

# Maxime Alexandre : THE FRENCH MAN ARRIVES TO THE DUTCH CULTURE

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Maxime: Thomas? *always with a cigarette (in the mouth or behind the ear or rolling a cigarette)*

Narrator: Steph

John: John

Rienk: Rienk

Cosimo:

Magda: Eli

Japan embassy: Toh

French embassy: Steph or someone else who wants to be

## Scene 1: Max arrives from the Thalys

Arrival of Max in Amsterdam: straight from the central station, he arrives at the VU and barges into a group meeting that has already started with his suitcase. He interrupts Olga, who is already presenting her work and asks a very long, very complicated question with a very strong French accent.

Maxime: should the positive band at 1777  $\text{cm}^{-1}$  not have a shoulder at 1778  $\text{cm}^{-1}$

*People look at him startled.*

Olga: Who are you???

Maxime: Bonjour everybody, I am Maxime, the new student of John

Olga: blablabla, *continues their presentation*

Maxime: It looks like you have a big light-induced structural change in your protein. The Amide I and amide II mode are expected to contribute. The differential signal at 1677 by 1697 being assigned to portions without secondary structure: that is the loops! Maybe you have a major rearrangement of the protein backbone! Is this beta-sheets contribution in our band so strong?

## Scene 2: Maxime gets introduced to John and Rienk

*It is the same day. Max and John are left together after everybody left the group meeting.*

John: Well, welcome Max, it is very nice to have a French student with us. From Paris, he! You, French looo-loover, I've got the right sample for you with these nice LOOO-LOOOV domain! Now, there is no tiiii-tiimme to loose, you have to start working on your project: "very **complicated** title of his **original** project". You will need to work on the Stepscan, the FTIR setup, setup 3, setup4, etc... He, you can even go to Paris to do some experiments! Good luck!

Max: Oh, great! I'm very happy to be working here! I will get right on it!!! *(Max goes away with his suitcase, happily)*

John *(calls after Max who is leaving the room)*: Oh, by the way: NOTHING WORKS!!! Have fun!

Maxime *(talking to himself)*: Relax man! You're in Amsterdam! I love plants! ... and there's a lot of herbs to try out here!

Maxime arrives to Rienk's office:

Maxime: Hello, I'm your new ph.D. student.

Rienk *(not looking at him, tipping on his computer)*: He, French man! are you sure you going to manage here? We are one of the **best** lab in the world. We have **state of the art** equipment. The level is **very high** for a biochemist like you.

Maxime: I'm so happy to be here. You won't get disappointed! I'm French, **best** country in the world and I'm from Paris, **best** city in the world! So you've got your man!

## Scene 3: Max starts to work...

Narrator: Maxime starts to work on the Stepscan. He soon realizes that there are a lot of little problems such as vibrations and noise signals coming from the doors closing and opening, and people passing near his setup.

Daniel: Sorry my dear French friend but I have to look to some important things in my office. Can not help you much...this porn star is about to divorce from this famous actor....

He made John buy a very expensive optical table on air, made the workshop create a box, which turned out to be even worse than nothing, then tried to fill it with lots of crap, and finally came up with the idea to use soundproof foam material (like music studios).

ASK JOS.

#### **Scene 4: Maxime works at night**

*Someone passes with a paper: "a few months later"*

Narrator: a few months have passed. Maxime is now used to difficult setups. He is struggling with stupid Stepscan, and Brucker guys who always mess up. He is measuring all kind of samples out of the freezer with all kind of set ups. Trying also to avoid the Dutch canteen, where he only can eat the French fries, his working hours have changed quite a bit.....

Recurrent scene:

Cosimo: Have you seen Maxime? I sent email, tried to call him but no news!

PhD : (check the watch) No, it is only three, just wait another hour . . . or maybe look under the Stepscan's table?

#### **Scene 5: Football game**

Narrator: But he does not ONLY work at the VU... He also enjoys the occasional relaxing game of football with his colleagues...

*Here, football game in the background.*

Narrator: His first attempt to play the ball, he encounters heavy defense: RIENK! Rienk decides that a short visit into a stinging nettle bush would do Max a lot of good! In a weak attempt to play the same way and with his limited physical skills, Max ends up with his foot in a hole! The biophysics lab day of fun earns him a broken ankle....

Marloes kindly drops him at the hospital.

Marloes: He, good luck! Sorry to not come with you, kids are waiting for their mum!

Maxime: No problem, I can not walk but I will manage!

#### **Scene 6: Football game consequences**

Narrator: One would think that having a PhD student incapacitated with a broken ankle would upset more than one supervisor... However, Max's boss had quite the surprising reaction.....

Max: Hi John, oh, I am really annoyed that I broke my ankle... I cannot do anything anymore... I cannot walk, I cannot go down my FOUR stairs, and I cannot do my shopping! I cannot cycle... It takes me THREE hours to go to the VU... Life is "miseraaable"...

