rifle-toting, kaffiyeh-swathed terrorists on evening news clips, Arabs became synonymous with mad acts of murder and mayhem. Following the trend, feature films such as *Network* (1976; portraying an Arab takeover of network news), *Prisoner in the Middle* (1974; depicting Palestinian terrorists), and *Black Sunday* (1977; still more Palestinian terrorists, this time at the Super Bowl) reinforced the predominant image of Arabs as monstrous threats to the nation's values and safety, indeed to its very life.

If, however, the immediate issue of early-1970s events was a torrent of anger and recrimination against Arab peoples, this period also produced two more sanguine results: a less lopsided assessment of Arab claims and, along with it, a deepening sense of urgency to resolve the region's conflicts. The history of these developments was multifaceted, one factor being the changing face of events in the region itself: when PLO chairman Yasser Arafat movingly addressed the United Nations General Assembly in 1974, or when Israeli military units strafed Palestinian refugee camps the same year in retaliation against alleged terrorist attacks, it became increasingly difficult for some Americans to determine who was friend and who was foe. Such qualms might not have arisen, however, if not for concurrent seismic shifts in the nation's own political landscape: with the civil rights and anti–Vietnam War movements having sensitized the nation to the fate of oppressed peoples at home and abroad, many Americans were prepared to view the plight of the Palestinians, and the grievances of their Arab supporters, in terms other than the absolutist framework of U.S. (or Israeli) moral rectitude. Perhaps most decisive in deepening America's resolve to mediate the Middle East conflict, however, was the palpable evidence that continued turmoil in the region would mean continued danger, discomfort, and unrest in the United States; no longer a faraway prospect the nation could safely put off, peace within the Arab world had come to seem intimately and imminently entwined with America's very survival. American diplomatic successes during this period were limited (though they were crowned by the Camp David Peace Accord); the failure to secure a lasting Pax Arabia need hardly be belabored. My point, however, is not to second-guess from a present-day vantage. Rather, it is to argue that the latter years of the 1970s saw a change in American relations toward the Middle East perhaps as profound as that which had transpired toward the close of the 1950s: marked by aggressive, anxious diplomacy and cautious (if, once again, anxious) optimism,

this period saw the effort to forge a more comprehensive, balanced settlement of the region's conflicts than had hitherto been attempted.

To simplify considerably, then, one may trace three overlapping but identifiable stages of American involvement in the Middle East during the three decades following World War II: limited engagement, wholesale commitment, and hopeful mediation. At the same time, the changing fortunes of the United States in relation to the Middle East correspond roughly to three dominant images of the Arab world: as an unfathomable vortex into which the nation is reluctantly and ineluctably drawn; as an inherently evil, personalized menace; and as a more ambiguous, ambivalent power, still treacherous yet potentially treatable. It is my contention that the three Sinbad films, in sequence, parallel these three geopolitical stages and, as such, that their dominant tenor accords with each stage's representations of the Arab world. Such parallels may be difficult to extract from the films, overlain as they are with the more obvious Orientalist master-narrative. At the same time, I would not wish to contend that the differences among the films are clear-cut or absolute; to confine each film to a single ideological niche—especially when two of the three appeared within three years of each other—would drastically schematize the nature of historical-cultural productions. I do wish to argue, however, that close examination of each film will reveal significant differences among their narrative and representational strategies; if in their broad outlines the Sinbad films suggest an Orientalist freedom from history, in their particular features they prove considerably more subtle—and as such, more potent, if problematic—vehicles of social alienation than the simplistic fantasies they are routinely understood to be. In my readings of the Sinbad films, I am guided by two beliefs: first, that because the Orientalist metanarrative is so pervasive throughout American culture (including film culture), it may actually be, however paradoxically, *more* responsive to current events than the norm; and second, that because this narrative is so resistant to scrutiny, it may, again paradoxically, provide a particularly congenial environment for clandestine—by which I do not imply intentional—commentary on the real. The Sinbad films, then, enable one to observe not only the complex ways in which cultural productions participate in the histories that produce them but, more specifically, the ways in which, as McAlister writes, "representations of the Middle East . . . helped to make the area and its people meaningful within the cultural and political context in the United States" (2).

