

Seven American Nights Forgery

The Urth list — 4 messages, 2 voices, 08 May 2008

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Dave Tallman — 08 May 2008, 19:59

I found more evidence for the forgery theory in SAN:

"I carried with me the bottle we had bought, still nearly half full; and before she pinched out the candle I persuaded her to pour out a final drink for us to share..."

There's a strong implication that Nadan drank some of that bottle. Ardis would be very suspicious if he didn't. But Wolfe has established that Nadan doesn't drink (p. 362, Orb IODDAOSAOS). Nadan can't change character without explanation. He wouldn't break his principles just for a chance to see her. There were simpler ways; he could have had an extra candle and matches in his pocket and left his pants in easy reach of the bed.

The story is melodramatic and absurd. It has to be a lie. That's why it has perplexed so many of us. Before, we were left with impossibilities:

1) Ardis had some ugly deformity that couldn't be detected by feel, such as discolored blotches on her skin. The violence of his reaction makes this impossible. He might be disgusted and break up with her, but that would be all.

2) Ardis herself was the werewolf he tried to kill. The Osman Aga story gives a scientific origin for the beasts. There's no way that a non-supernatural mutant woman could morph her skull into the inhuman shape Nadan saw (blunt muzzle, low brow like an macaque) and then back to her beautiful self the next day. Wolfe can't be asking us to believe this; it would destroy the story.

4) Ardis was not the werewolf, but had some hidden deformity that instantly identified her as the same sort of creature. Nobody has been able to figure out what this could be.

Nadan would have no reason to fabricate this incident. From at least that point on, a forger is writing for him. I'm still suspicious of the Good Friday parade description, but it could be genuine. Nadan seems to be allegorical here -- the "dead leader lifted up" is the lost greatness of America.

Here is my reconstruction of what really happened.

1) Saturday, Nadan arrives in Washington.

2) Sunday, Nadan heads north to see the buildings. He visits the National Art Gallery. (Why would he bypass the place his mentor visited and see the old ruins first? The gallery was on his way there.) That night he writes of his fears.

3) Monday, he goes back and visits the ruined buildings. The beggar with no lower jaw shows him the Smithsonian room. The beggar boasts "Sunday we will be great again," knowing that he

will be misunderstood as saying "Someday we will be great again."

Nadan's visit is noticed by F.E.D. informers among the beggars. The police tail him to the theater. The "curator" goes in, sits in his row, and draws him into conversation. Nadan escorts the curator home. He doses the eggs.

4) Tuesday, visits the park during the day. Attends the theater again and sees "Mary Rose." Eats egg one. Goes out to try to find Ardis. Kills the werebeast.

5) Wednesday, buys gift for Ardis at the Washington Monument fair. Eats egg two. Attends first part of "Mary Rose." Bobby attempts to pickpocket him, gets arrested. Ardis comes to his room to intercede for Bobby.

6) Thursday, spends most of the day trying to get Bobby out of jail. While he is occupied, the secret police search his room. They are experts and leave no trace. They make a copy of his journal and get it translated. Nadan returns home, eats egg three, then goes out to the play, where he ends up performing. Goes to Ardis' apartment.

The police return while he is absent. They found the mention of the eggs in the journal. It won't do for Nadan to destroy his mind or possibly die before they are ready with a cover-up. They bring a sniffing dog or some other detector and find the bad egg. They cannot simply replace it with a harmless copy -- the eggs are speckled and he might have noticed the patterns. Instead, they take the bad egg and move the journal, hoping he will attribute it to a thieving maid.

When Nadan returns, he finds the journal disturbed. He tears out the incriminating section about the Art Museum visit (shortening the record for Sunday).

7) Friday, eats the next-to-last egg. Picnic and boating with Ardis. Hears her proposal to go treasure-hunting. Sees the Good Friday parade (whether or not the account of it was forged).

Sometime during the evening, Nadan and Ardis are captured by the secret police. It could be before or after the costume party. Ardis is taken to her apartment and killed with Nadan's gun. Nadan will never be seen again.

His journal entries are given to the story-writing and forging computers, which come up with the twist ending in which Ardis was a werewolf and Nadan ran off to the interior of America after killing her.

By this time, his family is worried. All his letters to them have been intercepted by the police (p. 382-383). They send a detective, who will eventually find the doctored journal as a false clue.

On Easter Sunday, the American government will pull some kind of stunt with a forged document. It may start a war (as Kreton wanted to do in "Visit to a Small Planet"). The intent will be to bring America back to more power in world. ("Sunday we will be great again").

The death of the "hero" on Good Friday and the potential "resurrection" of America's power on Sunday form a nice Christian analogy, of course.

Dave Tallman — 09 May 2008, 18:19 · follows Dave Tallman

Matthew King wrote:

Dave, I've been reading your arguments with great interest. Please don't let our collective lack of response dissuade you from continuing.

