

# PEACE: ben Yahya and the Marid

The Urth list — 3 messages, 2 voices, 23 Oct 2000

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 23 Oct 2000, 15:38

This is the story fragment that has all the marks of being a genuine ARABIAN NIGHTS tale: style, form, and substance.

The tale erupts into the narrative flow when Den (at age 9), sitting in the rumble seat as the car speeds towards the Lorn farm, spies a towering column of cloud. (That is to say: Den is on the cusp of both meeting maiden Margaret and briefly grasping the Egg.) Apparently this cloud makes him think of a jinni coming out of a bottle; hence the story's frame of a fisherman, the bottle he caught in his net, and the jinni released.

This frame tale is very famous, used at least once very early on in ARABIAN NIGHTS (the very first story \_Sherry\_ tells the king in Burton's translation). But the nested story (in Burton's translation) does not come from either the fisherman or the jinni, rather it is told by a last man (note) who is discovered in a ruinous town (note).

ARABIAN NIGHTS

The Fisherman and the Jinni

The Tale of the Ensorcelled Prince

PEACE

The Fisherman and the Jinni

The Tale of ben Yahya and the Marid

Oh look! Here's a handy ARABIAN NIGHTS online reference:

[http://mfx.dasburo.com/an/a\\_index\\_commented.html](http://mfx.dasburo.com/an/a_index_commented.html)

Note to Dan'l: didn't you have a nice table showing all the nestings of stories in PEACE? Please post it here--I've somehow managed to lose my copy.

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"The Tale of ben Yahya and the Marid" (outline)

A marid (most powerful class of jinni) named Naranj has a human slave called ben Yahya. The marid, among other magics, regularly turns tubers into sherbet.

One fateful day, ben Yahya was carrying a huge jar of sherbet through the town when he was stung on the heel by a scorpion. Stopping, he saw a pear on a limb hanging over a garden wall. He climbed upon the jar to reach the pear, and as his hand closed over it, he saw a beautiful maiden sitting in the garden.

The slave fell in love at first sight; and fell in fact, breaking the jar and losing the sherbet. (Plus, he didn't even have the pear in hand.) The marid beat him for losing the sherbet, but promised

to give him the maiden and his freedom if he served silently for thirty years.

So he served his term and aged accordingly. The marid then took him up and flew him to the Haunted City, where he set the slave free and told him that the maiden was there . . . end of fragment.

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This is the first time I've ever worked on PEACE, but over the last ten years I've seen essays and a lot of online works in progress. William Schuyler's article in NYRSF #91 was the first I saw that linked ben Yahya's story back into Den's life story (and since I wrote an essay on how the brown book tales link back into TBOTNS, I have an expressed interest in such things).

ben Yahya = "son of John" = Den (son of John Weer)  
Naranj = Orange (Arabic) = Julius Smart, alchemist  
tubers into sherbet = potatoes into Tang  
broken jar of sherbet = coldhouse accident

Okay, so if we sense that Den was the coldhouse prankster (some will refuse this initial condition), then it becomes a clear case: Den, working for uncle Julius, causes a terrible accident; after this, he works silently (Julius hasn't spoken to him in 25 years) for 30 years.

But who is the maiden? Where is the Haunted City? How does the story end?

The maiden at one obvious level is Olivia. She is married to Julius. Den has strong feelings for her. The forbidden vision of the maiden might refer to the times when Olivia called Den to see her while she was in the bath (and her husband was in the lab). She is taken away (by death).

When the action of the gold hunt episode begins (25+ years after Olivia's funeral), Den goes to the library (formerly Olivia's house, with temple-like architecture) for a bit of research and he sees Lois, who is very clearly an echo of Olivia (an avatar incarnated within her own temple--see examples below). Den falls in love with her and her Olivia-ness; and as they travel together through the town, we come to see that in the 30 or so years of change it has come to be a Haunted City for Den (Olivia's cook has become a restaurant owner, and even then he is absent; Blaine reduced; Den is working with Ted Singer, who is probably the grandson of Eleanor's friend Sophie; etc.).

A few Examples (non-exhaustive):

- 1) Age: Olivia was in her early thirties when she married; Lois is in her early to mid-thirties, divorced, no children (an Olivia who did not grow large).
- 2) Olivia does not cook for her suitors; Lois does not cook for Den (special bonus if the delivered food is \_Chinese\_, heh).
- 3) Blaine to Den, with Olivia nearby: "There is properly no history, Alden, only biography"; Lois to Den, "Then you should try biography. Someone said that it was the only history, and I suspect most of it's more than half fiction."
- 4) Olivia's Indian club; Lois to Den, "Have you ever thought of Indians inhabiting this land?"

The Gold Hunt instigated by Lois is rather a lot like The Egg Hunt started by Olivia, another instance of the parallels. And there, at the climax, Lois pulls a gun on Den . . . end of fragment.

Well, well, well: maybe Lois was a little too much like Olivia; or maybe the opposite, despite all her superficial seeming, she was actually a monster disguised as Olivia (if I were to finish the ARABIAN NIGHTS tale, I'd say she was a ghul).