Before elaborating on this thesis, however, two further caveats are in order. First, though I will insist on locating the Sinbad films within the history of United States-Arab relations, at the same time I will resist reading the films as forthright political allegories, with Sinbad as the United States, the kingdoms he protects

as Israel, Sokurah as Nasser, Koura as OPEC, Zenobia as the PLO, and so on. An exaggerated reaction against the tendency to divorce these films from history, such clever matching of text and context actually leeches the films of their polymorphous power. For similar reasons, I must abjure any notion that the Sinbad films, by virtue of the fact that they are set in the Middle East, are either *more* representative of Middle Eastern conflicts than other concurrent films or *solely* representative of such conflicts. It would be quite possible to demonstrate that films seemingly remote from the Middle East are implicated in pervasive cultural desires and anxieties concerning the region; conversely, it would be possible to read the Sinbad films in terms wholly distant from the arena of international power relations, or in terms of other such relations (most obvious being the nation's disastrous military legacies in Korea and Vietnam).[10] My point, then, is not to enshrine or confine the Sinbad films within any static cultural niche. My point, rather, is to illustrate that of the countless productions in which U.S. concerns about the Arab world came to be focused, the Sinbad trilogy is one such site, an intriguing and fertile one but neither a definitive nor a conclusive one. Reading this site opens up the possibility not only of examining how diverse and far-flung are the manifestations of history within popular culture, but more specifically of affirming even the most fantastic of films' affinities with particular histories of social alienation.

## Mystery, Menace, Mediation: Sinbad in the Middle East

Toward the close of the extended introduction that sets up the main adventure in *The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad*, the princess Parisa, betrothed of the film's hero, utters the following line: "The world has grown very large overnight." It is a suggestive snatch of dialogue in the context of the American 1950s, a comment that bespeaks the United States' awakening to its role, risks, and responsibilities in a new global order. In the narrower U.S.–Middle East nexus, it is a line that underscores national anxieties over the meaning and significance of the Arab world, a world that was only haltingly being integrated into America's mental map and that was, according to the producers of the film, unfit for location shooting (they chose Spain instead) due to its "unsettled conditions."[11] Were Parisa's line spoken in virtually any other fifties-era film, its historical resonances would be unmistakable.

Spoken as it is in a Ray Harryhausen Sinbad film, however, the political implications of Parisa's line have passed unnoticed and unremarked. That this is so may be attributable to the cinematic packaging with which the line is surrounded, or swamped. For one thing, the line in its immediate context is meant as a whimsical, if painful, joke: it is not in fact the world that has grown larger, but Parisa

who has grown smaller, reduced to doll size by the malevolent magician Sokurah. For another, a special effects shot—the matting of the miniature princess into the life-size setting occupied by Sinbad—fills the screen while her line is spoken; intent on the magic of this image, viewers are presumably paying little attention to the lovers' banter. The result of these devices is that Parisa's tantalizing words are obscured beneath a heavy veil of Orientalist distancing, not to say trivializing, effects. To say this is not to imply that Harryhausen, or anyone involved in the film, wished to produce an underground morality play and so designed the shot in such a way as to parry its ideological thrust. It is, rather, to say that during the era in which the film was made, few Americans—including the filmmakers—were prepared to recognize their own historically situated anxieties within the film's presumably pure, innocent Orientalist trappings.

Indeed, as I have said, the Sinbad films' deployment of the conventional tricks of the Orientalist cinema's trade continue to deflect attention from their historically concrete discourse regarding the United States and the Arab world. Since in this generic respect the three Sinbad films are roughly similar, I will limit myself to touching on the Orientalist master-narrative at this point, suggesting its appearance in *Seventh Voyage* before moving on to explore the insufficiency of this narrative alone in accounting for each film's cultural work. The opening credits of *Seventh Voyage* key the Orientalist master-narrative: playing over images, somewhat in the manner of an illuminated map, of monstrous creatures on rocky isles alternating with the most readily identifiable of markers (bedouin tents and camels, walled cities with spires and minarets), the credits begin the work of distancing this world from the viewer's own. Bernard Hermann's sprightly, Middle Eastern–flavored music completes this initial encounter with the foreign: guided by the score's driving rhythms and by the roaming camera, which dissolves from one corner of the visible area to another, the viewer realizes the parallel fantasies of complete physical separation from, and complete visual authority over, this outlandish land.

