

PLASTOGRAPHIQUE

journal of coprolithic metabolism & metametabolism · n° 00007 · mar 2004

contents:

fiction #00017

non-poem #00017

fiction #00017

“Obnoxious know-it-allery?” ¶ “No! The *preservation of knowledge!* That’s the basic philosophy behind the junior Bersaglieri guidebook! We...” ¶ “Out! Out!” ¶ “How many times must I tell you, Signor Tenente, that junior Bersaglieri guidebooks are *not for sale!* They are for use by *members only!*” ¶ “?” ¶ “So I’ll *join!*” ¶ “As a *senior* Bersaglieri? No, you must *first* be a *junior* Bersaglieri, and I suspect you surpassed the *age limitation* around the turn of the century!” ¶ “Snort!” ¶ “Sorry, Signor Tenente! We’re sworn to protect the guidebook from being exploited to make a *profit!*” ¶ “Gaspl! I Never suspected Bersaglieri were radical crackpots!” ¶ “But what does a tycoon like you want with something as common as a *book?*” ¶ “As usual, lieutenant, you’re all wet! — Books are *knowledge*, and knowledge equals power and *money!* If I had all the data that seems to be buried in that little guidebook, there’s no end to the riches I could uncover! For example, I once bought the ship’s logs from Spain’s Archivo General de Indies! After doing years of research, they helped me locate tons of treasure on the Spanish main! — And you... what do you learn from watching *TV* in my lobby all day?” ¶ “Ha! Yesterday I learned the flip velocity of a ‘52 Hudson! — Touché!” ¶ “Bah! Anyway, I wouldn’t even *need* that silly Bersaglieri guidebook if I had the books I *really* dream of!” ¶ “What books are those, Signor Tenente?” ¶ “The library of Alexandria!!!” ¶ “Alexandria Fonebone? That retired schoolmarm who lives over on...” ¶ “No, lieutenant, Alexandria, *Egypt!* Its library contained *all* the knowledge of the ancient world! — The city was founded by Alexander the Great in the fourth century B.C. to be the capital of his empire! — For 600 years the Alexandrine scholars labored to collect copies of every written work on earth! The library was a repository of all the knowledge acquired by all the writers over the first millennia of mankind! — Contained in the library were scrolls telling the full histories of the Phoenicians, the Mycenaean, the Etruscans, and who knows how

many other lost civilizations!” ¶ “Yes... And all their *secrets* too, like the locations of treasure troves and gold mines! Sigh! But it’s gone now, the scrolls *burned* in riots and invasions!” ¶ “There’s no mention of *that* in our guidebook!” ¶ “Ha! So that stupid guidebook isn’t what it’s cracked up to be, after all! Who needs it?” ¶ “If it’s not in the Bersaglieri guidebook, it *didn’t* happen!” ¶ “What a thought! If the library of Alexandria still existed, I’d pay *anything* to find it!” ¶ “Yeah! We Bersaglieri would *also* like to see such priceless knowledge recovered!” ¶ “Sigh!” ¶ “Sigh!” ¶ “Yawn!” ¶ “I bet I could *find* the lost library if I could combine my *money* with the secrets buried in your guidebook!” ¶ “Signor Tenente, you have a *deal!*” ¶ “Huh?” ¶ “We Bersaglieri will *allow* you to use our guidebook for such a *noble* purpose... and we’ll even lend you our official hound, Capitano Varini!” ¶ “He’s trained to track down mummy wrappings, rusty armor, and ancient *paper*, all by *nose* power!” ¶ “I’ll do it!” ¶ “Ready to go, lieutenant?” ¶ “*Not me!* I’m not missing weeks” worth of work just to search for some dusty old library books!” ¶ “Besides, tomorrow on ‘Sea Search’, Mike Savage has a high-speed harpoon fight with some crooks and his minisub flips and bursts into flames!” ¶ “But lieutenant, the library contained lots of exciting plays and comedies by Sophocles and Aristophanes! They’re lots of fun!” ¶ “Did Sophocles ever write a *western?*” ¶ “Well, no, but...” ¶ “Touché again!” ¶ “*Let* him stay here and miss the adventure, boys! We’re off to *Egypt!*” ¶ “There it is, lads... the ancient library of Alexandria in all its glory! Quite a sight, eh?” ¶ “Wow! It sure is, Signor Tenente!” ¶ “Too bad it’s only a *mural!*” ¶ “Please to excuse... are you Signor Tenente who wishes to see me? — I am the head librarian, Hassan Ben Fhedyet!” ¶ “Yes, I can see that! We’ll come back after lunch!” ¶ “No, let me show you our tiny library! Of course, it is not much compared to the lost library I understand you are curious about! — There were supposedly *one million* scrolls in

