

A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS

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Recently I was showing my daughter Jessica some of the old word-and-number rebuses of my childhood, such as the one given on the right. When I ran out, she begged for more, so I went to the library, where by a lucky chance I happened to find the following passage in an old copy of Caesar's Commentaries, his account of his military exploits in Gaul.

UR	2	GOOD
	2	ME
	2	BE
	4	GOT
	<hr/>	10

Although it is not explained, one can guess that Caesar ordered the account written down as an aid to his memory, intending to put it into his own words later. The man whom he ordered to take it down was clearly an illiterate slave who feared Caesar's wrath should he admit his deficiency. Fortunately, the man was familiar with the English names of the letters and numbers -- no doubt he was a Briton -- and was able to devise a simple and logical code which enabled him to do justice to the conversation, which apparently took place in English.

You will note that he uses every letter of the alphabet and ten numbers between one and ten, as well as one monetary symbol and one Greek letter. Symbols repeated three times are to be pluralized (as CCC = /seize/); symbols repeated other than three times are to be read directly (as CCCC = /foresees/). I would guess that the title is a modern addition.

M N 4 L CCCNNN

- AL, CCCR!
- PPP 2 U, O 4NR! RIII! U R?
- I M RSTTT, XLNC, N RABN XIL.
- Y R U N XIL, RSTTT?
- I UUU 2 B AAA π , O CCCR.
- MSE BBBNS! 1/2 U E-10?
- ES, QQQQQQQQQQ, IR, I 8 H EEE N VL π -- XLN, 2. O CCCR, I 1/2 I DDDIR. I 444E EZ AAAA UUUU, IR, F I M AAA π 4 U. I 1/2 N IPPP UU 222 π . . .

- N I P P P ! 1 / 2 U C N N N M E R M E ?
- E S , X L N C , N A C Q R C T , A J ç 2 A 4 S , 2 R M E E E .
- I 1 / 2 C N U R C T , N I I I A U R C T S M T ! R U A A A π 4 N E I L L L ? RS!
C C C M , N ! UR
- O C C C R , U R Y Y U U 4 4 4 ! I M N O ç ! I C 2 C T T T : 1 S M T , N 1
2 R M E E E O Q π . I M U R L I , N I 1 / 2 A W W W U U , I R . U C , I M
A A A π N I M A C R , 2 .
- F U R A C R , I S Q , R U 8 L R O 4 N N ?
- E S , C C C R . I 4 C 9 C C C N N N F E Z S S S S S 4 U B 4 U X π R .
- 9 C C C N N N ! N M I 2 X π R N 9 C C C N N N ? Y ? L I B 6 , π ?
- O C C C R , U L X π R B 4 U R L F A D Z Z Z , 2 M I I R O . 1 / 2 U N E
N M E E E ?
- F U , F U .
- I 4 C U L 1 / 2 2 U L O G G G , O C C C R : 1 R 8 R 2 A Q Q Q U R N M E E E N 1
2 X Q Q Q M ; 1 2 X P 8 N 1 2 X - 1 0 - U 8 ; 1 2 2 2 A " P P P , P P P " N 1 2 R Q
4 " N I 4 N I " ; 1 2 8 S 2 U R T R N E N 1 2 8 S 2 U R N R G N X L N N N : A
4 M 4 N N N N 6 I N N N , C C C R , B 4 U R N M E E E ' D M I I . E S , 7 T U L E U R
N M E E E L X π R , 2 . . . X L N C , R U O K ? X Q Q Q R S T T T , C C C R , F 5
4 C N 2 F R !
- O L , F I 1 / 2 9 C C C N N N B 4 I I L E π π π A 2 R M M M ! A C F N M E E E
O 8 8 8 , R S T T T ! 2 R M M M !