Within the film-world, the mise-en-scène operates to confirm the fairy-tale nature of the proceedings; the standard turbans, scimitars, gongs, dancing girls, sedan chairs, and other icons of Hollywood's Middle East reinforce the impression of the film existing within the eternal fantasy of Orientalist film alone. As one minor indication of this persistent, even audacious, otherworldliness, when Parisa first appears, she is carting a brightly colored parrot, an inexplicable companion but for its hopeful attempt to ensure that the unmistakably Anglo actor who plays the princess will not be taken as such. A more prevalent, and considerably less playful, illustration of the film's investment in the Orientalist narrative of absolute difference involves its depiction of the crew of convicts Sinbad

raises for the return voyage to the island of Colossa. Not only are these men the most physically stereotyped members of the cast, with dark skin, black pointed beards, golden earrings, and thick accents, but their behavior typifies the cowardice, mendacity, gluttony, inconstancy, and depravity for which the screen Arab was renowned: criminals to begin with, they attempt to steal Sinbad's ship (only to plead for his help when they hit rough waters), guzzle wine from the island's enchanted stream and slay the baby roc to glut their bellies, and foolishly linger amidst the Cyclops's treasure horde, draping themselves in jewels and provoking another armed conflict with their abstemious captain when he tries to reason with them. The convict crew, moreover, provides a pretext for the film's most objectionable moment: when one careless sailor falls to his death, the pious captain intones, "Allah knows many ways of dealing with hungry men." The film's only reference to the divine beyond a few perfunctory prayers, this pearl is presented as if it were a proverb, characteristic of the low value the Muslim world places on human life.

Moreover, the film's special effects are quite in keeping with, indeed indispensable to, its Orientalism. To begin with, as the principal site of spectacle, the effects provide an impression of mastery over the Orient akin to Harryhausen's own mastery over his articulated puppets; most stunningly realized in the sequence in which the blinded Cyclops gropes after the hero, the film offers its audience unilateral, unencumbered vision and control over the Orient. At the same time, the monsters exemplify the discourse of absolute difference, their utterly fantastic nature removing them from contact with the viewer's reality. Indeed, in the case of the Cyclops, the film takes a further step toward ensuring difference by depriving the (articulated) creature of articulation: the Cyclopes "have no speech," Sokurah assures Sinbad, and thus the magic lamp "is useless to them." This is, of course, unlikely: the horned giants, who craft cages, clubs, and stools, who make fire, and who cook their meat, would almost certainly possess some form of spoken language. But beyond the extreme difficulty of creating a convincing illusion of speech with latex stop-motion puppets—a problem Harryhausen circumvented in *Clash of the Titans* by employing a live actor for the speaking parts of the animated character Calibos—depriving the denizens of the non-Western world of their voice is a hallmark of the Orientalist project. As David Spurr writes, there is a long-standing

> rhetorical tradition in which non-Western peoples are essentially denied the power of language and are represented as mute or incoherent. They are denied a voice in the ordinary idiomatic sense— not permitted to speak—and in a more radical sense—not recog-

nized as capable of speech. . . . The incoherence of the Oriental, in this view, is related to an incapacity to enter into the basic systems of thought that make civilized life possible. (104)

Taken as a whole, then, *Seventh Voyage* strives to produce a Middle Eastern fantasy world as far from the realities of "civilized"—Western—life as possible.

Ultimately, however, the Orientalist master-narrative proves inadequate to achieving its goal. Orientalism, I have noted, asserts the West's absolute authority to construct the East, an authority most readily secured if the East can be so fully fantasized as to seem to exist outside history. Yet as Sharman notes, this retreat from history must itself be placed within history: the making of Orientalist films "during a time when the Middle East is so politically volatile suggests an underlying nostalgia for orientalist narratives which offer heroes and villains rather than the morally ambiguous characters" who dominate the world stage (11). In this light, for all its proclamations of power over the fantasy land of the Orient, *Seventh Voyage* turns out to be awash in the anxieties over authority that marked American views of the Middle East during the postwar period. From 1950 to 1958, regional instability fostered by the withdrawal of the European powers, the growth of Arab nationalism, and Western (including U.S.) counterinsurgency against Soviet-backed governments brought down King Abdullah of Jordan, King Farouk of Egypt, Mohammad Mossadegh of Iran, Shukri el-Kuwatly of Syria, and King Faisal II of Iraq. Under these "unsettled conditions," American attempts to forge partnerships and alliances—or even, in the case of *Seventh Voyage*, to secure location footage—were both erratic and, more often than not, bootless. Within the film-world of *Seventh Voyage*, the chronic instability and insecurity of the time take the form of a profound suspicion concerning the origin, nature, use, and usefulness of power in the Middle East. In this respect, rather than representational power over the Arab world becoming the film's uncontested province, the uncertainty of power within the Arab world becomes a principal subject of the film's representations. This does not mean that *Seventh Voyage* is not an Orientalist film. It does mean that the film's illusion that its Middle Eastern discourse exists outside history is just that—an illusion, one that strives unsuccessfully to cloak the historical grounds within which it arose.