the great library, the knowledge of *eons* of human peoples!" ¶ "Any clue as to where it was located?" ¶ "No... the building itself was destroyed by Arab invaders in 640 A.D.! They burned the remaining scrolls to heat *bath water*! — The very thought makes me want to cry!" ¶ "What now boys?" ¶ "He must be wrong! Check the guidebook under 'bath water: hot!'" ¶ "Wait! Here's an obscure comment by Aristarchus the astronomer! — He was an Alexandrine scholar who knew the earth is round and revolves around the sun, facts that modern men did not rediscover for another 1,700 years! Such was alexandrine wisdom! — Aristarchus recorded how the tower of Pharos cast its shadow in a slightly different direction every day of the year! At dawn on the first day of the year... the shadow fell on the *library*!" ¶ "In all my days, I've never heard of that!" ¶ "That's that blasted guidebook for you, pal! Get used to it!" ¶ "Here's where the tower stood! On January 1, it's shadow would have fallen on *this* narrow area of the city!" ¶ "That's nearby! C'mon... let's take Capitano Varini there!" ¶ "Dr. Varella, get the junior Bersaglieri *smellometer* and give Capitano Varini the scent of *papyrus scrolls*!" ¶ "I'll do it! I'll do it! — Well, slap my face and call me a bitch! He's already on the trail of something!" ¶ "Yippee!" ¶ "The trail leads to this wall! Perhaps they sealed the library up to hide it from invaders! — Hand me that *pick*!" ¶ "One million scrolls... inside this little hut?" ¶ "Signor Tenente, maybe you shouldn't..." ¶ "Dig! Dig! Dig!" ¶ "Oops! Uh... um... just wondering if you carry 'Hoyle'?" ¶ "Aaaiee!" ¶ "Pay-puh! Pay-puh! Getcha pay-puh! Heah!" ¶ "??? That sounds like..." ¶ "Signor Tenente! What are you doing?" ¶ "Trying to recoup my *investment*! I just opted to buy this newsstand rather than join the *pharaohs*!" ¶ "Look, men... according to the guidebook, we figured wrong when we plotted the site of the library! We didn't take one factor into account!" ¶ "Celestial drift?" ¶ "@%#&* Smellometer!" ¶ "No, the fact that the Greeks of Alexandria didn't figure years the way we do today! *Their* first day of the year was the first day of the new moon closest to harvest time... Approximately *October 15*!" ¶ "Then the site should be in *that* direction!" ¶ "Give the hound the scent, Tenente! — Signor Tenente?" ¶ "What's he doing?" ¶ "He dialed the smellometer to 'dollar bills'!" ¶ "Let's go — snort! — my vim and

