

# The Matter of the Cadi, the Dervish, and the Ghûls

*by Phil Masters*

*(Note: This story first appeared in issue 14 of **Scheherazade** magazine. It also subsequently actually won a popularity poll among the magazine's readers. Unfortunately, the original word processor file became lost or corrupted somewhere along the line... So this file is actually a graphical scan. Sorry for any inconvenience caused.)*

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# The Matter Of The CADI, the DERVISH and The GHÛLS

by Phil Masters

"A dervish?" inquired the cadi. "Why would anyone lay a complaint against a dervish?"

The two guards in front of him exchanged sidelong glances. It was clear that they had not previously given much thought to the specifics of this case, and now they were just beginning to realise that it was going to make their employer Ask Questions. In fact, if things went really badly, he might begin to find the business Interesting.

The cadi had the appearance of a plump sybarite, and for the most part, he avoided effort - hence his girth. However, once he began to find something Interesting, he forswore all thoughts of rest - for himself or his employees.

"We don't know, master," said one, a grain more bold than the other.

"Excessive theological speculation during the hours of darkness, perhaps?"

"We don't know, master."

"Of course, some folk do find dervishes a trifle *irritating*," mused the cadi. "Probably because they insist on living simply and not grasping after gold and jewels. But most people consider them not worth paying attention to. Perhaps the fellow isn't a dervish at all, hmm? Rather, someone impersonating such?"

"We don't know, master."

"However, neither being a dervish, nor pretending to be one when one is not, has yet been made a crime."

"We... No, master."

"The pious sometimes accuse them of sacrilege," the cadi went on, "but no-one has bothered bringing such a charge in this city for many years. In any case, it would go to the religious judges, not to me. Ah well, there is but one way of shedding light into such dark corners."

The guard was feeling very bold. "Yes, my master."

"Ah, so you know what it is?"

"Uh... No, my master."

The cadi smiled the smile of a man faced by a precocious but very young child. "It's very simple," he said. "Bring them all in and we'll ask them."

Moments later, his court - which was no more than the largest reception-room of his house, cleared of all but the most austere rugs and one comfortable (and necessarily substantial) cushion for the cadi himself - was invaded by a crowd of vociferous, gesticulating

townsfolk. The *cadi's* guards struggled to keep them grouped together (with some success) and quiet (with none). Somewhere in the midst of this small mob, the *cadi* could glimpse a hunched figure in a heavily-patched woollen robe and a battered turban. The dervish was held between two burly artisans, and seemed to be looking about him with amiable interest.

The *cadi* pondered for a moment. While the idea of impersonating a dervish seemed bizarre, it was possible that motives could exist for such an eccentricity.

The cries of the mob remained excessive. The *cadi* signed to the largest of his guards.

"Al-Rojji."

"Yes, master?"

"Do you have your cudgel with you?"

"Yes, master!"

"Ah yes, I thought so." The *cadi* raised his voice. "Kindly advance on these people, *slowly*, swinging it. Desist only when silence prevails."

Al-Rojji smiled broadly, and started to obey. However, the crowd became silent before he reached them. He was evidently disappointed, and not entirely inclined to stop his advance, but by raising his voice once more, his employer was able to make him pause.

"Now," said the *cadi* to the citizens before him, "what is this matter that is so outrageous that you good Muslims feel obliged to bring it to my attention?"

The crowd became noisy once more, but fell silent as Al-Rojji recommenced his advance.

"Perhaps one of you good folk will explain," said the *cadi*, once Al-Rojji had been persuaded to pause once again. "Appoint one spokesman from among your number, immediately."

After some small consultation, one man among the crowd pushed his way to the fore. The *cadi* found his face slightly familiar.

"Your name?" he enquired.

"Mukbil abu Mukbil ibn Fadhl," was the answer, delivered with the manner of one who is confident of his righteousness.

"Mukbil?" asked the *cadi*.

"Sir?"

"Of what is this dervish accused?"

"Murder, sir."

The *cadi* raised a bushy eyebrow. "Really? That is a serious charge. Who is he accused of slaying?"

"A caravan, sir."

The *cadi* coughed briefly. "An *entire*

caravan?"

"Yes, sir."

"Not a large caravan, I take it?"

"Sir?"

"How many people were there in this caravan?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Then it seems that you are bringing a very vague and unspecific charge," said the *cadi* (noting as he spoke that the dervish in question had ceased looking about the room, and was now standing, still hunched, gazing pleasantly at the *cadi* himself). "And yet you speak of murder. That seems to me very like slander, which is itself a serious crime."

