



Sharaz-De

Sergio Toppi (Illustrator) , Anonymous , Edward Gauvin (Translator)

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A set of tales inspired by 1001 Arabian Nights, European comics master Sergio Toppi's Sharaz-de explores a barbaric society where the supernatural is the only remedy to injustice.

The lovely Sharaz-de, captive to a cruel and despotic king, must each night spin tales to entertain her master and save her head from the executioner. Her tales are filled with evil spirits, treasures, risk, and danger, but ever at their center hold the passions of gods and men.

Sharaz-De Details

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Author : Sergio Toppi (Illustrator) , Anonymous , Edward Gauvin (Translator)

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From Reader Review Sharaz-De for online ebook

Lindsay says

When I was a kid, I used to "sneak" into my mom's library and spend hours looking through *Faeries*, enthralled with the illustrations of the pretty faeries, the folklore, and the terrifying nasty ones. I say sneak, not because my mother didn't allow me near her books, but because the illustrations and descriptions were explicit--revealing the dangerous side of the fairy tale/folktale world with which I was unaware, having kept mostly to Disney. If I ever have kids, I want this to be their *Faeries* book.

A long time ago, I started to read *The Arabian Nights*, but fell away for some reason or another. Clearly, after reading this, I need to get back to it. And I need to check out more Toppi, but seeing as he's Italian and his work isn't published all that extensively in America (much less English), this feels like an uphill battle. I'm hooked though. I don't often buy books anymore, especially before reading them, but I'm so glad I did so with *Sharaz-De*...I'm fairly covetous of it already.

Eli says

A magnificent adaptation of 1001 Arabian Nights.

In the land of Gowan-dab, a mighty king had two sons, Shahriyar and Shahzam'an. Longing to see his brother, Shahzam'an set out in haste to see Shahriyar; but, in his haste, left without the dagger his wife had given him. Upon realizing this he rode back quickly to find his wife in the arms of another man. Distraught, he kills her and her lover and sets back out on his original journey.

Shahriyar, recognizing his brother's peril, encourages him to take leave and walk among the beauty of his gardens to find peace. Only in that garden, Shahzam'an finds his brother's wife in the arms of a palace servant. In his anger, Shahzam'an also executes his wife and her lover.

In all his agony, Shahriyar announces to his kingdom that he will take a young woman to his bed each night and then, in the morning, he will execute her. He continues to do this, each night, until Sharaz-de comes to him on her own accord, believing that she can stop the killings.

After their first night, she convinces Shahriyar to listen to her story. If he likes the story he should spare her life.

And thus begins Sharaz-de's many tales, each night postponing her death.

Each of her tales are centered around men who are ungrateful for all that they have, who seek more fortune, women or a better life. Each time they are spared the agony of defeat, they are greedy and no good befalls them as a result. (It is my belief that Sharaz-de hopes Shahriyar will see the error of his ways and spare the lives of the remaining maidens in his land.)

It is nearly impossible to describe the beauty that exists within these pages. Mostly in black and white, in a mess of fine lines and dots, Toppi's artwork is breathtaking and I found myself running my fingertips over the pages in an attempt to feel the textures which he displays on the page. The few stories told with color

have an even more dramatic effect, following the same patterns of lines and dots with even more definition in his alternating colors.

Although over 200 pages, I read this entire graphic novel in nearly one sitting. I would love to own my own copy--I discovered this at my local library by chance--as it is one I can see revisiting, not just for the artwork, but also for the experience of the stories.

I highly recommend this graphic novel. If you like graphic novel adaptations of famous classics, there is a good chance you will enjoy this.

Chris says

Disclaimer: Copy received via Netgalley

Did you ever see the old Sinbad movies? Maybe the one with the young Jane Seymour? The ones with the Ray Harryhausen special effects? Was it your first introduction to the Arabian Nights too? Did the actual tales with the frame story of sex and violence come as something as a surprise?

Well, Mr. Toppi follows the tradition of the original stories and not the movies.

And boy, is it something.

I had never heard of Sergio Toppi before seeing this book posted up on Netgalley. I picked it up simply because of the subject matter. Therefore, I do not know how this work fits into his oeuvre.

