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I thank PoorCynic, Neshomeh and Ellipsis Flood very much for beta'ing this. Especially EF.

Prelude: Introducing the Agents

The Marquis de Sod's office was quiet, surprisingly enough. Nobody portalled anything there, there were no new recruits, and no Agents were sent there. All-in-all, an event-less day, which was pretty rare in the PPC's HQ. Of course, it was not to last. The Ironic Overpower would take care of that.

A rather surprised-looking elf, still in his armour, fell through a plot-hole and landed in a heap before the Marquis de Sod's desk. His shortsword clanged to the Generic Surface floor beside him.

I see that the Agents sent me another badfic recruit without coming here themselves, said the Flower. The elf just groaned.

Well, don't just stand there, get up, the Flower continued. It tapped its fronds on the desk. The elf groaned again, and somehow managed to stand up.

"Ow, my head," he said, massaging it.

Your name? demanded the Flower.

"Anebrin," said the elf weakly. He looked up and recoiled.

You are assigned to RC 0.434294482. Your partner will be there forthwith. Good luck, said the Marquis. Anebrin staggered toward the door. Once outside, he tried to find the RC the telepathic flower had mentioned - whatever that meant. He became hopelessly lost a short while later, only finding the correct door after an hour or so of wandering, nearly losing his head to a thrown axe and his sword to an overly-greedy giant magpie in the process.

At last he found a door with '0.434294482' written on its surface (someone had attempted to erase the number from the door and write $\log_{10}2$ instead, but it hadn't gone too well, and the writing on the door was a mess). He assumed that this was the 'RC' the telepathic flower had mentioned. He opened its door - a wooden door just like something you'll see on a simple hut, the messy writing aside - and entered. The room was empty, save for two beds, two swiveling office chairs and an odd contraption. It looked like a cross between a drawing, a bookshelf, and a window, was rather large, and, like most of the things the elf had seen so far, grey. The floor and walls were bare, grey and depressing, like everything else.

Anebrin shrugged. He was too tired to care. Leaving his bow, quiver, and sword near one of the beds, he half lied down, half fell on the other bed. He was asleep a short while later.

Des - that's the name the teenager used in the Internet - was browsing the Internet. Again. But today was special. Rather than read manga or play Yu-Gi-Oh! online, he was looking for a job. After reading and discarding various entries, he came upon an odd one. Its wording was less like a classified ad and more like a plea for help. It implored all persons 'familiar with multiple fictional continua and fan-fiction' to join an organisation dedicated to the eradication of horrible fan-fiction and the promotion of good fan-fics. Intrigued, he filled the form out and left to make himself a cup of tea. When he returned, he saw that the web-page had changed. The new page contained nothing but a large button labeled 'Press Me' and a small message, telling him to go to the Marquis de Sod's office for an interview. Intrigued, he clicked the button.

Des got up - the portal, which had unexpectedly opened beneath his feet, dumped him unceremoniously on the hard floor - and straightened his eyeglasses. He tapped each lens. Not broken.

He cursed his curiosity. He just *had* to answer that online call for help, didn't he? So now he was supposed to go to the office of a 'Marquis de Sod' for an interview, without knowing where the damn place *is*, and on top of that, being stuck in this weird, dismal, grey place. It looked very much like a corridor, but it was hard to tell, since everything was in the same grey hue.

Des started walking in a random direction... and hit a wall. He cursed vividly in Hebrew. He shook his head and walked in another direction - this time, it wasn't a wall.

So he wandered the grey corridors of the PPC HQ (not that he knew that) for a while, and was beginning to think he was in some sort of a maze – one probably designed by someone who had taken LSD before he drew the plans up – when he passed the same wooden door for the third time. He stopped and inspected it.

“Log₁₀2? What? Who'd number a room like that?” he wondered aloud.