"Sir?" Mukbil was possibly not following every step of the *cadi's* logic, but he evidently understood enough to see that his firm accusations against the dervish had somehow failed to lead where they *ought* to, and to feel slightly hurt by the turn of events. The *cadi* felt a twinge of sympathy for him.

"May I suggest that you, and your friends and neighbours there, take a moment to arrive at an estimate of the number of alleged victims of this crime? When you are done, we can proceed with the investigation."

Mukbil drew himself to his full height, which was a little less than the average. "That is not truly necessary, sir. The caravan was led by my partner in business, Farukh, and from his letters, and the profit we expected of this venture, I believe that a safe minimum estimate would be thirty persons."

"And dervishes are often accused of laziness," the *cadi* murmured. "Ah, me. Perhaps you might explain the case against the fellow."

"Well, sir, this vagabond, this rogue, he arrived in town only two mornings ago, and set up in the bazaar, juggling and reciting poems. We thought nothing of it - he looks harmless enough, I'll grant you - but then, only today, a caravan arrives from Tarrisobhan, and the chief merchant of this caravan, he says, did you get my message to clear rooms at the inn and all? And folks say no. So he says, but I sent it with the last caravan, Farukh's, that only set out two days before us. And folks say, it didn't get here. So then the merchant says, it must have done, because I see that scruffy, evil-looking dervish that joined it, right over there in the bazaar. And that's when we realised - Farukh's caravan, it set out all together, with this

dervish, and he arrived here all on his own, without it."

"From which you promptly and intelligently deduced that he had foully slain thirty assorted shrewd merchants, skilled guards, and unhappy servants, along with all their camels, buried or hidden the bodies away from the caravan route, and calmly continued to here."

"Yes, sir."

"I am sure that the fellow must be stunned by your ingenious perceptions. Either that, or flattered by your impression of his murderous skills. However, perhaps we should ask him."

The *cadi* waved vaguely, and the citizens and guards took the hint and pushed the dervish forward. The *cadi* noticed that the man put up no resistance, which made all the pushing and fist-shaking appear somehow bombastic.

The dervish was probably quite a tall man, the *cadi* decided, but his hunched posture hid the fact effectively. The traditional patched robe of his calling, a less than complete set of teeth, and his ascetically shaved cheeks and chin, all contrived to give him a definite air of disreputability, but his glittering eyes and general demeanour showed no obvious signs of malice. He was hung about with carved amulets of bone and olive wood; so far as the *cadi* could tell, they mostly bore the seal of Solomon, which was considered a lawful ward against evil.

"Fellow?" said the *cadi*.

"Sir?" said the dervish.

"What do you say to these accusations?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing? Do you not deny this charge?"

"What, precisely, is it?"

The *cadi* drew breath. Whether or not he was a genuine dervish, the fellow had the authentic dervish manner of intellectual confusion down to perfection.

The *cadi* was beginning to find this case interesting.

"You are charged, by these good people, with murdering the thirty, approximately, members of the caravan which you joined in Tarrisobhan. Did you do this?"

"Err, no. At least, I don't believe so."

"You don't *believe* so? You are unsure?"

"Memory is a notoriously unreliable thing, you know."

"Are the recollections of all the murders you have committed so confused in your brain, then, fellow?"

"No. But I simply thought..."

The *cadi* could become impatient at times, even when he was interested. He interrupted. "Do you know where the caravan is?"

"No."

"Where did you last see it?"

"In the desert."

"Kindly tell the story of all that occurred between your departure from Tarrisobhan and your arrival in this city."

The dervish nodded with what appeared to be a look of respect. "I will. It having come to me, in the fair city of Tarrisobhan, that my search for the inner and higher truths of the universe was not progressing, I decided on a whim to travel to this place. As it is customary to travel as part of a group, I looked, and determined that a caravan was to follow the very road that I wished to tread..."

"A moment. You joined this group for traditional and customary reasons?"

"Yes."

Someone in the crowd called out here, "And to steal from their supplies, no doubt!"

The dervish did not look round, but did reply. "I carried food sufficient to my needs."

The *cadi* smiled slightly at that. "No doubt that was a modest enough pack, ascetic one. However, travellers mostly group together for security. Do you really feel the need for that? The sultan of this land, may he dwell forever in glory, has eliminated most banditry on that road, and cannot your philosophical powers fend off the grovelling desert ghûl?"

