

THE CURSE OF THE 30 PIECES OF SILVER

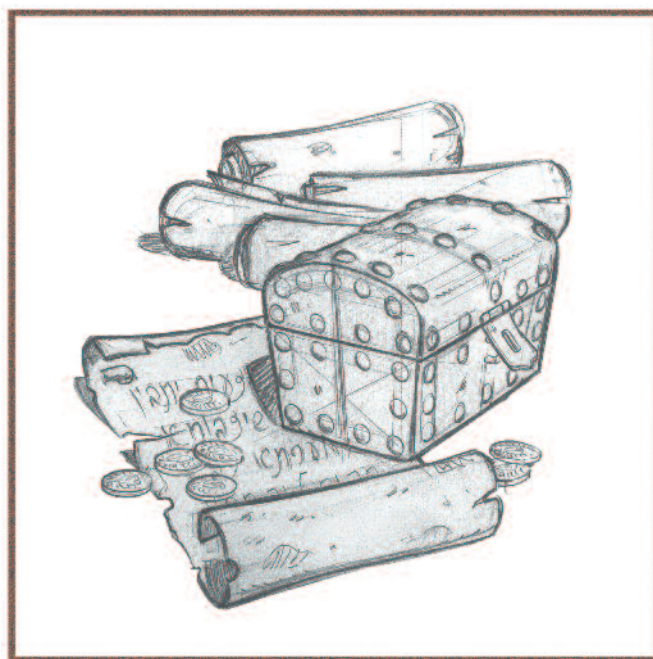
PART 1

THE SCROLL OF NICODEMUS

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Based on the characters of
EDGAR P. JACOBS

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THIS INCREDIBLE STORY BEGINS ON THE NIGHT OF AUGUST 26TH, WITH A RELATIVELY WEAK EARTHQUAKE (4.2 ON THE RICHTER SCALE) THAT SHAKES, YET AGAIN, THE SEISMICALLY ACTIVE MANI PENINSULA, AT THE SOUTHERN TIP OF THE PELOPONNESE.



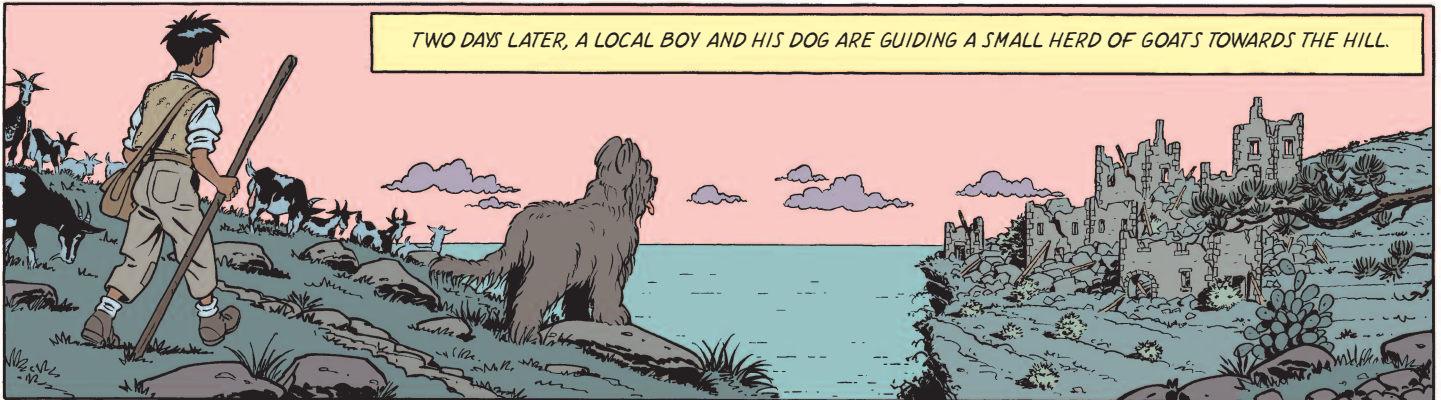
AS THE AREA IS SPARSELY POPULATED, THERE IS ONLY SLIGHT MATERIAL DAMAGE, AND NO LOSS OF LIFE TO DEPLORE.



