

# Camouflage

*“I think that life has a secret, and children hold that secret. Maybe it’s not given to everybody to discover this thing.”*

—Celine Dion

The asphalt lay like a dark winding python on sandy loam, at its tail the security checkpoint you just passed, and at its head a small clearing, hosting a simple wooden hut. As the car takes you ever closer you can feel Van Rjien’s escalating anxiousness. You probe him with a few simple questions, like “Whats that hut for?” and “Who works there?” and he takes the bait, starting a lecture about his friend Jo.

“She is my chess buddy, we often play online. We have known each other for ages, I think that we first met at a water purification seminar in Adelaide. She was a local, and I . . .”

From the look on his face you could tell that there is more than mere friendship here, but you hold your tongue and let him talk. Not until the car was parked, and you entered the building, did he stop ranting. The room was bereft of any signs of Jo, papers were strewn around the timber floor, and yesterday’s chess game still displayed across the monitor. Sensing that something had gone horribly wrong, Van Rjien yells for you to stay put and dashes out in a flustered state. You glance out the window, and the surrounding woodlands suddenly take on a darker aura, as though they are hiding a sinister secret. A phone rings suddenly, and you answer it promptly, expecting to hear a mysterious voice. Instead, you are put through to an auto-message. You listen to the entirety of the message, and jot the contents down for good measure. As you try to make sense of what you just heard, you start to wonder if this isn’t just another secret message.

Please dial:

2# To find out the many mystical properties of the kangaroo sternum;

3# If you like to offend ogres;

33# To purchase a laser penthouse, complete with marsh-creep igniters and banshee purifiers;

4# To buy a poster of a monk eyeing a particularly large piece of tofu;

444# To book an interview with lemming pirates and yeti geriatrics;

66# If you abhor sea anemone;

777# To drag on this conversation regarding pantomimes;

7777# To report a scarab bite;

8# To insult the reigning heavyweight champion boxer of the world.

—Yi Huang