"I have never discussed philosophy with a ghûl."

"But you have no desire to conduct investigations whose consequence might be that you yourself would be devoured."

"No."

"A sensibly cautious view of the usefulness of philosophy. However, do continue your tale."

"I joined the caravan as it left the town, and walked beside them as they crossed the desert..."

"Did you talk with them?"

"They did not seem to wish to talk."

"I see. Go on."

"That night, they - and I - settled down to sleep. I slept soundly, and when I awoke in the morning, they were gone..."

Here, the crowd of citizens erupted in tumultuous cacophony, and the *cadi* had again to signal Al-Rojji to his advance before conversation became once more feasible.

"Mukbil?" the *cadi* enquired.

"Sir?"

"Might your partner - this Farukh - have had some reason to pack up his tents and depart hastily in the night for parts unknown - rather thoughtlessly leaving this fellow behind, uninformed of whatever his reasons might be?"

"Farukh? Do that? Of course not, sir. Why should he want to do such a thing?"

"I do not know. He is your business partner. However, you may wish to remind me that there are no other towns for many leagues in the general direction of Tarrisobhan; any caravan seeking to divert from that road would still have to come here, or return there, for supplies. And we know that this caravan has done neither."

"Ahh... Yes, sir."

"Yes, quite. Thank you for reminding me of that." The *cadi* returned his attention to the dervish. "Do you stand by your tale, fellow?"

"I told what I remember seeing."

"Ah, well." The *cadi* paused, and tugged thoughtfully at the tip of his beak-like nose with one fleshy and well-manicured hand.

"This matter is certainly Interesting. However, I do not think that we have heard everything yet. So, unless anyone wishes to enlighten me further concerning any of this... No? Well.

Guards, take this fellow," he gestured to indicate the dervish "and transport him to the dungeons of the city governor's palace. Inform the gaolers there that he may be involved in some crime, but we do not know what, and that he may also be innocent as a babe.

*Everyone* may note" (here the *cadi* raised his voice pointedly) "that I have observed this fellow now, and he appears to be in good health, and intact save for the trivial matter of some teeth. I intend to speak with him again in the morning, and if his condition has in any way deteriorated by then, *I will discover the reason why.*"

The warning was understood; the crowd of townsfolk stood back, sullenly but promptly, as a group of the *cadi*'s guards escorted the dervish from the room. The *cadi* decided that, knowing that their chosen subject of blame was safely secured for the moment, they would refrain from attempting a lynching just yet.

"Now," he said, "the rest of you may leave. I wish to Think on this Interesting problem."

That night, the dervish was sitting calmly in one corner of one of the city governor's cells, when a clank of keys and creaking of

little-oiled hinges told him that he had a visitor. He looked up in what seemed like impassive interest, but did not clamber to his feet, even when the *cadi* squeezed through the doorway, alone.

"Peace be upon you," said the *cadi*.

"And upon you, Peace, and the blessings of Allah." The dervish's reply was formally perfect, however offhand his manner.

"I have come," the *cadi* said, "to learn more of your reasons for visiting this city. I do not believe that you have previously chosen to disclose all of the facts."

"I am here in search of transcendental truth."

"Yes of course. But all dervishes are searching for that all the time, aren't they? Now, I don't pretend to understand your beliefs and such, so you might have come here for reasons that I could never understand. However, I observe three facts."

The dervish showed no reaction, but the *cadi* continued. "Firstly, that your accusers, in describing your actions, did not claim that you made any attempt to sell amulets in the bazaar. I should say that I have made enquiries, which confirm the implication; you sold no amulets. Secondly, that you wear a number of amulets, inscribed against evil. And thirdly, that although many dervishes obtain substantial income by the sale of amulets, one rarely sees your kind actually wearing such things - certainly not in quantity - save as a way of displaying merchandise for sale."

At that, the dervish glanced briefly into the *cadi*'s eyes, and perhaps smiled a little.

"Can you explain that?" the *cadi* asked.

"Of course. Amulets are tools, to ward off specific evils, cure specific diseases, and so forth. Wearing such things without specific cause betokens hypochondria, or a lack of faith in the mercy and power of Allah."

The *cadi* smiled. "Just so. And yet you wear several amulets."

"Yes."

"Can you explain what you wish to defend against?"

"Ghûls," said the dervish.