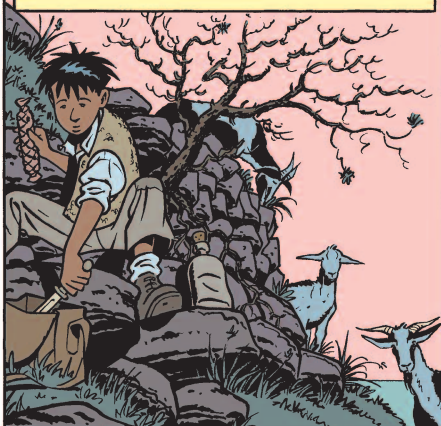
BUT A LANDSLIDE CARRIES OFF THE SIDE OF A HILL, AND, WITH IT, WHAT WAS LEFT OF AN ANCIENT RUINED VILLAGE.



TWO DAYS LATER, A LOCAL BOY AND HIS DOG ARE GUIDING A SMALL HERD OF GOATS TOWARDS THE HILL.



HAVING TAKEN STOCK, WITH LITTLE EMOTION, OF THE CHANGES IN THE LANDSCAPE CAUSED BY THE EARTHQUAKE, THE GOATHERD FINDS A COSY SPOT TO HAVE A BITE.



WHILE HIS DOG...

Triton! Come here if you want a bit of sausage!



WOOFF...

TRITON?!?...





Wait, boy. I'm going to get you out of there, don't worry.

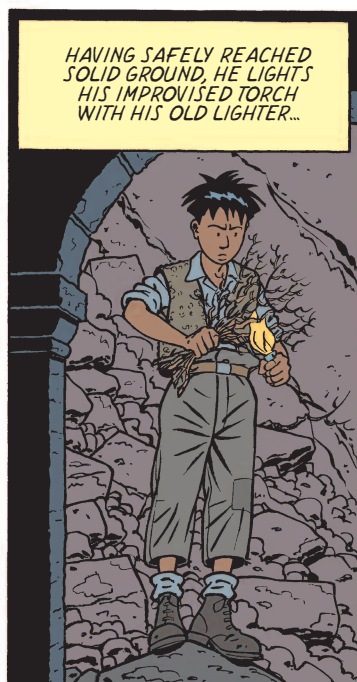
WOOFF!
WOOFF!



AFTER GATHERING A HANDFUL OF DRY TWIGS, THE YOUNG GOATHERD CLIMBS DOWN INTO THE CREVICE...



... AND SLIDES DOWN A FEW FEET ON A SLOPE OF DIRT AND PEBBLES.



HAVING SAFELY REACHED SOLID GROUND, HE LIGHTS HIS IMPROVISED TORCH WITH HIS OLD LIGHTER...



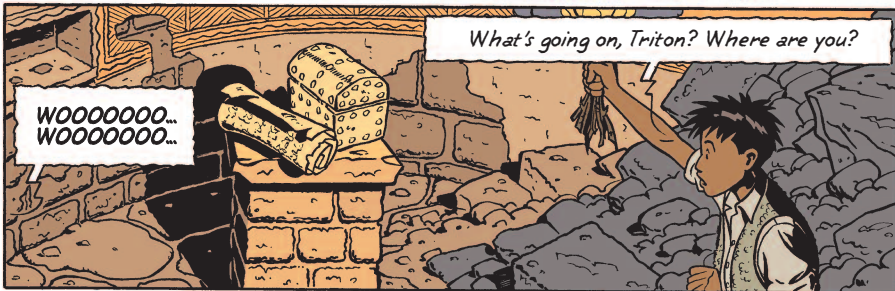
... AND DISCOVERS AN INCREDIBLE SIGHT!

???



WOOOOOOOOOOOOO...

By Saint Dimitrios!?!



WOOOOOOO...
WOOOOOOO...

What's going on, Triton? Where are you?



You're scared, eh, Triton? Me, too. Don't worry. We'll get out of here.