John: Well, actually, I have an idea...

Max: Oh, really?

John: Yes! It is a GREAT idea!! Well, now that you can't work in the lab, why don't you write a review?? And after that I have a couple of students for you. You just need to drop to a classroom at the VU!

*Max looks a bit flabbergasted.*

Narrator: And that how Max started what would soon become an impressive list of written work...

### **Scene 7: Group meeting**

*Max is giving a group meeting, after starting with half an hour delay, he is showing very complicated, full of figures, slides on the board.*

Max: "blablabla, imidazole, blabla, beta-sheets, blablabla, Amide I frequency shift, blablabla, Flavin in the photoreceptor..."

Next slide

Vibrations of alpha-helix, blablabla, up-shift of the Amide I, blablabla, protein mode, blablabla, weakening of the NH-C=O bonds that connect the turns, blablabla, compaction of the beta-sheet domain, blablabla, photoprotection,....

*People are sort of sleeping in the background.*

*Someone passes with paper that says "two hours later"*

Max: and that concludes my short talk!

*Everybody snaps awake, and goes out. Max calls after John.*

Max: Hey John! By the way, here is my first draft of the paper on "XXXXXX".

John: Oh thanks! I am very excited to read it!!! But well looking to our data you should still measure more...

Narrator: little did John know what he was about to embark into.....

### **Scene 8: John reads.....**

*John is reading, calm at the beginning. He is actually reading it out loud, and gets irritated more and more.*

John (washing himself – sits on a chair): blablabla (*reading the real paper*)

“Anjali, please could you bring me a towel, I haven’t enough here to dry me out! (looking at Cosimo’s and Maxime’s papers)

At the other side of the city:

Maxime and Cosimo (each at the other side of the room: at home – talking at the same time): incredible after all this time, no news from John! What happened to my papers??!

### **Scene 9: in the coffee room**

*Everybody is drinking coffee and chatting.*

Cosimo: Hey Max! Have you heard of this really cool conference? It is so nice, so exactly on our topic: IR spectroscopy applied to photoreceptors!!!

Max: Oh yeah! That looks really cool! Where is it???

Cosimo: In Osdorp!

Max: Oh, right, but it’s too bad! I’m working the night before that day! (*Sarcastic tone*)

Magda: Oh, and how about that one on anthropological evolution of Icelandic pygmies societies?

Max: where is it?

Magda: In Japan.

Max: OK! I’m in! ;)

### **Scene 10: Getting ready to go...**

*Someone passes with a paper that says” one day to go before Japan”*

Maxime: He Magda! Going good? Look at my poster! What do you think about?

Magda: Hi Max! I’m more or less fine! Getting super stressed... Impressive your poster! How many figures did you manage to put there? 33 ! Wow!

He, I just got my visa from the embassy! Thank goodness, I was getting so stressed not having it only one day before we go! Did you get yours?

Max: A visa??? What is this? Is it a new type of photoreceptors??

Magda: No! A visa is this little piece of paper that you stick in a passport to travel to other countries...

Max: What are you talking about Magda! I am French, I don't need a Visa, or a passport!! I can go anywhere I want with my identity card!

Narrator: it turns out this was not quite true.....

*Someone passes with a paper that says: "a few hours later"*

*Max is freaking out on the phone..., leafing frantically through a phonebook!*

TOH: Embassy of Japan, hello!

Max: Hello I am French! A friend of mine says I need a visa for Japan. I think it's not true!

TOH: yes, you need one!

Max: BUT I AM FRENCH!!!! Can you do this on an identity card??

TOH: No, you need a passport

Max: BUT I AM FRENCH!

TOH: you *need* to bring us your passport

Max: BUT I AM FRENCH! *Hangs up Merde...*

French embassy: Embassy of France, hello!

Max: hello, I am French! I need a passport to go to Japan tomorrow! This is an emergency!

French embassy: Oh, ok. No problem. We are open only for a few more hours, and you need to bring us your birth certificate.

Max: BUT I AM FRENCH!!!! *Hangs up Merde...*

### **Scene 11: Getting ready to finish...**

Narrator: Nearly at the end of his contract...

Maxime: Incroyable! Is my dear supervisor so busy??! I have no news from my 5 papers I gave him to correct! I guess I should pass by the VU...

John: He, now that we have this sample holder (lisajo??) for the stepscan, you can start your measurements for my great project! By the way these measurements you did in the beginning, we should check it out, maybe it's worse it to write a paper!

Rienk: He, French man! I see you like difficult set ups! I've got a good news for you: with my super grant that I got in France I need some one to be there for me and set up this new **great** project of mine!

After starting his post-doc:

Maxime: I **love** science! I **don't** have the laser for the set up and **don't** get well what is this GREAT CRAZY idea of Rienk but finally I can speak **French**! It makes it much easier!