"Ah. The evil, shape-shifting, anthropophagous fiends of the desert."

"Yes, as I said."

"You previously implied that you were uncertain of your ability to repulse such creatures."

The dervish smiled. "I said that I had never discussed such matters with a ghûl. In truth,

few ghûls are great conversationalists. But my studies - and a little practical experience - suggest that correctly chosen amulets can serve to repel these entities."

"Well and good. But perhaps you might discuss this specific incidence of nervousness a little further."

The dervish paused for a moment before answering. "Perhaps I should. I prefer to keep these matters quiet, if I can..."

"I suggest you break that personal rule. Here and Now."

"As you say... You must understand that we who pursue higher truths sometimes encounter unpleasant facts. A man can't know what he'll find till he looks, and sometimes, you turn over a stone looking for gold, and a scorpion crawls out. Anyway, one of my fellow seekers sent me a message; she had learned that a ghûl pack was plotting to attack this town. She didn't know more than that, but... I made up some amulets to repel the things, set out for here in a hurry..."

The cadî's face was grim. "You should have told me all of this before. By Allah, man, you should have told me the day you arrived, and sent letters ahead. This is my town whose destiny you are playing with, and I will not have it fall to some supernatural monster..."

"Ah, no. I see that. But how was I to know, before, that I would find such a one as you here, to speak with?"

The cadî was now pacing the narrow limits of the cell; at that, he turned towards the other, his scowl like a dark cloud. "I have no wish to be flattered by you, dervish, however poor your opinion of other men." He collected himself a moment. "But - no matter, for now. Say more."

"Hah! There's little more to say. Everything happened in the desert as I described it, but I thought it best to assess the position in this town before I took other actions."

"You drew the obvious conclusions concerning your former travelling companions?"

"I did."

"And yet, one cannot reach the same conclusion concerning Mukbil. Interesting." He looked again at the dervish. "I am afraid I must leave you here a while. There is much I must confirm before I can have you released."

The dervish shrugged. "One place is like another, in comparison to eternity. But the ghûls..."

"I will deal with the ghûls. You should have no fear." The cadî rapped on the cell door, and the night gaoler, who had been waiting not far away, let him out.

"No," murmured the dervish, "perhaps not."

The next morning, the cadî called together the noted citizenry of his home district - the mosque's imam, its muezzin, and the wealthier merchants - and announced that the complexities of the case required him to make an expedition out of the city.

This proclamation caused a measure of startlement among the citizenry. It was known that for the cadî to leave his *house* required a substantial provocation; for him to venture beyond the city walls surely indicated the coming of, if not the end of the world, then at least the disruption of a large portion of it. Within minutes, the tale was not only fluttering around the bazaar, but it was accompanied by a variety of theories as to the secret truths of the matter, ranging from the belief that the cadî was fleeing in horror from the magnitude of the dervish's crimes, which his refined intellect might discern in all their dreadfulness, to the possibility that the cadî was a henpecked husband, escaping the depredations of a shrewish wife. (The fact that the cadî was notoriously and eccentrically unmarried in no way reduced the appeal of the latter idea.) For the most part, the practical and broad-minded citizenry chose to believe all of the theories at once.

By mid-day, and despite the heat of the noonday sun, a number of loiterers were stationed by the main gate of the city, awaiting the sight of the cadî's unprecedented egress. Eventually, however, they recalled or were reminded that the cadî had specifically scheduled his journey for the *next* day, and so departed that scene in search of other sensations.

Meanwhile, the city's senior imam had come to the cadî in open court, concerned at this behaviour and fearful for what it might portend.

"Can any case, no matter how gruesome, justify such an expenditure of your time?" he asked.

The cadî looked at him. The fellow was a grey-bearded sheikh, and not without honour. However, he was also garrulous and curious; his reputation for wisdom had largely been obtained by a lifetime of vocally questioning practically everything. The cadî suspected that

the imam must have been an insufferably curious child.

"I believe so," he said. "Whatever crimes have been committed, have taken place in the desert. I wish to know what might be found hidden in the sands, and how can I learn that save by direct personal inspection?"

The imam blinked at that. "Through your noted facility in intellectual analysis?" he ventured. But the question was quiet, whereas the rumours that the *cadi's* words started were already loud. Soon, the entire bazaar knew that the *cadi* would be seeking the bodies of the dervish's countless victims, buried in the wilderness.