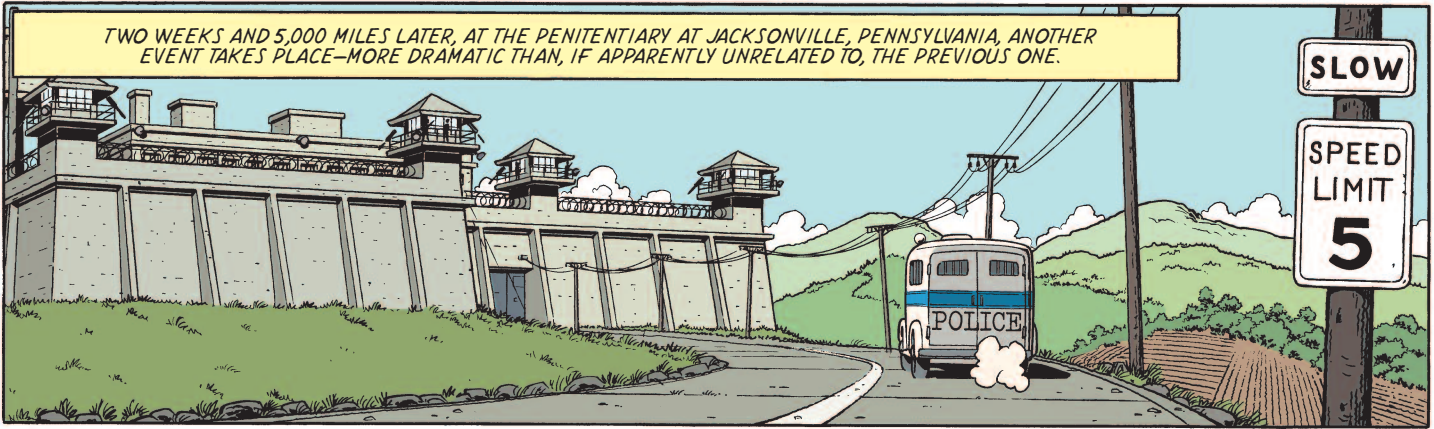
But first, I'd like to know what's in that casket. There might be something valuable in there.

GRRR...

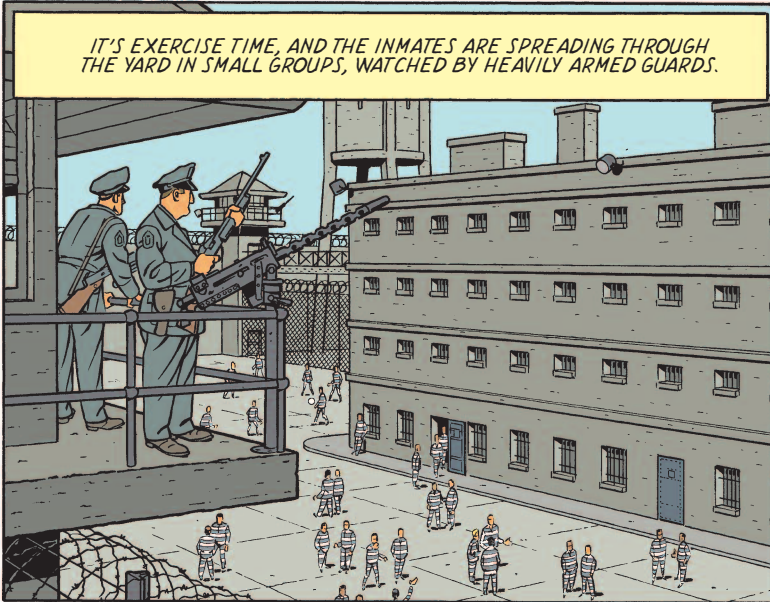


BUT, AS THE YOUNG BOY LIFTS THE LID OF THE METAL CASKET, A STRONG DRAFT SUDDENLY SMOTHERS THE FLAMES OF HIS TORCH.