“I know not, either, and it is my abode,” said a voice, and Des turned around, surprised. He blinked. It looked like the owner of the voice was an elf. After all, not many humans had pointed ears and grey eyes. The armour the elf wore was angular, black and had a green, many-branched tree emblazoned on it. A stylised water plant decorated one of its shoulder pads. The armour's shape, and the fact that the elf had his long, blond hair gathered in a piece of red cloth, rang a bell in Des's mind. The elf was attired like the Elvish Fighters in *The Battle for Wesnoth*! But wait, elves? How was that even possible?

“Well, I'll be damned,” he muttered. “An Irdyian elf?”

The elf chuckled. “From that question I discern that you are new, are you not?”

“New? I'm here for a job interview,” said Des. “Regarding that: have you any idea where the office of one 'Marquis de Sod' is?”

“Yes, definitely new - newer than me, even,” said the elf to himself. To Des: “No, but I'll take you there.”

The elf started walking. The teenager shrugged – how one could offer to take you to a certain place while not knowing the way, Des didn't quite know – but followed the elf. After all, the other option – continuing to wander around until he found that office – wasn't appealing, to say the least.

“By the way,” said the elf, “I am called Anebrin. What do they call you?”

“Just... Des. Or Desdendelle. It's a pseudonym, of course,” said Des.

“Observe,” said Anebrin, ignoring the teenager's choice of pseudonym. “This place is like a magical maze: if you concentrate on your destination, you will never reach it. Apparently, one has to distract oneself to arrive anywhere in a timely manner.”

They passed a wooden cart full of cabbages. Des pointed at it with his thumb.

“What is that?” he asked.

“I know not what it is doing here,” replied Anebrin. “It is obvious that it is a cart of cabbages. Although I cannot discern the reason for its being here, compared to the locations of most of this organisation's missions, it can be safely classified as a mundane occurrence.”

The elf shuddered at the memory and Des wondered what could possibly be so bad about his job. He walked past the cart, and his one of pants' pockets caught on a protruding pin. Unfortunately for him, that pin held one of the cart's sides in place; when it was removed, that side fell down and showered him and Anebrin with cabbages.

Des jumped. Literally. When he landed, he slid on one of the cabbages, and fell on his rump.

“Owowowowow...” he muttered. He got up, massaging his hurt backside. Anebrin gave him a sideways glance before continuing to walk like nothing happened, and Des wondered why the elf seemed to take the whole thing for granted.

They walked in silence for some time. The elf had a thoughtful expression on his face, and Des was trying - and failing - to make sense of their route. Finally, they reached a door that looked like any other in HQ. To one side, there was a couch with a large neon sign that read 'Newbie' taped above it.

“We have arrived,” said Anebrin.

Des nodded and knocked. The door opened by itself and he entered. He looked around. The office seemed to be fairly regular – desk, chairs and so on - but then his gaze fell on its occupant. He flinched visibly.

“What in the name of...?” he asked, even more surprised than before. A daisy in a suit and a bowler? Just what *was* that thing?

You are, I understand, the new recruit? asked the Marquis.

“Yes...” said Des weakly - he did assume that they need recruits, else they wouldn’t call for help, would they now? He opened his mouth to add that he was looking for the interviewer, but the Marquis cut him off.

Good. We are understaffed at the moment. Agent Anebrin, if you will, said the daisy. Anebrin came through the still-open door.

“Yes, Marquis?” said the elf, obviously ill at ease. Even Des - who wasn’t good at reading people, much less elves - could tell that Anebrin did not want to talk with the flower.

The daisy tapped one of its fronds on the table. *Agent Anebrin, this is your new partner. Agent Desdendelle, welcome to the Protectors of the Plot Continuum.*

Des stared, stunned, at the Marquis. That was quick, quicker than any interview he had gone through in the past. Even the army took more time, and he knew first-hand the IDF's carelessness.

Well, don't gape at me, off you go, said the Marquis. Anebrin grabbed Des's arm and pulled him out of the office, closing the door after him. The teenager was still staring at the closed door.

“What... what...” he mumbled. He realised he was having second thoughts.

“As the Marquis said,” said Anebrin, “welcome to the Protectors of the Plot Continuum.”