Thanks for the encouragement, Matthew.

Rereading with the forgery plot in mind, here are some new thoughts.

1) The woman who helped Nadan get the curator into bed supplied him with the chemical with which he dosed the egg. It becomes highly likely that this was poison. He was expected to take it and die that night, with any letters he wrote that day still unmailed. His game with the eggs was real Russian Roulette.

It threw the police off, too. Is he smarter than he appeared to be? What has he done with the bottle? If he dies some other way and the poison is found it may expose the plot. Therefore they must protect him until they can figure out what is going on. They saved him from the werewolf, and also from a dog-pack attack in the park. The hotel manager warned him that one man with a pistol would not be safe. When Nadan heard the howling of dogs behind him, he assumed they were "mourning their fallen leader." More likely, the police were killing more of the dogs.

2) The curator's idea of scent as the primal form of communication is interesting. He smokes a pipe in the theater, possibly to mask his own scent of excitement. His example of the scented letter falsely declaring passion is exactly paralleled when Ardis leaves a scented note in Nadan's hotel room. Did the curator suggest this idea to her?

3) The curator had two documents to show Nadan. One was the machine-written forgery, an example of a "closed curve" in which all original meaning was lost. The second was a blank piece of paper. I suggest this was the simplest possible example of an "open curve." No matter to what level of abstraction you go, a blank paper's information is not lost, because there is nothing to lose. Mathematicians like these zero cases. I think this was a line of baloney intended to make Nadan think the curator was a harmless academic. It's also a nice little joke by Wolfe. To him, a story which conceals nothing is no story at all.

4) Now that we have mapped Nadan's week to Holy Week, here are some more parallels:

a) The ruined city suggests Jerusalem. One part is described as "occupied." (As in 'Jesus Christ Superstar' -- "We are occupied. Have you forgotten how put down we are?") The police act like the Roman soldiers.

b) The first real entry into the city is on Palm Sunday. Nadan describes crowds and music.

c) The authorities plot against Nadan and try to kill him.

d) Nadan is followed by beggars and people needing healing.

e) A sacred place (the Washington Monument) has been converted into a den of thieves, selling stolen rings.

f) Ardis becomes Judas, the disciple who betrays him and dies herself. (She is certainly in on the police plot. She knew Terry would be absent, for example). "I asked her if she loved me, and she stopped my mouth with a kiss."

g) The meal of sandwiches (bread) and fruit-flavored beverage (wine) recalls the Last Supper.

h) Red and purple garments in the city. Scarlet and purple robes were put on Jesus.

5) With so many parallels, it's time to move the arrest to where it really belongs: late Thursday

night. All of Friday needs to go into the forgery. This is where the exposition gets really obvious, as Ardis lays out the story of treasures in the interior and the creatures there. It lays the foundation for the false ending. Nadan becomes much more love-sick and his determination to see her is stated several times, again telegraphing the ending.

The real ending of what Nadan wrote is on p. 377. His last two words are "the end."

Roy C. Lackey wrote:

If the F.E.D., for reasons unexplained, wanted Nadan dead, and in fact killed him, they would have to have gone to extraordinary lengths in forging an account no one else had reason to believe even existed, and in so doing do something pointless and stupid. If Nadan had been killed by the U.S. government, the government would have no reason to suppose that a private investigator would eventually be hired by his family to investigate his disappearance, so there would be no need to "plant" a false account. Nadan would simply have disappeared without a trace, or been the victim of a random "crime" or "accident" in a rough and violent land.

Yes, it does seem extraordinary to go to such lengths, but the stakes were very high and Nadan seems to be related to royalty (Uncle Mirza, where Mirza means "prince"). My theory includes an initial simple plan to kill him that went wrong because of his strange game with the eggs.

As for the idea that nobody at home knew of his journal, we can't be sure of that. He bought it at a bazaar at home, so he may have showed it to his family and promised them he would bring it back full of tales of adventure. He contemplates giving them an expurgated version, never just chucking the whole idea. The police could know this if one of the letters they intercepted included something like "As I told you before I left, I am keeping a journal..."

Roy C. Lackey — 11 May 2008, 06:43 · follows Dave Tallman

As the first two sentences of the story make absolutely clear, the private investigator hired by Nadan's family had already unearthed sufficient evidence to lead him to believe that Nadan had left D.C. to travel northward to the region of the Bay of Delaware **before** the notebook had even been "discovered" in said region. In other words, no matter what happened to Nadan after the concluding events related in the notebook, whether forged or not, the notebook had no bearing on the investigator's previous sleuthing. The discovery of the notebook only served to lend a certain amount of credence to his previously communicated conjecture that Nadan had left D.C. for points north.