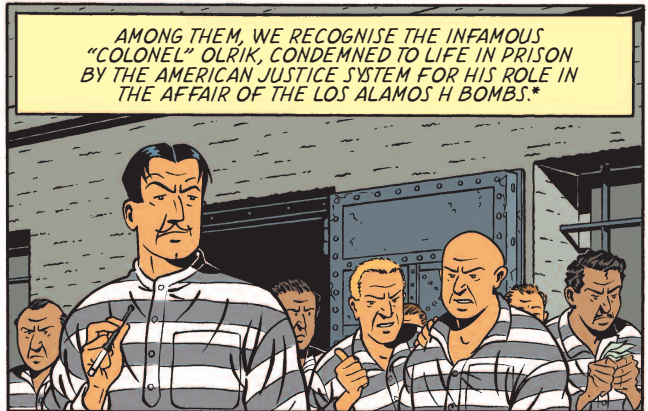
TWO WEEKS AND 5,000 MILES LATER, AT THE PENITENTIARY AT JACKSONVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA, ANOTHER EVENT TAKES PLACE—MORE DRAMATIC THAN, IF APPARENTLY UNRELATED TO, THE PREVIOUS ONE.



IT'S EXERCISE TIME, AND THE INMATES ARE SPREADING THROUGH THE YARD IN SMALL GROUPS, WATCHED BY HEAVILY ARMED GUARDS.



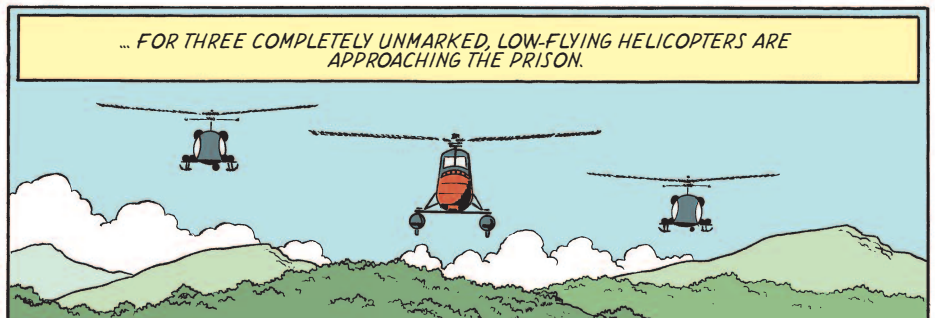
AMONG THEM, WE RECOGNISE THE INFAMOUS "COLONEL" OLRİK, CONDEMNED TO LIFE IN PRISON BY THE AMERICAN JUSTICE SYSTEM FOR HIS ROLE IN THE AFFAIR OF THE LOS ALAMOS H BOMBS.*



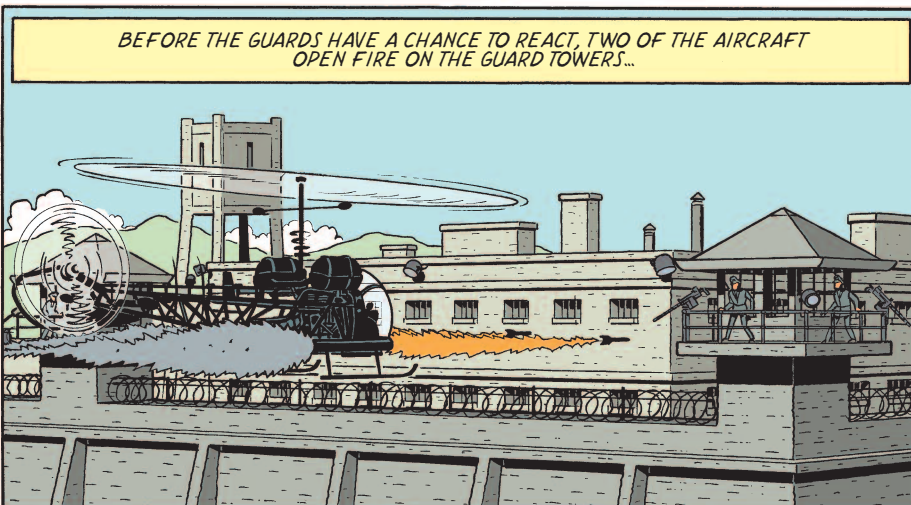
SUDDENLY, THE ALARM SOUNDS...



