

B1+ : Comprendre la structure et l'essentiel d'un extrait de roman.

Note de Sabine Aligé - IEN Anglais-Lettres : l'extrait de roman semble plutôt relever d'un niveau B2, une aide lexicale pourrait être prévue. Certains éléments de ce texte relèvent du C1 : "identifier les points de détail fins, y compris les attitudes, que les opinions soient exposées ou implicites". Par exemple, *Never the deux shall meet* fait référence à Rudyard Kipling et aux différences est/ouest.

Septembre

Never the deux shall meet

The year does not begin in January. Every French person knows that. Only awkward English-speakers think it starts in January.

The year really begins on the first Monday of September.

This is when Parisians get back to their desks after their month-long holiday and begin working out where they'll go for the mid-term break in November.

It's also when every French project, from a new hairdo to a nuclear power station, gets under way, which is why, at 9 a.m. on the first Monday of September, I was standing a hundred yards from the Champs-Élysées watching people kissing.

My good friend Chris told me not to come to France. Great lifestyle, he said, great food, and totally un-politically correct women with great underwear.

But, he warned me, the French are hell to live with. He worked in the London office of a French bank for three years.

"They made all us Brits redundant the day after the French football team got knocked out of the World Cup. No way was that a coincidence," he told me.

His theory was that the French are like the woman scorned. Back in 1940 they tried to tell us they loved us, but we just laughed at their accents and their big-nosed Général de Gaulle, and ever since we've done nothing but poison them with our disgusting food and try to wipe the French language off the face of the Earth. That's why they built refugee camps yards from the Eurotunnel entrance and refuse to eat our beef years after it was declared safe. It's permanent payback time, he said. Don't go there.

Sorry, I told him, I've got to go and check out that underwear.

Normally, I suppose you would be heading for disaster if the main motivation for your job mobility was the local lingerie, but my one-year contract started very promisingly.

I found my new employer's offices - a grand-looking 19th-century building sculpted out of milky-

gold stone - and walked straight into an orgy.

There were people kissing while waiting for the lift. People kissing in front of a drinks machine. Even the receptionist was leaning across her counter to smooch with someone - a woman, too - who'd entered the building just ahead of me.

Wow, I thought, if there's ever a serious epidemic of facial herpes, they'll have to get condoms for their heads.

Of course I knew the French went in for cheek-kissing, but not on this scale. I wondered if it wasn't company policy to get a neckload of Ecstasy before coming into work.

I edged closer to the reception desk where the two women had stopped kissing and were now exchanging news. The company obviously didn't believe in glamorous front-office girls, because the receptionist had a masculine face that seemed much more suited to scowling than smiling. She was complaining about something I didn't understand.

I beamed my keenest new-boy smile at her. No acknowledgement. I stood in the "yes, I'm here and I wouldn't mind being asked the purpose of my visit" zone for a full minute. Zilch. So I stepped forward and spouted out the password I'd memorized: "Bonjour, je suis Paul West. Je viens voir Monsieur Martin."

The two women gabbled on about having "déjeuner", which I knew was lunch, and they made at least half a dozen I'll-phone-you gestures before the receptionist finally turned to me.

"Monsieur?" No apology. They might kiss each other, but I could kiss off.

I repeated my password. Or tried to.

"Bonjour, je . . ." No, my head was full of suppressed anger and linguistic spaghetti. "Paul West," I said. "Monsieur Martin." Who needs verbs? I managed another willing smile.

The receptionist - name badge: Marianne, personality: Hannibal Lecter - tutted in reply.

I could almost hear her thinking, can't speak any French. Probably thinks De Gaulle had a big nose.