First, I would like to say something about the artwork. Mr. Simonson in his foreword notes that Toppi made excellent use of space as well as black and white. This is true. The copy I received via Netgalley, downloaded and read on computer, includes two tales that are done in color. The majority of the book is in down in black and white. The black and white illustrations are better than those that have been colored. The black and white drawings pull the reader in far more than those that have been colored. I do not know what the scheme in terms of color is for the final edition. But the black and white is stunning. The loneliness of an exile is far more stabbing and heart rending in stark terms than in the washed out color. I hope the color is either just in the two stories or taken out all together in the hardcover version. (For parents, the artwork does have some topless women).

In short, Toppi's artwork = WOW!

Sharaz-De (Sherazade) tells stories to save her life. The frame story of Arabian Nights not only shows the reader the sharp intelligence of a young woman, but also the power of story-telling to shape what is around us. Toppi keeps true to this idea. The stories are chosen to reflect on the situation that Sharaz-De finds herself in. They are not so much stories of passionate love, though passionate love is there, but stories about mercy and justice. It is hard not to see Sharaz-De herself in the character of the falcon who saves his prince or in the dwarf that demands a just payment or in the djinn who falls in love with mercy.

It is that choice of stories and the stunning artwork that make this a joy to read. Toppi keeps to the frame story and the reader becomes part of that frame. Using the storytelling technique of repetition, Toppi makes the reader part of the danger that Sharaz-De faces; the reader becomes the judge as well as Sharaz-De's

husband. At the same time, however, the reader is Sharaz-De, standing on the edge of that sword. It's brilliant. The reader is lost in one story, finds the way out, and then is lost once more in Sharaz-De's own predicament.

I once knew someone who taught Arabic. He once said that the best translation of Arabian Nights was the Burton work. I don't know Arabic, so I can't speak for the accuracy of translation. What I do know, however, is that Toppi's retelling is the most engrossing version of Arabian Nights I have seen.

And that includes the mini-series that had Rufus Sewell in it.

Mike Klein says

Wonderful art and a great bunch of stories make this one of the best graphic "novels" around. (Really it is more like graphic literature).

Mostly pen and ink drawings that add to the stories that are sometimes subtle and sometimes over the top, but always appropriate.

The only problem with this book is that it is way too short. There are 1001 stories and this book only contains 12. The author is now dead so there'll be no more and that is too bad. Ending a book can generate different emotions--for me this one made me sad that there wasn't more.

Minor note: This is an adult graphic story, so there are some pictures that might be inappropriate for young readers. For everyone else, read this.

Ricardo says

A Idade de Ouro Islâmica deu ao Mundo uma lufada de ar fresco no obscurantismo medieval, incluindo diversos clássicos de literatura, onde, para o mundo ocidental, as Mil e Uma Noites tomam o papel principal. Contudo, Toppi não reconta as histórias de Sindbad, Ali Baba ou Aladino. Ao invés, coloca Sharaz-de (Xerazade) a contar histórias a Shahriar (uma por noite, um pouco à semelhança do original) onde entram personagens que, não tendo o objectivo de serem lembradas por si só, servem de mote a uma série de histórias de intuito moral, onde uma perspicaz Sharaz-de (servindo de protótipo da mulher perfeita) leva Shahriar a adiar a sua execução para que volte a contar uma nova história na noite seguinte.

A moral das histórias inventadas por Toppi é condizente com o tipo de invocações morais que o mundo ocidental atribui ao mundo islâmico (não sei se correctamente), pois cada cultura interpreta, à sua maneira, os legados de outrem.

Para mim os contos são bem elaborados, incluindo por diversas vezes a acção dos chamados génios ou djinns, de cujo imaginário não me parece inverosímil tendo em conta a extensa experiência de miragens no deserto por parte daquele povo (tal como a literatura norte-europeia inclui unicórnios e elfos no seu imaginário devido à densa cobertura vegetal existente em tempos e a fenómenos de nevoeiro não raros nesses países, que levaram o imaginário das populações a tentar justificar de alguma forma o incompreensível).

Voltando a Toppi, declaro que o seu traço reflete singularmente a ambiência oriental da sua influência

literária. Não raro o autor apresenta as personagens como se já estivessem a movimentar-se no enredo, adicionando fluidez à leitura e reconstruindo os padrões clássicos de narrativa em novela gráfica de forma efectiva, optando por uma sequência narrativa mais solta. Deste modo o ilustrador oferece uma obra de arte em cada página, cuja sequência pode (e deve, pelo menos uma vez) ser apreciada dispensando a leitura da narrativa.