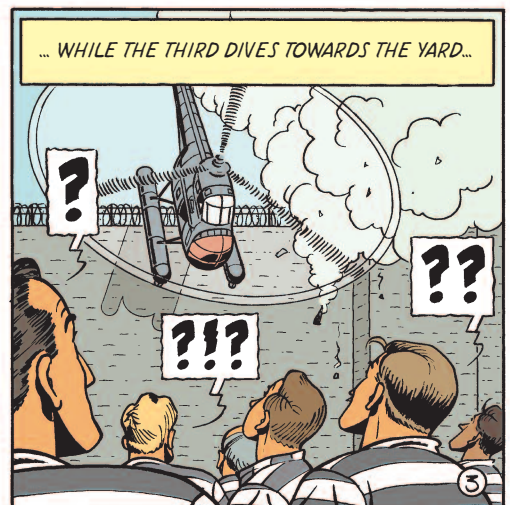
... FOR THREE COMPLETELY UNMARKED, LOW-FLYING HELICOPTERS ARE APPROACHING THE PRISON.



BEFORE THE GUARDS HAVE A CHANCE TO REACT, TWO OF THE AIRCRAFT OPEN FIRE ON THE GUARD TOWERS...



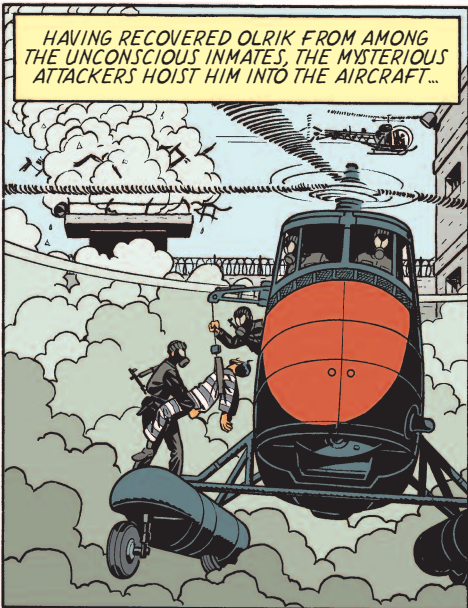
... WHILE THE THIRD DIVES TOWARDS THE YARD...



*SEE THE STRANGE ENCOUNTER.



... DROPPING A STRING OF SMALL SLEEPING-GAS BOMBS, WHICH ALMOST IMMEDIATELY KNOCK OUT BOTH PRISONERS AND GUARDS.



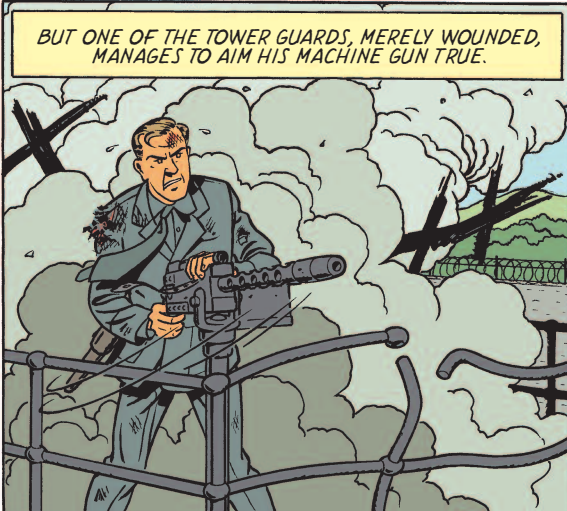
HAVING RECOVERED OLRIK FROM AMONG THE UNCONSCIOUS INMATES, THE MYSTERIOUS ATTACKERS HOIST HIM INTO THE AIRCRAFT...



... WHICH LIFTS OFF IMMEDIATELY.

