

Chronometers

“Billions of blistering blue barnacles!”

—Archibald Haddock

You step off the platform and ascend the escalators at Flinders Street station. Drawing in a deep breath of chilly morning air, you are reminded of just how awful it feels to suffocate in the second-hand smoke of a passer-by. There hadn't been much in the folder that you photocopied yesterday, mainly reports on the inexplicable discrepancies between the consumption of water in Melbourne and the rate at which it was disappearing from the reservoirs. There was also a paragraph or two on possible explanations alluding to terrorists and pirates: too far-fetched to be remotely possible. The only other information you have is that you'll be meeting up with Van Rjien at this unreasonable hour.

So, here you are, with Van Rjien nowhere in sight. With nothing better to do with your time, your look around aimlessly. There was the usual gathering of eccentrics under the clocks at Flinders Street: three goths sitting on the steps, plenty of teeny-boppers wearing bright pastels that wreak havoc on your weary retinas, and even a few cloaked druid-like characters taken straight out of an Asterix comic. You slip down the steps to get a better vantage point, and overhear snippets of their conversation. Something about the costumes being a bad idea, and a certain Mr H's meeting regarding “The Big Project.” Eventually the druids all hustle back into the station, and you happen to notice that one of them had dropped a diary page full of train times. Just as it occurs to you that something is amiss with these times, your already limited attention span is broken by a gentle prod on the arm and a familiar voice,

“Sorry that I'm so late, our train leaves in two minutes so we had better hurry.”

You stuff the sheet of paper into your pocket—you never know when such information might be useful.

06:15:45	Broadmeadows
03:30:30	Pakenham & Cranbourne
05:25:35	Williamstown
03:20:10	Upfield
05:30:30	Altona
12:20:30	Frankston
07:35:25	St Albans
03:10:20	Sandringham
06:15:30	Werribee

—Joanna Cheng