

Madam, I'm Nadan

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 20 Aug 1997

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Peter Cash — 20 Aug 1997, 09:57

Jim Jordan wrote some very thoughtful comments on "Seven American Nights" that sent me back to the text with my sharp pencil to find the missing "night". After a careful recount, I now think that eight nights are enumerated in the narrative, and I'm more confused than ever.

Jim Jordan <jbjordan at gnt.net> wrote:

1. The missing night might be the Moslem sabbath (Friday night), but the story does not seem have any break where this might occur. It is the second night. Notice on p. 338 that Nadan begins to recount his first day in the evening, around 4 p.m. (midnight in Teheran). He describes that he slept late, breakfasted, and then asked about visiting the city. He headed north. Then we have a break: Jasmin must not read this. It is later at night, because a candle is burning and something is beating against his window. He is full of fear, and mentions that he might have been drugged. Then there is a break, where he had edited something out, because section 4 begins "That is out out at last!...." The preceding stuff is not something that would have been hard to write, so something has been edited, something related to his true mission, something related to Gassem (see below).

He

then moves ("Still...") to a dream about bread that has mold on it, some kind of famous bread. Christian communion bread?

Psychedelic communion? The mold is, to me, suggestive of the grain mold that yields lysergic acid. Thus, this a perversion of the sacrament of communion.

At any rate, something has happened during the day to make him rejoice that he is a Persian and not an American. Then, the next section describes an actual visit to the Central City of the north, which must be the next day, because it ends with his opening the shutters to watch the sun set.

Then he goes out to eat and to a play. If it was on the previous day, which it seems at first reading to have been, then this is a couple of hours after "evening" and also after he has lit a candle to write by, and that makes no sense. So, here is the missing night: the second night.

I'm not sure whether I agree with this or not. I agree that there is a hiatus of at least one day between the writing by candlelight and opening the shutter on the setting sun; I had missed that! But I'm not sure that I agree with you on where the breaks are. The problem is that the more I think about this, the more confused I get.

It is true that he begins writing on the evening of the second day with "Here it is evening again..." (p. 338, ORB). And there appears to be a break between the section begun thus and the "Yasmin must not read this" section. But how long is the break? Is it a few hours or a day (or more)? It's clear that Nadan's mood has darkened in the interval, but it is not necessarily because some great evil has happened. Nadan says he is "paralyzed by a fear that entered me--I do not know from whence--yesterday..." Thus, Nadan does not know the cause of the fear.

However, it began at a certain point in time; it began yesterday, and I believe that's important. The "fear" could not have come upon him any earlier than the second day--on the first day, he is still burbling about how he loves America. Thus, the writing about the fear (the "Yasmin" passage) must have taken place no earlier than the third night. Thus, I agree with Jim (I think--let me know if I'm misrepresenting you, Jim)--there is a day missing from the account, and it is the second.

If this is true, then the following account of the "visit" to the Smithsonian took place no earlier than the fourth day, for at the conclusion of the account, Nadan says that as soon as he left his guide, he "returned here" (ORB, 343), and proceeds to open the shutters on the setting sun. That same night (4), Nadan goes out to dinner and then goes out again to see a play. He returns to his room with the alleged psychedelic drug.

The next entry is on the morning of the fifth day--"I am writing today before I go down to breakfast" (ORB, 350), and Nadan resolves to visit the park. He also recounts the visit of the three whores, which took place late on night 4. When Nadan returns from the park, he notes the fact in his journal, and announces he is about to eat an egg (ORB, 353). After experiencing no effects, he goes out to dinner and sees a second play.

The next entry is made on the morning of day 6. Nadan recounts the remainder of the events of the previous evening--which are strange indeed. Nadan breaks into the manager's office (isn't this a bit extreme?), gets what he hopes to be Ardis' address, and kills a monster while searching for her. As soon as Nadan has written of these events, he rushes out to find the monster's body (still a bit high, eh?), but fails. He returns, makes another entry. He leaves to go shopping; when he returns, he also notes that there are five of the original six eggs remaining: "The five remaining candy eggs stood staring at me..." ORB, 360). Nadan then eats another egg, goes out to see the second play, where he meets "Kreton", gets him arrested, and finally makes the acquaintance of Ardis.

On the morning of the seventh day, (ORB 370) Nadan makes a brief note about his disturbing dream. That evening, he recounts the "sorry" time he and Ardis had dealing with the police bureaucracy, and eats his third egg. He then goes out to meet Ardis for dinner. Late at night, he returns to find only two eggs remaining, and assumes that his rooms have been searched. He says that he has eliminated all passages relating to his true reasons for coming to America--but then continues to narrate the events of that evening, in which he acted in a play with Ardis.

The passage that begins, "Once again I am here" (ORB 377) must be written on the evening of the eighth day (Sunday, when the Theater is closed for Easter), when he recounts the picnic with Ardis. He then leaves to meet her for the final time, after eating his fourth (and the next to the last) egg. At three AM, he writes of his shocking revelation about Ardis' true nature.

2. It certainly appears that the last egg eaten was hallucinogenic. But to a slight degree, it may be that all the food in America is hallucinogenic; notice the attention given to virtually every meal.

Or perhaps the first egg was psychedelic, and the effects of the drug are permanent...

As you can see, I have gone from a lack of days to having too many. Can anybody help me out?