Nick says

Beautifully illustrated stories taken from the Arabian Nights; there's some deftness to the writing too but the images are almost enough to tell the narrative on their own.

Better review soon.

antónio alves says

dizem que é uma novela gráfica.
cá pra mim é uma epopeia gráfica! :)

deslumbrante

Dov Zeller says

I read this one in the spring and forgot to review it but then saw a goodreads friend had just read it and it sparked my memory. A beautiful retelling of the Arabian Nights that manages to capture the high stakes intensity in a way no other version I've read has done. Toppi's "Sharaz-De" singularly evokes the king's emotional pain as well as his immature, self-centered cruelty, while still offering a sense of romance and expansiveness (night after night unfolding in endless stories told by Sharaz-De to captivate, educate, and, in a sense, tame him.)

The art is dramatic, big, mostly black and white, which makes the use of color all the more wondrous.

Sometimes I found the drama to be a bit heavy. The story and art can wrestle with each other for the spotlight, and I couldn't always absorb them both simultaneously. In that way it felt almost more like an adult picture book than what I consider to be sequential art/graphic fiction, which gives me a lot to think about. All in all, in content and style, it offers a through-provoking and rich experience.

Seth T. says

I'm an artist and the son of an artist. I don't have a lot of work to show for the title—being mostly employed in web design, I only have a little bit of illustration work for online magazines still extant. But my father, he was a career artist in the real sense—in the sense that he produced physical objects of art. Ceramics and

Chinese brush painting. The point is: we're both all about the aesthetic value of human creations, no matter the medium. He likes my work and I like his and whenever one of us runs into something sublime, we Facebook each other and say: "Hey. Look at this. It is worth your time."

So minutes after cracking open and flipping through my edition of Sergio Toppi's *Sharazde: Tales from the Arabian Nights*, I had placed an order for a second copy—this one to ship to Europe where my father lives. I didn't want him to see scans of Toppi's work online. I didn't want to message him photographs of these drawings (though I couldn't resist an Instagram in his honour). No, he needed to behold this gorgeous collection of art in person and I would not wait for him and my mother to fly out to visit in the summer. I needed to share this now. Or as close to now as shipping to Europe could approximate.

And I wasn't disappointed. His reaction very much mirrored my own. He was just as blown away and gob-smacked as I was. Being a genuine surfer hippie from the genuine surfer hippie days, the word "stoked" might have held some play as well. There was joy, there was adulation, and there was awe. In short, Toppi's work received from my father (and from myself) exactly the reaction his work deserves.

Because, oh man. I

The only other comics reviewer I actively read remarked on the fittingness of having Walter Simonson introduce the book. Simonson's best work is clearly influenced by Toppi—much of his *Mighty Thor* seems a marriage between Toppi's visual topography and Kirby's brute dynamism. But while Simonson is all about the excitement of the actions in which his characters revel, Toppi is quiet and reserved. His work (at least here represented) is reflective and considerate. His drawings are mysteries and evoke the sacred even more deeply than Craig Thompson's attempts in *Blankets*.

I've been describing *Sharaz-De* in terms of its art and even think of it primarily as an art book—something to display for guests—rather than as a comic book or graphic novel. It has a story and it has writing, but those things really seem mostly in place to provoke Toppi to draw something interesting and amazing and earth-shatteringly beautiful. Honestly, I may never read the book's story ever again. And that's fine and I don't mind. I certainly don't feel slighted. This is an amazing book and worth every penny I spent on it.

Part of my ambivalence toward the book's narrative aspect may be that it's an adaptation of a kind of literature I generally avoid: the fable. Toppi is adapting some of the stories of Scheherazade, the ken of which have long filtered into our societal consciousness. Even if one is unfamiliar with the tales of the Arabian nights, the structure and morals are ubiquitous. Characters who are dishonest, ungrateful, and oath-breakers meet untimely and often terrible ends. If you make a promise to a strange being who gives you wonderful fortune with a single stipulation, whatever you do, don't blow it where that stipulation is concerned. These fables are common across cultures—so if you've read European or Asian fables, you know the drill as well. Just desserts figure prominently.

