

# Bookshelves

*“How can anyone govern a nation that has 246 different kinds of cheese?”*

—Charles de Gaulle

A little poking around reveals that the whiteboard is just a door in disguise. A sigh escapes your lips: gone are the glorious days when everything was just as it appeared. You dejectedly pry it open and slip through, only to emerge from the back of a painting onto a lavishly carpeted hallway decked with doors. Hoping with all your heart that, of all the arcane secrets behind these doors, none of them are remotely close to being human, you tiptoe towards the other end as quietly and quickly as possible.

Voices approach. Alas!—you are too far from the laboratory to retreat. In a cold panic you dash into the door on your left and find yourself in what appears to be a library. And what a library it is! Lavishly furnished, with ceiling-high shelves crammed full of books. And is that a copy of *Ethel the Aardvark goes Quantity Surveying* wedged between a thesaurus and *Great Shakespearean Classics*? Though well aware that you have greater things to worry about, you can't help but pull the volume off the shelf. To think that you'd discover this priceless tome in here! In your excitement, you momentarily forget any impending peril, and recline in a sofa backing a shelf lined with trophies. You open the book, and out flutters a leaf of paper covered in familiar, yet messy scribbles—a note hurriedly signed by Van Rjien. It informs you that he had found the blueprints for a large and sophisticated pump, and was now on his way back to HQ for expert opinions. The note ends with instructions to uncover the identity of the Secret Seven, and assurances that he'd return to collect you as soon as possible.

You're on your own now, without a clue of where you are, or how to achieve this herculean task. And just who on earth are the Secret Seven? You sigh, and slump back into your seat. It is then that you notice that Van Rjien's message had been written on the back of a book's preface page. Your initial anger at this wanton act of destruction subsides as you realise that he might have left you with directions after all.

## PREFACE

*New Year's Day, 1984: "for".*

3 May. Bistritz.—Left Munich at 8.35pm. . . . .	i
“I see. . .” said the vampire thoughtfully. . . Mr Jones, of the Manor Farm. . . . .	ii
Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich. . . . .	iii
Call me Ishmael. . . In the remote border town of Q. . . . .	iv
Abandon all hope ye who enter here is scrawled in blood red lettering. . . Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins. . . . .	v
It's hot as hell in Martirio, but the papers on the porch are icy with the news. . . Aristotle contemplating the bust of Homer thought often of Socrates while Rembrandt dressed him. . . . .	vi
A few miles south of Soledad, the Salinas River drops in close to the hillside bank and runs deep and green. . . The station wagons arrived at noon, a long shining line that coursed through the west campus. . . . .	vii
“Christmas won't be Christmas without any presents,”. . . . .	viii
One summer afternoon Mrs Oedipa Maas came home from a tupperware party. . . . .	x
The studio was filled with the rich odour of roses. . . . .	xiii
I am Ninety. Or Ninety-three. One or the other. . . . .	xvi
Harry Potter was a highly unusual boy in many ways. . . . .	xxiv
Far out in the uncharted backwaters of the unfashionable end of the western spiral arm of the Galaxy. . . . .	xxx

—Paul Fijn