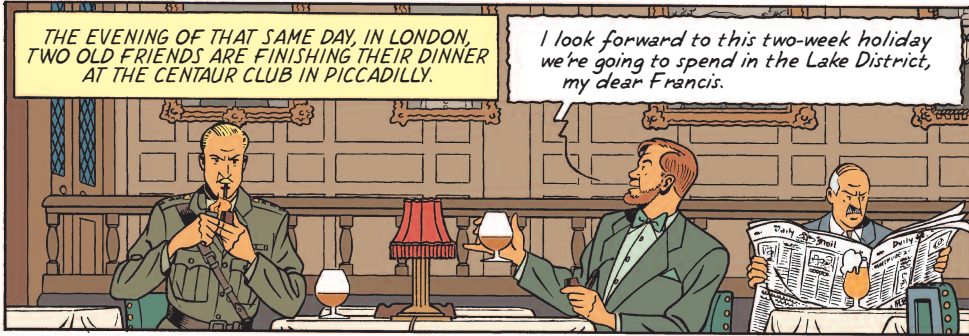


THIS BLOODY RAID, WHICH WILL BE ON THE FRONT PAGE OF EVERY NEWSPAPER THE NEXT DAY, HAS LASTED LESS THAN FIVE MINUTES.



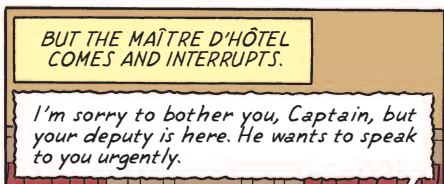
BUT ONE OF THE TOWER GUARDS, MERELY WOUNDED, MANAGES TO AIM HIS MACHINE GUN TRUE.





THE EVENING OF THAT SAME DAY, IN LONDON, TWO OLD FRIENDS ARE FINISHING THEIR DINNER AT THE CENTAUR CLUB IN PICCADILLY.

I look forward to this two-week holiday we're going to spend in the Lake District, my dear Francis.

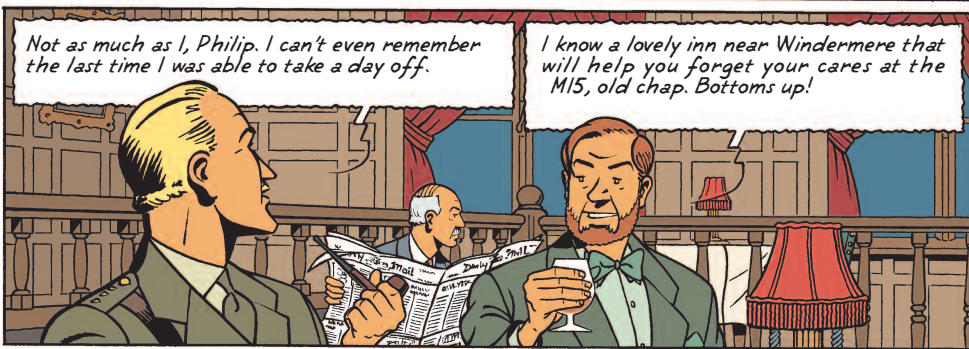


BUT THE MAÎTRE D'HÔTEL COMES AND INTERRUPTS.

I'm sorry to bother you, Captain, but your deputy is here. He wants to speak to you urgently.

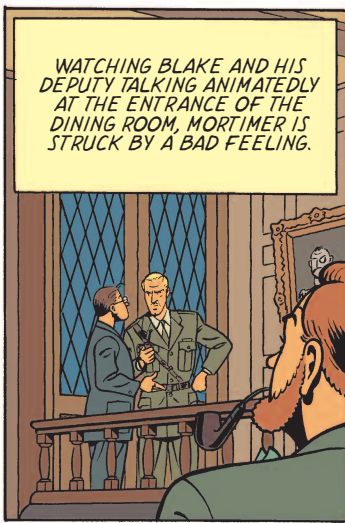


Honeychurch?! Heavens! What could he possibly want with me at this hour?



Not as much as I, Philip. I can't even remember the last time I was able to take a day off.

I know a lovely inn near Windermere that will help you forget your cares at the M15, old chap. Bottoms up!



WATCHING BLAKE AND HIS DEPUTY TALKING ANIMATEDLY AT THE ENTRANCE OF THE DINING ROOM, MORTIMER IS STRUCK BY A BAD FEELING.



AND, INDEED, WHEN THE CAPTAIN COMES BACK TO THEIR TABLE, HIS BROW IS FURROWED WITH WORRY.