Toppi doesn't do any astounding narrative acrobatics with these fables. They are told in rather straightforward tone. They are there and they are faithful and not much more. But as I said, who cares when they were the genesis for such wild visual imaginations. I've included some scans with this review (as is my

wont), but please don't imagine these do anything near to approximating what you'll see in *Sharaz-De*. It'd be like a guy carrying a faxed photo of his girlfriend in his wallet. These scans are merely sad facsimiles of the crisp printing that inhabits the paperscape of Archaia's lush, large book.

I've read that Archaia is using *Sharaz-De* as a test case to prove whether or not there's an American market for more of Toppi's work. I hope, almost desperately, they'll sell well enough to merit future editions. I can guarantee that if I still have a discretionary income, then I will own each and every one of these.

Because, oh man.

A Note on the Political

As with any transmission of an ancient Arab work by a European's pen, there will be questions with regard to the looming spectres of Orientalism and appropriation. The concerns are valid so far as they go, and Toppi does lean *somewhat* on Orientalist trappings, but not nearly so much as we might expect from a work that came out of the 1970s. More, the mystery and foreign grandeur of his work in *Sharaz-De* seems to mirror his own penchant for making every story mysterious and foreign. Even a cursory survey of his work shows that *Sharaz-De* is not unique in its wild landscapes, wandering attires, and exotic figures—these are common traits across his oeuvre. While not perfect in its portrayal of these people and their culture—more because of wild reinvention than misrepresentation—I felt that Toppi acquits himself pretty well on *Sharaz-De*.

This reinvention does bring up the question of appropriation and the right of appropriation. And here's where I say that I'm torn on the whole appropriation issue. And here's where I begin a big ol' excursus. Good thing the review's over and this is just an end note, huh?

While I'm never happy for people to feel they've been wronged and I like to sympathize and do what I can to show them my compassion, I believe reappropriation is not only intimate to the human experience but actually Good. Reappropriation is one of the ways that members of humanity and human communities naturally interact. I visit your house and I see something I really like in the way you decorate the walls in your living room and I go home and incorporate some of those ideas into my own visual landscape. This is how cultural expression naturally works, regardless of power balance. I'll incorporate your good ideas into my creative expression whether you're my boss or I'm yours.

I don't have any problem with this on the face of it. Sharing culture is good and builds community. I think, though, that with the rise of concepts of intellectual property, people and cultures have more and more grasped onto the idea that they own "their" practices and visual markers. Because I don't actually believe in intellectual property,² it's a hard sell for me. I also think it's hubris and naivete to believe that what you or your culture has produced is all yours—as if it wasn't created through the appropriation of other cultures' intellectual/visual products.

Rather, I see three responsible ways for Good People to deal with reappropriation.

1) Be compassionately invested in world community. The big problem (as I see it) with exocultural appropriation is when it's done by nationalists, people wholly invested in their own community with no interest in the community of others. This is even worse when the appropriating community is oppressing the appropriated culture. The problem then isn't primarily the appropriation but oppression. Evidence: I've yet to

find an Asian who was angry at *Avatar the Last Airbender's* use of distinctly Asian cultural cues, 3 even though the show was forged by a couple of white American males. Why? Because the show and the creators were as respectful as anything.

2) Recognize cheesiness when you see it—and then avoid. Hot Topic is (or was... do they still exist?) the modern American youth's highly commercialized reappropriation of punk cultural cues. They've branded and marketed particular aesthetics that punk culture once used (and may still use, I don't know) to distinguish itself. Hot Topic is so very not punk. And it's obvious to anyone who'd care to notice.

3) When you encounter an individual who is upset by your appropriation of some of their cultural cues, dialogue with them. Discover what you can do to mollify their concerns. Explain that you realize that what you've appropriated doesn't mean the same thing to you as it does to them and explain (not excuse) why you've done the thing you've done. Listen to their complaints and reasons why they're uncomfortable. Learn from each other. Foster community.

That's my off-the-top-of-my-head response. And goes some way toward describing why I don't think we should be bothered by Sergio Toppi's version of the Scheherazade.

Footnotes

1) I'm trying hard here not to open the book for reference because I'll lose way too much time falling again into Toppi's illustrations. It's really an amazing world he's created.

2) It's complicated and I'm still working out for myself what that even means.