vigor is restored!" ¶ "Be sure to dial up *papyrus* this time, not *newsprint*!" ¶ "Oho! The hound is on the *right* trail this time! And I'm on my way to millions in ancient treasure! Billions! *Trillions*! — Uh... maybe one of us should stay at my newsstand in case somebody wants to buy a paper!" ¶ "Uh-oh! Look!" ¶ "Hey! What's the big idea of playing dodge-ball in a public thoroughfare? — Darn kids! Always underfoot when a man's trying to *work*! — The trail ends here, boys! Stop playing around and start digging! — Maybe the library was preserved under a *landfill*, or..." ¶ "Someone to see you, Signor Tenente!" ¶ "Are you *nuts*? You can't conduct an archaeological excavation in the middle of a soccer championship!" ¶ "Oh, so? Show me that rule in the rule book!" ¶ "Gosh, he's right! It is allowed by the 'King Tut' rule of 1922!" ¶ "No, that rule was *voided* after it resulted in a *curse* on whosoever dared enter the locker room!" ¶ "Oh, never mind! I'll buy both teams and the stadium!" ¶ "What about the spectators? There'll be another *riot*!" ¶ "Give me that megaphone!" ¶ "Free copies of *Mickey Mouse Comics* to the first ten people at the newsstand across the street! — Quick! Dig before they find out they don't publish that anymore!" ¶ "The hound is getting excited! We're getting *close*!" ¶ "Ow-wooo-ooooo!" ¶ "Whups!" ¶ "!" ¶ "Signor Tenente fell into some kinda *cavern*!" ¶ "Hold on! Hold on!" ¶ "Jeepers! Look at *that*!" ¶ "You found *something* Signor Tenente! But it looks more like a *tomb* of some sort!" ¶ "Well, get a *rope* before the hound and I become residents!" ¶ "Anybody see any scrolls? Or books? Or pamphlets? Or so much as an old issue of Mickey Mouse?" ¶ "It looks empty except for those two sarcophagi!" ¶ "Dr. Valentini, check the guidebook under 'hieroglyphics, meaning of!'" ¶ "This looks like it was built for somebody *important*!" ¶ "Probably the owners of the 'Mortgage and Loan of Alexandria', not the *library*!" ¶ "Wow, Signor Tenente! As far as *tombs* go, we hit the *double jackpot*! — That's the casket of Alexander the Great! — And the other one is Cleopatra's!" ¶ "Cleopatra? *The* Cleopatra?" ¶ "Well, she was the *seventh* Cleopatra, but she was the one in all the movies!" ¶ "Here's the whole story! — Alexander's top general, Ptolemy, founded the great library to honor Alexander's memory, and made his crystal sarcophagus the central exhibit! He was the first *greek* pharaoh... and Cleopatra's ancestor!" ¶ "I thought

non-poem #00017

Cleopatra was *Egyptian*!” ¶ “No, she was *Greek* and highly educated! That’s why she thought Caesar and his invading legions were *barbarians*!” ¶ “Ugh!” ¶ “When Caesar burned a warehouse of library scrolls, Cleopatra knew the library must be protected... so she founded *that*!” ¶ “What is it?” ¶ “The symbol of her ‘Guardians of the Great Library’! It’s an *ibis* representing *Thoth*, the god who invented the art of writing! — Cleopatra’s last wish was to be entombed with Alexander’s casket in the library catacombs... along with the *original* scrolls collection!” ¶ “Smart girl! While invaders throughout the centuries destroyed only *copies*, Cleopatra had the *actual* library hidden down *here*.” ¶ “Where, dagnabbit?! *Where*!” ¶ “Look around, Signor Tenente! I suspect these ‘metal walls’ are actually the ends of *bronze tubes*, each one containing a *scroll*!” ¶ “Gasp! That means we’ve *found* the lost library! A million bronze tubes a million scrolls... each one a *priceless* treasure! — And after two millennia, still in perfect condition! Cleopatra was one slick chick!” ¶ “Be careful, Signor Tenente! Papyrus is *delicate*!” ¶ “Perhaps *this* scroll tells the secret location of the treasury of King *Croesus*! *That’d* be nothing to *sneeze* at! — Ac-choo! Ah-choo!” ¶ “Papyrus is only strips of river reeds glued together! After 2,000 years, what did you expect?” ¶ “A million tubes of *dust*?! I might have just inhaled the entire history of Crete!” ¶ “Look, men... an ante chamber!” ¶ “The guardian symbol... and an inscription!” ¶ “Check the guidebook for a translation!” ¶ “It’s *greek*, but from a much later period than Cleo’s day! Ah... here it is! — It’s *Byzantine Greek*... the language of the eastern half of the Roman Empire! That means the ‘Guardians of the Great Library’ were still in business 500 years after Cleopatra!” ¶ “*Hope*!!!” ¶ “The guardians made *parchment* copies of the scrolls and moved them to safety in the *new* capital of civilization!” ¶ “Where?” ¶ “Constantinople, capital of the mighty Byzantine Empire! It’s now known as Istanbul! — Here, the ideals of Greek civilization lived on after Rome rose and fell, and after wondrous Alexandria was reduced to rubble!” ¶ “Yes, Signor Tenente, this basilica once housed 100,000 parchment scrolls... All the history and science known to medieval man!” ¶ “Sounds like they *condensed* the library of

