Creaks

“Hateful to me as the gates of hades is he who hiding one thing in his heart utters another.”

—Homer

Once you are on the train Van Rjien urges you to take a nap, warning that the day ahead will be an intense one. Although you’d barely slept last night, you can’t help but look out the windows into the golden morning light. The initial cluster of office towers quickly breaks off into long rows of sun-bleached backyard fences, and after switching trains at Pakenham, suburbia eventually gives way to cows on open fields. The metallic wheels screech to a halt, and stepping out onto the platform at Taralgon, you notice that the druids you saw this morning are getting off two carriages down. Van Rjien gestures towards a car and hurries off towards it. Minutes later, with seat belts buckled and engine started, Van Rjien turns towards you and finally breaks his silence.

“Aha! Terribly sorry for the silent treatment on the train, but I had to be sure that I would not let anything leak. Erhm, there were a few things that I neglected to tell you yesterday. The reason that you are helping me is because you have certain skills that I can make use of. We will not always be able to directly communicate, and I need someone who will be able to decrypt my secret encoded messages...”

You quickly learn that Mr Arjan Joost Van Rjien does not know much more than what was in the report, and your task today is essentially to gather more information. He did have suspicions as to who might be behind all this, and the message left in yesterday’s newspaper supported them. The rest of the trip is spent, once more, in silence. By the time the car has driven past Lake Tyers, Coopers Creek and Rawson, you grow sufficiently bored to reach into the seat pocket for the copy of this morning’s paper. You habitually flip to the comics page and instead of the usual cryptic, in its place is a suspicious looking word-search. A casual glance to the right shows that Van Rjien is smirking now: so this is what he meant by secret messages.
PERSTENTIROU
INRESU OEHG
CAPGPANIKTT
KMCROCMOFUSO
EOATNOMFITO
RTININYIWTN
SFYENGRCSHS
SALCTMAETAE
ADESSMANDNM
EOLPRININA
SOBREVYCKNG.

—Paul Fijn