3) Which doesn't mean there aren't any, but I think the general thought is that *ATLA* gets appropriation right.

[Review courtesy of Good Ok Bad]

Jeff Jackson says

These reimagined tales plucked from the Arabian Nights are intriguing, but the real attraction is Sergio Toppi's astonishing artwork. He combines design and storytelling in a way that eliminates the need for panels while still propelling the reader through time and space. His drawings are exquisitely detailed and expressive, balancing shadow and light, culture and costume, hallucination and reality.

The episodic narrative sort of evaporates at the end, but I've rounded up my rating for "Sharaz-De" because sometimes story isn't everything. Some of Toppi's artwork here even dwarfs Moebius. It's hard to imagine a comix fan who wouldn't come away dazzled.

Charlotte says

If I were to have any criticism on this book, it'd be that the amazing art distracts from the story.

Bettie? says

Rufus Drool mouthing 'Open Sesame' is enough to send a girl mad...

http://youtu.be/k_zUQZxAX4A

Mili Avital ... Scheherezade
Alan Bates ... Storyteller
James Frain ... Schahzenan / Harun al-Rashid
Tchéky Karyo ... Black Coda (as Tcheky Karyo)
Jason Scott Lee ... Aladdin
John Leguizamo ... Genie of the Lamp / Genie of the Ring
Vanessa Mae ... Princess Zobeide
Dougray Scott ... Sultan Shahryar / Amin
Rufus Sewell ... Ali Baba
Jim Carter ... Ja'Far
Peter Guinness ... Chief Executioner
Hugh Quarshie ... Mustappa
Pik Sen Lim ... Aladdin's Mother (as Pik-Sen Lim)
Amira Casar ... Morgiana
Andy Serkis ... Kasim
Ayesha Dharker ... Coral Lips
Alexis Conran ... Prince Ali
James Callis ... Prince Ahmed
Hari Dhillon ... Prince Hussain
John Hallam ... Demon
Alexei Sayle ... BacBac

Artur Coelho says

Deixei o melhor para o fim. Aliás, este foi o elemento fundamental que me convenceu a negociar com uma papelaria cá da terra para fazer a colecção completa das Novelas Gráficas Público/Levoir. Tinha de assegurar que esta edição do esplendoroso Sharaz-De chegaria às minhas estantes. Sabendo o que me esperava, tendo-o já encontrado por portas e travessas nos recantos obscuros do mundo digital, guardei-o até ter tempo mental para o saborear.

A adaptação de contos das Mil e Uma Noites por Toppi toca-nos no fascínio do orientalismo. Não adapta toda a obra - seria trabalho gargantuesco, mas condensa episódios do vasto tecido ficcional dessa recolha clássica da tradição árabe. Mas não é pelo texto que o livro me encanta. Apesar de ter uma relação nostálgica com leituras de infância de esfarelados exemplares de uma edição de 1957 na colecção Orbe da Livraria Clássica Editora. Essas edições coligidas por Eduardo Dias ensinaram-me o que sei sobre Sheharazade, Aladino, Sinbad, génios, odaliscas, palácios luxuosos no meio dos desertos, princesas misteriosas, bruxas

que se alimentam de cadáveres nos cemitérios do Cairo e as aventuras do jovial Harun Al-Rashid, o califa que elevou Bagdad aos píncaros civilizacionais. Sublinhe-se que a nostalgia infantil não me cegou para o lado polémico da obra, traduzida para a sensibilidade europeia no século XIX como uma visão fantasiosa e pitoresca da cultura árabe. Boa companhia para aquelas pinturas de jovens tunisinas de seios ao léu ou paisagens de carnes ardentes de odaliscas saídos dos pincéis da escola orientalista francesa, muito adepta da sensualidade das escravas no harém. O orientalismo tem muita coisa passível de aterrorizar psiquiatras ou psicólogos clínicos.

O que torna Sharaz-De obra maior é o traço de Toppi. Fortemente texturado, filigranado a roçar a abstração. Os arabescos que deslumbram o olhar são muito apropriados para estas histórias das arábias sonhadas. Têm mais força no contraste puro do desenho a preto e branco, embora as ilustrações a cor também nos façam perder o olhar. As figuras surgem por entre os arabescos filigranados ou texturas densas, pequenos oásis de silêncio por entre o murmúrio do traço.

