

Preview



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For thousands of years, nomads traveling through deserts heard mysterious sounds they thought were made by ghosts or demons. Marco Polo reported that evil spirits "at times fill the air with the sounds of all kinds of musical instruments, and also of drums and the clash of arms." Today a nonoccult explanation is available: those diverse noises are all acoustic emissions produced by shifting sands.

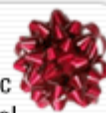
At least 30 "booming" dunes have been found in deserts and on beaches in Africa, Asia, North America and elsewhere. Listeners have likened the sounds they make to bells, trumpets, pipe organs, foghorns, cannon fire, thunder, low-flying propeller aircraft, the buzzing of telegraph wires, even moaning or humming. Nevertheless, researchers do not agree on just how and why, in many parts of the world, under certain conditions, the sand sings.

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