The uncertainties concerning the West's position in the Arab world operate from the film's first sequence and do not relent by its last. *Seventh Voyage* opens on a shot of a ship at sail, gliding slowly through a nighttime mist as an ominous note plays on the sound track. This shot is, of course, a standard Orientalist opening; a daytime version appears, for example, in a key pretext for *Seventh Voyage*, Alexander Korda's 1940 film *The Thief of Bagdad*. At the same time, however, this opening shot activates the historically rich image of the nation-as-ves-

sel, an image reinforced by the following shot of the stalwart (and turbanless at this point, notably Western) captain standing at the wheel, staring intently into the dark. When Sinbad calls for a sounding, his crew expresses mistrust: "If there was land, it would be such that no man would dare set foot upon." The surprising discovery of land underscores both the captain's prescience and the unpredictable conditions of his world. Likewise, the first mate's prayer that "we may find nothing more" than food and water on the island of Colossa captures both the irresolute nature of the common (Middle Eastern) seaman and the inadequacy of such fervent prayers—for of course, what they find on Colossa dictates the entire course of the adventure to follow. The dialogue that caps the opening scene, in which Parisa's lady-in-waiting berates Sinbad for "taking [Parisa] from the comfort and safety" of home and in which the princess defends her lover, claiming that he is "not responsible for the mysterious winds that blew us off course," heightens the dominant note of this expository sequence: the unpredictability of events when one departs home port for lands unknown, sailing (in Sinbad's later words) "uncharted waters" in the company of a "doubtful crew" and with an even more doubtful mission or end.

This discourse on the perilous nature of foreign entanglements deepens as the film progresses. On Colossa, Sinbad, brave but headstrong, nearly leads his crew into mortal danger: marveling at the stone face carved into the cliff, which he likens to the work of "some ancient civilization," and determined to "see where that stone mouth leads," he is narrowly saved by, of all persons, the magician who will turn out to be his foe, the man's emergence from the cave preventing Sinbad from literally walking into the mouth of the beast. That Sinbad applies the term *ancient civilization* to the monument connects the Valley of the Cyclopes to the Middle East, the "ancient civilization" from which the West was born and to which, as colonizers and self-designated saviors of the region's supposedly half-bestial peoples, the West has regularly returned. That Sinbad has been chastened by his near-fatal encounter with this backward world is evident when he steadfastly refuses to aid Sokurah in recovering the lamp and its "weird power": "The Cyclops will be on guard now," he warns, and in any event "we are on an important mission for the Caliph of Bagdad. Our presence there means the difference between war and peace. I'll not risk that by turning back." Unswayed by the magician's offer of "a king's ransom" in jewels—which he empties over a map, so that monetary and territorial interests are visually linked—Sinbad expresses the nation's hesitancy to become involved in an alluring and alarming land of fabled wealth, sudden violence, unaccountable beings, and weird power.

The lull in the action after the escape from Colossa serves to establish character relations, to flesh out the back story, to situate the viewer more fully in an

Orientalist milieu, and to provide audience and animator alike a breathing spell (though it does include one of Harryhausen's flashiest creations, the snake-woman). At the same time, however, this period of relative quiet permits the aura of anxiety cultivated in the prologue to mount, not only as regards the film's manifest conflict—the magician's monomaniacal quest for the lamp—but in respect to other, less insistent elements of the action. For instance, in the scene of the banquet honoring Parisa's father, the Sultan of Chandra, the film identi-fies multiple threats to the safety and stability of the land. The sultan himself, an Orientalist caricature constantly muttering maledictions beneath his beard, serves as a reminder of the ferocity lurking below the polished, glamorous sur-face of Middle Eastern opulence and decadence. Similarly, Sokurah's counter-feited prophecy—according to which "mysterious and evil forces are at work" to produce "great disaster," a regional war instead of a royal wedding—recalls the precarious, hair-trigger quality of war and peace in this land. For even if Sokurah *is* bearing false witness to achieve his dastardly ends, his prophecy nearly comes true: finding the shrunken Parisa the following day (and, like everyone else, improbably never suspecting the magician of the misdeed), the sultan threat-ens Bagdad with the very fate Sokurah had "foreseen."