That rumour was encouraged when the *cadi* announced, further, that he would be taking the dervish with him, to indicate certain details of topography. The fellow would - he assured the concerned townspeople - be watched day and night by well-armed guards who would cleave his head from his body at the first sign of dubious intent. Indeed, the *cadi's* guards were soon requesting the loan of additional heavy swords, spears, and armour from the city governor's armoury, in quantities that proved that the danger represented by the dervish was being treated very seriously indeed.

Meanwhile, the *cadi* was making other detailed arrangements for his journey. On his return from the afternoon prayers, he met in private with a professional cook, currently without employment, and verbally examined the man's knowledge of his art.

"Your awareness of culinary principles seems adequate," he said, after some thirty or forty questions had been set and answered. "I find myself in search of additional staff, as the regrettable need for me to venture into the remote wilderness implies new complications in my domestic organisation. There are too few restaurants in the desert. But tell me, fellow; given your apparent competence, how is it that you find yourself without employment?"

"It was my previous master," the cook answered. "He abruptly took upon himself a taste for crude, artless cuisine, and announced that my skills no longer pleased him. Indeed, he told me that my efforts offended him, and that I over-cooked every dish - which is, of course, untrue."

The *cadi* nodded. "Civilised men are not only rare, but becoming rarer every month," he commented. After only a few more questions

on various topics, he retained the cook's services.

He declared to the public that he feared that he might have to be absent for as long as three days; hence, he felt the need to ensure that his party carried all appropriate creature comforts with them. Camels laden with tents, rugs, cookery implements, casks of salted fish and meat, boxes of fruit, flasks of water, sacks of coffee, and many more of the simple necessities of the *cadi's* life, were observed progressing from the bazaar to the *cadi's* courtyard.

Late on the morning of the following day, the *cadi's* party was observed making a remarkably slow and not overly well-organised way from his house. The crowds watched with mostly silent fascination, only occasionally permitting themselves an abrasive jeer in the direction of the dervish, who sat, swathed in manacles, upon a placid mule. However, the jeers rapidly died when the dervish happened to glance towards their originators; there were many mutters concerning the evil eye.

At the city's south gate, the party paused. Indeed, there appeared to be some complications in the organisation of their egress. However, many of the crowd by then considered their entertainment complete, and were already ambling back to the bazaar to see what else the day had in store. These folk were therefore able to observe a phenomenon that was considered somewhat surprising; the arrival of a trading caravan, led by one Farukh, who had entered by the north gate.

The commotion thereby engendered was still growing as the traders settled in the town square before the mosque. The bazaar supervisor, who chanced to be near to hand, hustled forward to offer his assistance and the hospitality of the town's official inns. Other less official greeters chose approximately the same moment to press forward and make certain enquiries about the group's evident narrow escape from the dark evil of certain itinerant philosophers. The result was a great deal of confusion, and little was achieved or answered before the day's third surprise occurred.

The *cadi's* party returned to the centre of the town with a little more briskness than it had displayed in departure. The *cadi* himself, ringed by personal guards, came face to face with Farukh the merchant, who bowed deeply, but with somewhat of a look of surprise.

"Good sir," said Farukh, "I had heard that you had departed this town."

The *cadi* gestured vaguely. "One attempted to," he said, "but fortunately, one became aware before one had progressed too far that one had neglected to ensure a sufficient supply of silk cushions for one's tent. A silly error." He coughed a little, looking deeply embarrassed. "Naturally, I ordered our return; and now I am pleased to observe that the entire wearisome operation will be unnecessary."

"Yes," said Farukh, with a slight expression of puzzlement at the *cadi*'s words. However, the conversation was interrupted at this point by the arrival of Mukbil abu Mukbil ibn Fadhl, who cried Farukh's name with passion, and hurled himself forward to embrace his partner, who indeed smiled vastly at the gesture.

Mukbil then turned to the *cadi*, while remaining in a brotherly embrace with Farukh. "So," he cried out, "perhaps we can now learn the truth behind this charlatan's foolish tales". He waved vaguely in the direction of the dervish.

The dervish, however, was advancing on this scene of reunion. His chains fell away as if magically dispelled, and the crowd gasped, ignorant of the fact that they had never been correctly fastened. He was wielding a brazen amulet, inscribed with the seal of Solomon and words of power. His guards were paralysed by surprise for one second, then scurried after him.

"No!" The *cadi* cried out, "Too soon! Beware, Mukbil!"

