

An Introduction

Enter Eusabius from stage left

Florestan let out a sigh, sitting on the couch. It had been one hell of a long day.

No. One hell of a long day was understating it at that moment in time.

He was beginning to see what exactly a job at the Protectors of the Plot Continuum would entail, and it was not all pretty.

He had just gotten off of his first assignment. It was just supposed to be an average Sue-sination (as he had decided to refer to it) somewhere deep within the bowels of the *Mass Effect* canon. Or something. It hadn't really mattered, and it had ended with his first partner going insane and him being reassigned. To be fair, the higher-ups had mentioned that many agents needed to go to FicPsych for whatever reason. It didn't allay Florestan's fears in the slightest.

But at least he had gotten a sweet new response center out of the deal. That was a definite upside, and it was better for his sanity. His new response center had a bookshelf with plenty of books in it as well as the occasional DVD case, and it was all mostly his. The desk still had the console, so of course the couch he sat on was made completely of plywood. It never paid to get comfortable, after all.

In the time he had been waiting to receive a new partner, though, he had erected an entertainment unit on the other side of the couch, complete with a PS3 and Xbox connected to the object just under where the TV was. So they stood there next to the bookshelf, the little Shumann-mini he had picked up from his previous partner hiding out behind the television. Florestan simply gave it a brief glare before turning his attention back to what he was doing. Given that the mini had proceeded to thoroughly wreck most of Florestan's collection of old vinyl records shortly after its creation, they had plenty of cause to have some kind of tension between them. Florestan had always felt that he was perfectly justified in unleashing the volley of curses that had come from his mouth when the incident first happened, even despite the protests of his partner. And there he was, left to watch over it where his partner could not.

It wasn't his problem anymore. Besides, it allowed him some freedom to redecorate the response center he had been thrust into.

And there Florestan was, directing his way through Miranda's loyalty mission for what had to be the eighth time in terms of playthrough count. There was the Cerberus cheerleader, talking about Oriana again. But of course, Florestan knew the game's dialogue so well that he mouthed along with the game.

There was also the matter of the Offenbach operetta playing over the loudspeakers instead of the sound for Mass Effect 2. The little Shumann-mini sat uselessly to the side as he had nothing to do. Well, nothing to do except fearfully glance at Florestan. Listening to non-game music while playing video games had a weird effect on Florestan; somehow it made him more concentrated on the action. He couldn't tell why, but he preferred it this way.

And as he played on, he couldn't help but wonder about his new partner. The Flowers were being quiet about it. They told Florestan that they'd let him know when his next partner would come in, but they hadn't say much else...

This was suspicious to Florestan. He hadn't gotten as far as he had in the world without being paranoid at something. And as he always said, it was better to have your wits about you than to be dead. He knew he probably shouldn't be suspecting his higher-ups of subversive activity, but he honestly couldn't help himself. He was getting a new partner, and they were telling him almost nothing useful. Florestan would've bolted in any other case.

But given that he wasn't going to get literally kicked out of an apartment any time in the foreseeable future, he figured it was better not to say anything at all.

And so, he took his frustration at this out on a whole bunch of hapless Eclipse mercs.

He never really did like the damn Vanguard, anyway.

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Eusabius had to admit, there was something... strange... about watching a human-sized daisy metaphorically running around, its leaves giving wild gestures like it was screaming and yelling at something. Of course, given that the Flower was psychic... that didn't really tend to bode well.

However, the recruit simply regarded it with a blank expression on his face. He simply sat there, his hands neatly placed on his lap. He had held this position for quite some time, and it was only ever broken by the occasional blink in the direction of the Flower.

For some reason, Eusabius guessed that he was driving this... Marquis de Sod even crazier than usual. But he simply sat there, looking on at the flower.

Finally, the daisy in question simply sat there, giving an exasperated sigh. Eusabius decided it was better that he never ask how something without a mouth or a nose can give off an exasperated sigh in the first place, instead simply looking at the flower.

Is there something you need? Or is there a reason you're looking at me like that?

The Marquis' voice sounded less than pleased in his mind, but Eusabius simply replied by shifting his legs ever so slightly. "Nothing at the moment," he says. "I am simply looking at a Flower. I find that one does not always need to have a reason to look at something."

The statement came out a little *too* plaintively for the Marquis' comfort. It also didn't help that Eusabius' incredibly slight Eastern European accent...

Well... what was important was that he didn't sound perturbed in the slightest.

What I want to know is how you can sit with this perfectly calm expression on your face after three hours of waiting.

"Four," corrected Eusabius, his voice quite calm and collected. "It is only time, Marquis."

Most people I know would've gone insane with this long a wait.

