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The Scarecrow (Modern Middle East Literature in Translation)

Ibrahim al-Koni

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The Scarecrow is the final volume of Ibrahim al-Koni's Oasis trilogy, which chronicles the founding, flourishing, and decline of a Saharan oasis. Fittingly, this continuation of a tale of greed and corruption opens with a meeting of the conspirators who assassinated the community's leader at the end of the previous novel, *The Puppet*. They punished him for opposing the use of gold in business transactions—a symptom of a critical break with their nomadic past—and now they must search for a leader who shares their fetishistic love of gold. A desert retreat inspires the group to select a leader at random, but their "choice," it appears, is not entirely human. This interloper from the spirit world proves a self-righteous despot, whose intolerance of humanity presages disaster for an oasis besieged by an international alliance. Though al-Koni has repeatedly stressed that he is not a political author, readers may see parallels not only to a former Libyan ruler but to other tyrants—past and present—who appear as hollow as a scarecrow.

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