I'm afraid I have to postpone my holidays yet again, old boy. Come on—let's go home.



What's going on, Francis? Has another "Yellow M" stolen the crown jewels again?

It's almost worse than that...



Olrik escaped from Jacksonville Penitentiary.

AND BLAKE RECAPS IN A FEW WORDS WHAT HONEYCHURCH HAS JUST TOLD HIM.



Good heavens! That blasted villain still has pretty powerful allies, then?

Apparently so. Which is why the FBI is asking me to come help them find him as quickly as possible.



I will be on a plane to Washington tomorrow morning.

I could come with you. I know that devil as well as you.



No, Philip. This is a police operation. Despite the help you've given it before*, the Bureau won't let a civilian get involved in the investigation.



I'm afraid you'll have to go catch trout in the Lake District without me, old fellow.

Not the happiest of prospects, Francis.

*SEE THE STRANGE ENCOUNTER.

THE NEXT MORNING, HIS MOOD DECIDEDLY MOROSE AFTER TAKING THE CAPTAIN TO THE AIRPORT, MORTIMER FINDS HIMSELF ALONE IN HIS 99 PARK LANE FLAT, DEEP IN THE STUDY OF A MAP OF THE WORLD.



Where the devil should I spend these two weeks' holidays?...

To India, maybe, and my childhood memories? No. Without Blake, there would be something missing. Besides, I'm not exactly one for nostalgia.



BUT THE DOORBELL PULLS HIM AWAY FROM HIS PONDERINGS.



Hello, Mrs Benson, how are you?

Very good, thank you. A postman just brought this letter especially for you, Professor.



Who on Earth could be writing me from Greece? I don't know anyone there. Thank you, Mrs Benson.



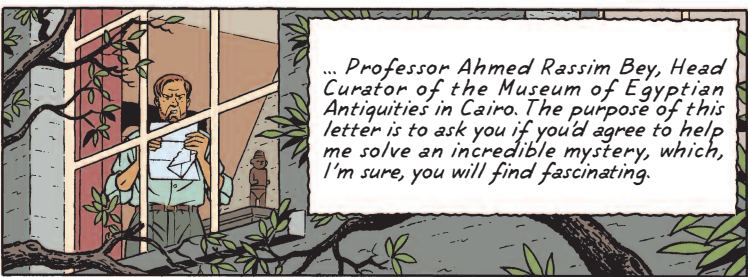
WITH THE LANDLADY GONE, MORTIMER QUICKLY OPENS THE MISSIVE.



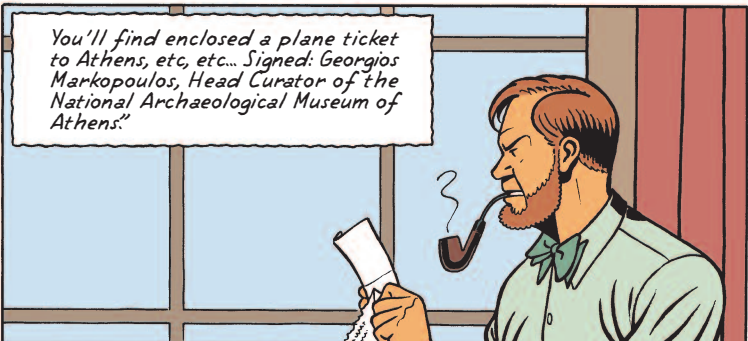
"Dear Professor Mortimer, your reputation as an amateur archaeologist has travelled far and wide. Moreover, you come very highly recommended by a mutual friend..."



... Professor Ahmed Rassim Bey, Head Curator of the Museum of Egyptian Antiquities in Cairo. The purpose of this letter is to ask you if you'd agree to help me solve an incredible mystery, which, I'm sure, you will find fascinating.



You'll find enclosed a plane ticket to Athens, etc, etc... Signed: Georgios Markopoulos, Head Curator of the National Archaeological Museum of Athens."



Well, the timing of this invitation is excellent. Let's see... This ticket is for next Thursday, which should give me enough time to organise things and procure a visa.