“I think you will find that most people are insufferably impatient about something of such importance,” said Eusabius. He of course omitted referring to the Flower directly, as he knew better than to offend his new superiors. “I have waited for four hours here. If I must, I shall wait here longer.” His tone of voice denoted not impatience, but rather acceptance of the situation.

The recruit watched the flower attentively, noting as he seemed to return to his previous position of general aggravation. But there was something else, too... Eusabius couldn't quite put his finger on what it was he was watching with the Flower, but there was something, strange about the Flower.

But then, he knew it was the PPC. And many, many strange things occurred there from what he heard.

The door opened quite suddenly, the Marquis not showing whether or not he had any kind of extreme reaction to the door opening. Eusabius, however, simply turned his head to the rather lanky man who had entered without a hint of surprise on his face. He simply glanced all around, green eyes settling first on the Marquis de Sod, and then on Eusabius. It was here that he noted how much larger he was in comparison to this man.

“Ah.” The thinner man stepped inside the room, closing the door behind him. “I guess you’ve finally solved my partner issue?”

“It appears to be so,” replied Eusabius, standing up. “My name is Eusabius.”

“Florestan.” The slightly more experienced PPC agent held out a hand, Eusabius shaking it in reply. “I’ve been waiting for you to show up for a while.”

“As would many, it would seem,” said Eusabius, noticing that he was slightly shorter than Florestan. “I take it we have been set up at a Response Center?”

“Yes.” Florestan turned towards the Marquis, giving him a rather quick nod. “I guess everything is taken care of then. I’ll see you around.”

And with this, the lanky man let Eusabius exit the room first. Florestan spared a final look back at the Marquis De Sod, and then he closed the door to the office.

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Upon getting back to the response center, Eusabius took an opportunity to look around. The first thing that caught his attention was the small creature that was resting on the bookcase at the other end of the room.

“Is that a mini?” He asked, indicating the creature in question.

“Yep.” Florestan glared at the Shumann-mini soon after saying this. “Got ‘im from my last partner. I really wish she had taken the damn thing with her. He’s annoying.”

Eusabius simply regarded the mini as it looked nervously at the newer PPC agent. Something seemed... amiss about the mini, but the new agent simply brushed it off as he approached the Shumann-mini.

“He seems harmless,” he commented.

Florestan scoffed sharply at this. “Yeah, and he’s an incredibly destructive little twat sometimes,” he replied. “Watch your possessions around him, Eusabius. Trust me.”

The new agent stopped in front of the Shumann-mini, which looked at him with wide eyes, not saying anything. But Eusabius simply shrugged, not understanding how something so small and fluffy could be such a menace to anything, let alone his objects. Of course he wasn’t about to take Florestan at his word just yet, but he could wait and see.

And with this, he sort of walked on into the apartment, his eyes falling onto the bookshelf. He saw that proudly displayed copy of *Lord of the Rings* up top, shaking his head as he skimmed down to the rest of the objects on the shelf. His eyebrow moves slightly upon seeing Florestan’s game collection, though. With this, he reached into the bookshelf, pulling out his copy of *Mass Effect 2* that was there.

“I would not have taken you for a man who plays Bioware games,” he said.

Florestan turned, noticing Eusabius looking at the game. “Yeah,” said the slightly more veteran agent, leaning against the wall as a smile came to his features. “Bioware’s always great. Which crowd are you in?”

“Chiefly *Dragon Age*,” replied the slightly larger agent as he set the game case back in the bookshelf. “I have a slighter bent towards fantasy and such.”

Almost immediately, Florestan groaned, cupping his head in his hands. “Please don’t tell me you’re one of those *Lord of the Rings* nuts!” he complained.

“Personally, I have never understood the appeal of the books,” said the newer agent almost immediately. “The movies, I can definitely see an appeal for. But the books are far too... shall I say, ponderous, for my tastes.”

“Oh, good,” says Florestan. “I don’t want to have to deal with the finer points of the mythology of Middle Earth. I really don’t.”

“I have heard about how many of the missions here were meant to fix errors in that continuum, almost above all others.” Eusabius shrugged at this. “Hopefully it will not come to that with us.”

Florestan smiled, shrugging. “We’re in the Department of Implausible Crossovers,” he said. “If we ever have to go to that continuum, we’ll be doing so while untangling it from another.”

“I see,” Eusabius replied. There was a light in his eyes that was not there when they first met. “Perhaps Thedas and Middle Earth can cross one day.”

“That would be the bloody day,” said Florestan, shrugging. “Still... hopefully we’ll be around long enough to get something like that.”

The slightly younger agent nodded at this, a small smile coming to his features. “I look forward to getting

our first mission, Florestan.”

It was with a hint of happiness that the thinner PPC agent noted he wasn’t resorting to pet names.

Florestan was beginning to like Eusabius already.