



Spirit 21

'THEY BUILT ME A BOX TO LIVE IN
I SAID

1001 Inventions exhibition: discover Muslim heritage and re-discover the excitement of science

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Over the weekend I went to see the ["1001 Inventions - Muslim heritage in our world"](#) exhibition at the Science Museum, which is based on the [website](#) and book of the same name.



The exhibition consists of a number of stands like the one in the picture, under different themes like medicine, market and town. There are intriguing exhibits like Al-Jazari's elephant clock, model wind-turbines pre-dating Dutch windmills, in Afghanistan to harness renewable energy (a lesson for today's green energy activists?) as well as plenty of information like Muslim scholars predicted the world's circumference to within 125 miles 8 centuries ago, and Muslim doctors pioneered cataract removal and the use of catgut around that time as well.

The whole exhibition is a revelation about the "Dark ages" where in fact many discoveries were made that have laid the foundations for today's modern science - dispelling the absurd myths that the Muslim world was devoid of creativity, invention or contribution. Quite the opposite. From this perspective, the exhibition is a must see for historical, cultural as well as of course scientific knowledge.

From a personal perspective though, it was the short film starring Ben Kingsley as a mysterious polymath from a golden age that captured my imagination. The film was broadcast at regular intervals on a huge screen in the exhibition hall. It re-ignited my childhood excitement for discoveries, and the incredible wealth of science that we have around us today. The story follows a group of school children spending the day at a museum investigating the science discovered in various eras of history. The teacher hands the assignment for "The Dark Ages" with pity to three children, warning them that they are unlikely to find much if anything. As they enter the library section they are greeted with the mysterious Ben Kingsley. He conjures up secrets from the period, and summons various scientists and philosophers to explain their secrets to the children. Once I'd got past the Harry Potter-esque introduction, I too was swept away by the enormity of the scientific findings and the graphics are magical enough to create a tingling about how science itself is magical.

The stories of these Muslim scientists and their myriad of inventions left me feeling inspired to discover the secrets of the universe... All in all, an afternoon well-spent.