If Nadan killed Ardis and, as you suggest, he was being intensely monitored by the U.S. government, they would have known of the killing and had a perfectly legitimate excuse to arrest him openly for murder. There is no indication that any such thing happened, and if it had, there would have been no need to fabricate a diary in order to insinuate that he left the city voluntarily to adventure in the interior of the country, much less plant that diary so far away from D.C. If the government killed Ardis and attempted to frame Nadan for the murder, as you contend, the result is the same.

Further, with Ardis dead and without the information contained in the notebook, how was the investigator able to conclude that Nadan had left the city and traveled northward?

Nadan had no real desire to go adventuring or treasure hunting, but he felt too defiled to go home. It is possible that he made some sort of plans to travel northward on his own initiative, or he may have been blackmailed by Bobby. Either way -- or by some other way altogether -- a trail of evidence was left that allowed the investigator to conclude that Nadan left the city **alive**, and the evidence had nothing to do with the notebook.

As for the American government pulling "some kind of stunt" on Easter Sunday that would have significant international repercussions, it must have been a big dud. The note that the investigator sent to the family back in Iran along with the notebook was obviously written in the autumn, a good six months after Nadan's stay in D.C. There is no indication that anything of import happened in the world since Easter.

If any or all of the notebook was forged, the most obvious suspect is the person who stood to benefit from it the most -- the investigator. So long as he could keep up the family's hope that Nadan was alive, he could keep milking them for money. And he almost certainly spoke Farsi.

-Roy

Dave Tallman — 11 May 2008, 09:51 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Roy. C. Lackey wrote:

As the first two sentences of the story make absolutely clear, the private investigator hired by Nadan's family had already unearthed sufficient evidence to lead him to believe that Nadan had left D.C. to travel northward to the region of the Bay of Delaware *before* the notebook had even been "discovered" in said region. In other words, no matter what happened to Nadan after the concluding events related in the notebook, whether forged or not, the notebook had no bearing on the investigator's previous sleuthing. The discovery of the notebook only served to lend a certain amount of credence to his previously communicated conjecture that Nadan had left D.C. for points north.

Yes, there has to be evidence beyond the notebook that Nadan has gone to the Bay of Delaware. But if the ending of the journal account has been faked, then so could that evidence. In my view, the notebook is just one piece of a false trail.

If Nadan killed Ardis and, as you suggest, he was being intensely monitored by the U.S. government, they would have known of the killing and had a perfectly legitimate excuse to arrest him openly for murder. There is no indication that any such thing happened, and if it had, there would have been no need to fabricate a diary in order to insinuate that he left the city voluntarily to adventure in the interior of the country, much less plant that diary so far away from D.C. If the government killed Ardis and attempted to frame Nadan for the murder, as you contend, the result is the same.

I don't see that the "result is the same" if the government killed Ardis and framed Nadan for murder. Openly arresting him on false charges wouldn't have served their purposes. The family and their lawyers would visit him in jail and details of the plot might be revealed. The authorities wanted him silenced, so they framed him as a fugitive wanted for murder. That way the family would be afraid to demand the full co-operation of the police in finding him.

Further, with Ardis dead and without the information contained in the notebook, how was the investigator able to conclude that Nadan had left the city and traveled northward?

So your contention is that Ardis isn't dead? The account we have, if it were genuine, seems to imply very strongly that Nadan killed her. We have him, gun in hand, faced with what has been revealed to him as an "it." In his hallucination he refers to her as "my dead Ardis." He imagines the word "police" spoken loudly, probably because he fears they will be after him soon.

A possible start for the investigator would be the hotel manager saying that Nadan checked out,

porters who put his luggage in a wagon, etc. Such witnesses could be lying, of course. The police could also tell the detective that they wanted to arrest Nadan and that their investigations showed he fled north.

As for the American government pulling "some kind of stunt" on Easter Sunday that would have significant international repercussions, it must have been a big dud. The note that the investigator sent to the family back in Iran along with the notebook was obviously written in the autumn, a good six months after Nadan's stay in D.C. There is no indication that anything of import happened in the world since Easter.

The frame tale is narrowly focussed on the hunt for Nadan. You can argue that nothing happened on the international scene, but an argument from lack of evidence is a weak one. It would have been nice for my theory if Wolfe had made some sort of mention of troubled times. He does hint that something is slowing down the mail between the investigator and the family.

You make some good arguments, but I'm convinced I have found the "gestalt" of this story. When I read what I think is the last page Nadan really wrote, the dramatic irony jumps out at me.

"You will see me tomorrow. You're going to take me boating, and we'll picnic by the water, under the cherry trees. Tomorrow night the theater will be closed for Easter, and you can take me to a party. But now you are going home, and I am going to sleep." When I was dressed and standing in the doorway, I asked her if she loved me, but she stopped my mouth with a kiss.

The parallels to Holy Week have been extensive up to this point. Judas betrayed Jesus "with a kiss" right before his arrest. I believe that the parade described the next day is a "stations of the cross" parade for Good Friday. If the parallel continues, what follows Thursday night for Nadan should not be a happy day in the park.