Richard Francis Burton was an English explorer, translator, writer, soldier, orientalist, ethnologist, linguist, poet, hypnotist, fencer and diplomat. He was known for his travels and explorations within Asia and Africa as well as his extraordinary knowledge of languages and cultures. According to one count, he spoke 29 European, Asian, and African languages.

Burton's best-known achievements include traveling in disguise to Mecca, The Book of One Thousand Nights and A Night, an unexpurgated translation of One Thousand and One Nights, bringing the Kama Sutra to publication in English, and journeying with John Hanning Speke as the first Europeans led by Africa's greatest explorer guide, Sidi Mubarak Bombay, utilizing route information by Indian and Omani merchants who traded in the region, to visit the Great Lakes of Africa in search of the source of the Nile. Burton extensively criticized colonial policies (to the detriment of his career) in his works and letters. He was a prolific and erudite author and wrote numerous books and scholarly articles about subjects including human behavior, travel, fencing, sexual practices, and ethnography. A unique feature of his books is the copious footnotes and appendices containing remarkable observations and unexpurgated information.

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