Indeed, pursuing this line of inquiry, it is intriguing to note that, as Sokurah himself pleads when Sinbad floors him for his lie, he was *asked* to prognosticate; if he prevaricated instead, the sultan and the caliph had engineered the condi-tions for his fib. (Given the sultan's volatile temper, moreover, to foresee the collapse of the peace process hardly constitutes a whopper.) The fallout from Sokurah's prophecy further suggests the razor-thin difference between lie and truth, war and peace: in the brief scene preceding Parisa's enchantment, as even the stalwart Sinbad expresses anxieties about Sokurah's prophecy, his lover reas-sures him by crooning, "I'll dream of the dangers he predicted, so you can res-cue me." Their kiss dissolves to the scene of Parisa in bed, where "the dangers [Sokurah] predicted" do indeed come true; the "evil dreams" he foresaw are re-alized. In this regard, even the most dreamlike, fantastic element of the Bagdad sequence, Harryhausen's wildly imaginative snake-woman (whom the sultan and the caliph do indeed call a "dream"), becomes part of the overriding sense of anxiety over foreign affairs: seduced into performing by Sokurah's promise of "power," Parisa's handmaiden becomes a monstrous fusion of unlike parts that cannot coexist peacefully but must rebel against each other. The snake-woman thus dramatizes the dangers of trusting in unknown powers or bedfellows, as she embodies the fear of literal entanglement within the beast's coils.

The portrait that the early movements of *Seventh Voyage* draw, then, is one of a world marked by inexplicable forces, doubts over the validity of one's percep-

tions and judgments, and, above all, reservations about the location, extent, and uses of power. It would be tempting to attribute these features to flaws within the film's script or to its desire to flay the "inscrutable Oriental" hobbyhorse. However, not only is each of these dismissals a mere excuse packaged as an explanation, but both overlook the fact that the film's incongruities, far from being quirks, are so consistent—and insistent—that they constitute the very texture of the film's discourse. Consider, for instance, how often the film raises questions about power: "Who's in command of the great crossbow?" a sailor asks. "I do not understand the power of this lamp," Sinbad says. And moments later, he asks Sokurah, "What protects your castle from [the Cyclopes]?" Consider, too, how frequently expectations are reversed: Confident that the convicts "can do nothing" against him, Sinbad is proved wrong—almost dead wrong—in the very next shot. Conversely, twitting Sokurah's curse aboard ship, the rebellious convicts are nearly destroyed by the Harpies in the scene that follows. Given the film's outward candor—the fact that much of what the characters find wrapped in intolerable obscurity the audience can plainly observe—the prodigies that suffuse *Seventh Voyage* cannot be passed off as the necessary atmosphere for an exotic, quixotic Sinbad film. Rather, the aura of dark intimation serves the function, is the medium, of the film's unmistakable disquiet over the conditions of the real.

Toward this end, it is notable that the most fantastic elements of *Seventh Voyage*—the magician Sokurah, the genie Barani, and the animated monsters—not only enable the anxieties about power to be most fully activated within the film-world but resist penetration or resolution by the audience as well. Of the villains in the three Sinbad films, Sokurah is the most enigmatic; his motivations throughout the film, though they may appear straightforward, are in truth notably murky. After his initial rescue, as he attempts to bribe Sinbad into returning to Colossa, he announces, grimly and with finality, "There is nothing I would not do to regain [the lamp]." Yet as he speaks this line, his face, in close-up, passes into shadow, an indication that his motives, if evil, are oddly unaccountable. Sinbad attributes the sorcerer's desire for the lamp to a kind of madness—"his life is distorted with this single, driving wish"—but this explanation simply rephrases what is readily observable: Sokurah wants the lamp very, very much. At another point, Sinbad terms him "ambitious." But ambitious for *what*? Again, for the lamp. Yet with all the film's focus on the lamp, it is worth asking what Sokurah plans to *do* with the lamp if he should regain it. He is already a remarkably powerful figure, with the ability to effect dramatic physical metamorphoses with the mere application of a potion (as in the transfiguration of the snake-woman) or the mere look of his eyes (as in the animation of the skeleton). And the lamp, as he himself has announced, has merely "protective" powers: "The man who holds this treasure