But the warning was too late. Farukh's embrace turned into a crushing grip, and Mukbil goggled as hands that were all too like claws drew blood from his sides. Farukh's mouth opened implausibly wide, showing excessively large teeth, and Mukbil attempted to summon the breath to scream.

Then Al-Rojji, barely visible within exceptionally heavy armour, stepped forward and brought his club down firmly on Farukh's head. Farukh fell forwards, and with a gurgle of terror, the wounded Mukbil struggled free from under his partner's stunned form. Mukbil then stared at the many shallow gashes on his torso, and collapsed in horror.

The *cadi* murmured praise to Al-Rojji for his prompt obedience to prior instructions.

At that moment, the other members of the delayed caravan began to press forward, reaching for weapons, gibbering aggressively,

or - most disquietingly of all - *changing shape*. Even their camels seemed infected by the mania, cavorting to shed their packs, hurling themselves forward in a malicious manner unusual even among camels, and even transforming themselves into other forms.

But before any fighting could begin, the dervish was upon them. He disregarded his guards - who were too busy gawking to stop him, even if the *cadi* had not been ready to tell them to desist. The additional amulets hanging around his neck were clearly visible, and he began issuing instructions in a high but strong and clear voice, invoking the highest name, the ordinances of Solomon, and numerous other lawful authorities.

The members of the caravan paused in their offensive. The dervish's words seemed to strike them as physical blows. Some of them made half-determined moves towards the *cadi*'s party, but they found themselves facing a line of well-armed and armoured guards. One such was hurled to the ground by a monstrous buffet, but the clawed hand responsible was lopped off by a swift iron blade, and at that, the counter-attack faltered.

The dervish brushed past the recumbent shape of Farukh, his foot barely touching the body; even so, it writhed and twisted, and then burst into oily red flames, producing choking fumes that discomfited all within many yards (save the dervish) before sputtering away to leave only a stain on the flagstones.

Now the faltering monsters fell into utter rout. Turning this way and that, they realised that the path to the town's south gate was entirely clear (the *cadi* having issued certain commands and strong suggestions during his return through the town), and they fled that way. They were pursued by arrows from the guards, words of power from the dervish, and mockery from the bolder townsfolk. The former two destroyed several of them as they fled.

While that procedure continued, the *cadi* reached the battered Mukbil abu Mukbil ibn Fadhl, and bent over to ensure that the merchant was not critically hurt. At worst, he decided, Mukbil would need broken ribs tended, in addition to the lacerations caused by the ghûl's claws.

"You really should be more careful in your choice of business partners," he observed. Mukbil gurgled. "By my estimation, from the schedule of journeys that I obtained from your

clerk - and other evidence - Farukh was slain in the desert, and replaced by his slayer, three expeditions since. Nearly two months, in fact. You evidently failed to note any significant changes."

Mukbil gurgled again, and his gaze went past the cadi's shoulder. The cadi looked around to see the dervish watching him. "Other evidence?" the latter enquired.

"Oh, nothing conclusive in itself," said the cadi. "A few bizarre anecdotes. To give one example, his highly talented cook was ejected from employment, with no plausible justification, when his master took to demanding raw meat, and no embellishments, for every meal. I am happy to say that the fellow in question is now in my employ. There were many small facts such as this, significant only to one who already owned cause for suspicion. However, this buffoon should surely have perceived some cause for apprehension concerning his partner, long since."

"Perhaps you should be kinder?" said the dervish. "He has just learnt that his friend has been murdered."

"Indeed," muttered the cadi, "but my guards have been watching his house since our first conversation. Messengers have been passing back and forth in the night, between him and the desert to the north." He looked back at the merchant. "What did they tell you, Mukbil? That they were working some kind of profitable swindle, and you might share the profits?"

"Why did they contact him?" asked the dervish.

The cadi smiled. "How else could they know when you and I were to leave the town?" he said. "They had been repulsed once by the power of your amulets, and I imagine they feared my reputation for incisive intellection. Fortunately, my ruse caused them to emerge from hiding. More fortunately, your power destroyed their leader and scattered the others with no harm to the town. Despite your own slight impetuosity, I might say. Well, without that cunning leader, I doubt that they will continue as a threat."

The dervish agreed. "My task is complete," he said. "I can return to the investigation of higher truths."

"I, too," said the cadi. "Disputes over ownership of mules and suchlike. Well, this matter at least has been interesting."