Alexandria! Perhaps they left out the plays and poetry!” ¶ “This library was the *light* of the dark ages for 800 years! — Scholars traveled from the middle east to study here, and in exchange they brought the books from the Great Libraries of Islam!” ¶ “Wow! The pot *grows*!” ¶ “Here you go, Capitano Varini! I set the dial to ‘parchment’! Get the scent and do your stuff!” ¶ “He’s on the trail! Follow me with a taxi, boys... One big enough to hold 100,000 scrolls!” ¶ “Wait, Signor Tenente! — The scrolls were all lost in a *fire* in 936 A.D.!” ¶ “The library — destroyed *again*?” ¶ “Only the originals! The monks in our scriptorium had spent centuries copying the scrolls into the latest invention... *books*! Ten scrolls fit in each book! — Those 10,000 books were the pride of Constantinople... until they *disappeared* when the city was looted during the 4th crusade!” ¶ “Yes... here it is in the guidebook! — In 1204, crusaders en route to the holy land were hired by wealthy *Venice* to pillage its rival city, Constantinople! — Our trail leads to *Venice*! Where’s Signor Tenente?” ¶ “I can’t even see him! Maybe we should have told him that parchment *isn’t* paper... — ...it’s animal skin!” ¶ “@#%©” ¶ “There was an era when world power was concentrated in certain city-states, rather than nations! The rulers of the world were wealthy businessmen from cities such as Genoa, Florence, or Venice! — Imagine! In the middle ages, people valued *books* more than gold or jewels! Wealthy families spent entire *fortunes* on books! *Everyone* was a book collector!” ¶ “Times have certainly changed!” ¶ “The guidebook says that the crusaders took the Byzantine library to the abbey of *San Slanti*!” ¶ “That’s just ahead! Pole *faster*! — Hm... that must be it!” ¶ “The palace is sinking into the mud just like all of Venice has been doing for a thousand years!” ¶ “Yes, Signor Tenente, this abbey once housed a magnificent library! Some say our books sparked the *renaissance*! — Leonardo and Michelangelo got their first inspirations studying here! Another man read of the wonders of the far east and journeyed there with his son seeking riches!” ¶ “And, according to our guidebook, the son *repaid* the library by bringing back copies of the great books of Kublai Khan’s empire! His name was *Marco Polo*!” ¶ “Marco Polo added the libraries of ancient *Cathay* to the pot? This treasure chest just *tripled* in value! — But what *happened* to all those books?!” ¶