BUT what happened THEN? People have wondered if Den killed Lois; after all, he has her gun. I don't think he killed her, but there is a spectrum of unpleasantness that stops short of murder: at the very least, Den wrestled the gun away from her and drove off without her, leaving her in the countryside at night. However, since Den seems to fear her showing up at his doorstep (sleeps with the gun under his pillow), I'll bet it was something worse than that--rape is a possibility.

(I should stop here, but nah.)

Anyway, as I've hinted already, the maiden is probably represented by more than just Olivia: there is a hint of Margaret Lorn, who, in some ways I'll tell you some other time, is the opposite of Olivia.

Den assumed that he would marry Margaret, but suddenly in high school the relationship broke off. The exact details of Den's next several years are fuzzy, but: Olivia died (when Den was 20 or 25); a worker died in the coldhouse (when Den was 18 or 23); Margaret married someone else, and had his children.

So poor-man Den is fearful of an avenging Lois, when who should come to his door but . . . Sherry Gold. She's come to plead for her father. Yes, she's an older LOLITA (1958), but I also think she's a bit of Scheherazade . . . reel it in, boy, reel it in! Right--the main point is that she initially seems somewhat like Margaret as he remembers her (virginal, brown hair, teenager), so here Den gets the second attack on his heart, and then Sherry reveals (like Lolita) that Den is her third lover (and the third suitor, alas, is the least important).

Still: in the Haunted City, perhaps ben Yahya has finally found the true love; the first one he saw was a ghul in disguise, the second one was the real thing. Here is the potential for a happy ending (and judging from later events, Den felt deeply for Sherry--his stroke came the night of her death), but it doesn't seem to have materialized in Den's real life.

We will see another case where the fairy tale ending is not realized.

=mantis=

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Adam Stephanides — 23 Oct 2000, 22:38 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

Once again, a fascinating post. Too much to digest at once, but a few quick questions and comments:

Michael Andre-Driussi wrote:

The

marid beat him for losing the sherbet, but promised to give him the maiden and his freedom if he served silently for thirty years.

Silently? I don't see where in the story the marid makes this condition.

Okay, so if we sense that Den was the coldhouse prankster (some will refuse this initial condition), then it becomes a clear case: Den, working for uncle Julius, causes a terrible accident; after this, he works silently (Julius hasn't spoken to him in 25 years) for 30 years.

But Den says that Julius hasn't spoken to him since the Olivia's funeral (169 in the first edition), which you (below) date two years after the accident. Of course, maybe Den was already in Coventry, and Julius had to speak to him for form's sake. Or maybe Julius just didn't have any occasion to speak to Den, and hadn't been taken with him enough to seek him out.

Den assumed that he would marry Margaret, but suddenly in high school the relationship broke off.

What is the reference for their breaking up suddenly in high school? I must have missed that.

a worker died in the  
coldhouse (when Den was 18 or 23)

Surely not 18; we're told that the accident happened when Den was "a young engineer--two years out of school" (250), and surely even in those days high school dropouts were'nt hired as engineers, even if they were the boss's step-nephew.

--Adam

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 23 Oct 2000, 20:30 · follows Adam Stephanides

The  
marid beat him for losing the sherbet, but promised to give him the maiden  
and his freedom if he served silently for thirty years.

Silently? I don't see where in the story the marid makes this  
condition.

"`For all the days until thy time be done, I will have thee serve me as the windlass serves the  
well or the oar the ship . . . ."

I suppose "selflessly" would be better than "silently" . . .

Okay, so if we sense that Den was the coldhouse prankster (some will refuse  
this initial condition), then it becomes a clear case: Den, working for  
uncle Julius, causes a terrible accident; after this, he works silently  
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to speak to him for form's sake. Or maybe Julius just didn't have any  
occasion to speak to Den, and hadn't been taken with him enough to seek  
him out.

Gosh, Adam, why not just complain that 25 years doesn't equal 30 years?

Den assumed that he would marry Margaret, but suddenly in high school the  
relationship broke off.

What is the reference for their breaking up suddenly in high school? I  
must have missed that.

Yep.

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Surely not 18; we're told that the accident happened when Den was "a  
young engineer--two years out of school" (250), and surely even in those  
days high school dropouts were'nt hired as engineers, even if they were  
the boss's step-nephew.

This has to do with the thorny nature of establishing a timeline for the 20th century portion of PEACE. If you believe Den is telling the absolute truth, which is easiest if you think he wasn't personally involved with the coldhouse prank, then all is easy, as you say, for this particular instance (things get tricky later, maybe).

If you think Den is likely to lie, to make himself seem older and thus nowhere near the coldhouse at the time, well then, you have to toss out that date. (Bill S. thought that the date was ten years off, and the incident happened in 1928.)

Plus, if you find an artifact that only existed in 1924, linked to Den at age four, then you construct a timeline that makes Den eighteen years old in 1938--just like the young fellow who died. Alas, that artifact might be the only red herring in the entire collection of historical pointers!

My enthusiasm wanes.

=mantis=