Oásis. Pronto. Bolas. Fui apanhado pelo espírito orientalista. Resta-me ir ouvir a Scheherazade de Rimsky-Korsakov no palácio de Monserrate. Deixo ficar Toppi na estante, mas trago comigo um ou dois dos livros da colecção orbe. Permitem-me?

David Schaafsma says

Sharaz-De is an adaptation of The Arabian Nights, or The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night, with someone we recall is named Scheherazade. It has an alarming premise of sex and violence. Shahry?r discovers his wife is unfaithful, killing her. He travels to his brother's house, finds his wife is unfaithful, and she is killed. Shahry?r decides to have sex only with virgins after this, whereupon each morning after he kills them so they will never have the chance to be unfaithful. Nice story, eh? Then, improbably, after all the area virgins are killed, Sharaz-De decides she wants to marry this guy (!) and starts telling him stories to make herself valuable to him. She finishes each story at dawn, and each morning Shahry?r agrees to allow her to continue to live. Lucky her, eh?

The stories are a mix of fable, Fairy tales, Islamic philosophy, songs, from various countries. I read them when I was young i a big hardcover book, but couldn't remember having read many of the stories here. Some characters in the tales are familiar to modern audiences, such as Aladdin, Sinbad and Ali Baba, and the stories have been a huge influence on literature, but I generally have found the stories forgettable. I supposes it's because fables and fairy tales are not my favorite forms of literature. They focus on fate, destiny, maybe something to do with the knife that Sharaz-De elected to face every morning, and aspects of Islamic poetry and philosophy run through the tales.

The reason to read this is the art, which is worth looking at even if you skip the stories. A few of them are watercolored, but the black and white are perhaps even more impressive. The fantasy stories really take a back seat to the art, but that they are fantasy gives Toppi the chance to wildly invent. And that he does, though as one the introduction mentioned, Toppi is a master of two things you might not associate with fantasy: his use of white space, and his talent for drawing clear and individualized faces that betray just the right emotions subtly. Worth picking up just to see one of the European comics masters (Toppi died at 79 in 2012) at work. It's a great gift to have these in translation.

João Carlos says

“Sharaz-De – Contos das Mil e Uma Noites” do artista plástico e ilustrador italiano **Sergio Toppi** (1932 – 2012) é mais uma excelente edição da colecção de Banda Desenhada “Novela Gráfica” do jornal Público em parceria com a editora Levoir publicada a 23 de Abril de 2015.

No prefácio da edição da Levoir/Público, João P. Boléo refere em relação a **Sergio Toppi**, que **”A sensibilidade, a atenção ao pormenor significativo, a qualidade literária, a densidade temática e a seriedade humanista estão presentes na sua obra desde cedo, a par de um elevado apuro estilístico.”** e as **”Narrativas em geral de média dimensão caracterizadas pela intensidade dramática, originalidade e o mistério que as envolve, aliadas a um espantoso sentido plástico e um pessoalíssimo domínio narrativo. Nelas funde magistralmente os tempos de leitura, o conjunto e o pormenor, a página como um todo e o percurso sequencial, com um inconfundível estilo marmóreo, ao serviço de um fascínio por civilizações e culturas míticas ou historicamente simbólicas, tanto no passado mais longínquo como contemporâneas...”**.

Entre a traição e o adultério há uma jovem mulher, Sharaz-De, que decide sacrificar-se perante o Rei; contando-lhe histórias antigas e raras...

“Sharaz-De – Contos das Mil e Uma Noites” é um livro fascinante, um conjunto de contos, de histórias dentro da história, que englobam e exploram sociedades ancestrais, onde o misticismo e o sobrenatural dominam, num conjunto de personagens cruéis e despóticas, que definem e aplicam os seus próprios códigos de justiça e de honra, enfrentando perigos e riscos inimagináveis, numa luta pela honra e pela traição. Primeiro “li” **“Sharaz-De – Contos das Mil e Uma Noites”**, dedicando particular atenção ao enredo e aos diálogos; depois “vi” **“Sharaz-De – Contos das Mil e Uma Noites”**, dedicando exclusiva atenção às ilustrações; onze Contos ou onze Histórias, nove a preto e branco e duas a cores, absolutamente deslumbrantes.

Sergio Toppi (1932 – 2012)