“Come! I will show you!” ¶ “The books were lost in 1485, when our bell tower fell over! It was very odd since none of the monks had noticed it was even *leaning*!” ¶ “I can believe it!” ¶ “The bell tower crushed the scriptorium where the monks had been printing copies of the books on a new *Gutenberg press*!” ¶ “Didn’t anyone try to *dig* the books out?” ¶ “It is said that when that was attempted, the workers’ senses were assaulted by *demonic powers*! — They were superstitious and feared the ‘evil nose’!” ¶ “You mean ‘evil eye’?” ¶ “Evil nose!” ¶ “That was to tell ‘em to leave the finding of the books to *Signor Tenente*! — C’mon, Varini! — There! The smellometer is set on ‘book binding’! Go for it, pooch! — There’s nothing evil about this wonder hound’s nose! He can... — Oof!” ¶ “He’s gone down a storm drain!” ¶ “Maybe the scriptorium was pushed through into the Venice *sewers*!” ¶ “Perhaps I should have been satisfied with that newsstand business and left it at that! — No, *wait*! He’s found something beyond this wall! Go get some picks!” ¶ “We *found* it! The Lost Library of Alexandria!” ¶ “*Oog!* What a *stench*!” ¶ “Sniff? Snuff? Whiiiiine!” ¶ “I think the official hound is getting officially *ill*!” ¶ “Bless my deductibles! I’m about to dance tip-toe through the secrets of the ancients!” ¶ “Uh-oh! Better look in the guidebook’s ‘dog’ section under ‘telling barks from barfs.’” ¶ “He’s just overcome with *delight* at having led me to this treasure trove of... — Slime?” ¶ “These poor books have been down here for 500 years! They’ve become a bit *mildewed*!” ¶ “What an ignoble fate for the great library... turned to *goo*!” ¶ “I could *cry*... if I didn’t feel more like doing something *else*!” ¶ “But didn’t the abbot say something about *printing copies*!” ¶ “You’re right! C’mon... Maybe he’ll see us again!” ¶ “Phew! I wouldn’t if I were him!” ¶ “*Yez*, before da bell dower collabed, da mongs managed do prind *one* full sed of boogs! *Typesed*, id condensed down do 1,000 vobules! — *Lorenzo de Medici* send a boogdealer nabed *Christobal Colon* do buy dat sed of boogs for a *huge* amount of lire in 1484!” ¶ “Check the guidebook under ‘Medici’!” ¶ “The Medici family was the richest, most powerful in Italy! They became *kings* and *popes* and they were *ruthless* book collectors! — Lorenzo wanted to find new trade routes to India! He’d heard that the great library held accounts of the phoenicians’ voyage to unknown western lands in 600 B.C.!” ¶ “*America!!!*”

¶ “But Christobal Colon realized the *value* of the library’s secrets and never gave the books to the Medici family! He quit bookdealing and went to *sea*!” ¶ “And the trail ends there?” ¶ “?” ¶ “This obscure bookdealer disappeared into history with the *only* set of books from the great library! Sob!” ¶ “Check ‘Colon, Christobal’!” ¶ “Well, you might know this obscure bookdealer-turned sailor by the *english* version of his name, Signor Tenente!” ¶ “Yeah?” ¶ “Christopher Columbus!” ¶ “The plot thickens!” ¶ “Like cement!” ¶ “Columbus’ private library is in Seville, Spain!” ¶ “I’m already halfway across France!” ¶ “A 1,000 books set? No, our Columbus Library does not have one, Signor Tenente! But you’re free to look around!” ¶ “Thank you!” ¶ “What are these funny words scribbled in the margins and endpapers?” ¶ “Columbus made notes in all his books, using a *code* no one can decipher!” ¶ “Check the guidebook under ‘Columbus, funny words’!” ¶ “Yep! It’s right here... the *key* to the code! Let’s get to work!” ¶ “What? How can Columbus’ code be in *that* silly little book?” ¶ “Maddening isn’t it? But I’m *used* to it!” ¶ “Eureka! Here’s a whole section of notes written by Columbus in 1505 about a secret library!” ¶ “I’m all ears and goosebumps! *Read!*” ¶ “I used the library of Alexandria to discover the western route to India, but the Medici family knew I had the books their patriarch had paid for! I resolved to hide them somewhere beyond the Medici’s powerful grasp! — In 1498, I filled my ship’s hold with the books and took them to my governor’s mansion in Santo Domingo!” ¶ “Hey, Columbus! What’s with all the *books*?” ¶ “But King Ferdinand learned of the books and seized them! He took my governorship away and had me returned to Spain in chains! — Someday I hope to reclaim the books and use them to find the lost gold of Ophir, King Solomon’s Mines, and so much more! — But Columbus never sailed to the New World again, and he died in *poverty*! — Sounds like you and Columbus are treasure-hunting birds of a feather, Signor Tenente!” ¶ “Maybe he was part *scottish*!” ¶ “Could the lost library still be in the West Indies?” ¶ “If they ever moved it, it would be mentioned in the logs of the spanish fleet! — And I *bought* those records for use in salvaging treasure, remember?” ¶ “Back to Gorizia! Wow! This is the *best* treasure hunt *ever*!” ¶ “Halt! Who goes there? Pass!” ¶ “Some *guard*! I could be Miss Ferguson taking