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Character Online I didn't want to be Lwaxana Troi. I wanted to be someone who wanted to be Lwaxana Troi.

Alexis Ong • September 18, 2020

I crawled out of bed exactly 5:30 on Saturday morning, made a cup of coffee, and got ready to become Ambassador

It was still dark out as I cued up all the Lwaxana-centric episodes of Star Trek: The Next Generation on my iPad. I logged onto "The Holodeck" Discord server and dutifully changed my Discord avatar to a picture of Lwaxana beaming in a lavish dress. It'd been decades since my last excursion through a chat room like this; it was 2020, but I was ready to head back to 1999, thanks to a curious digital role-playing game called *Strangers on the 'Net*. Many people confronted with their early internet lives might think of the lies they told. As a 13-year-old in the 90s, I adopted a 16-year-old persona because I loved the song "Sixteen" by No Doubt and didn't want teenagers to think I was a baby. Those three added years didn't mean a lot back then. There was so little chance of people actually meeting that

nobody gave a shit, anyway. There were no guidelines on what to say, or how much information to disclose.

Lwaxana Troi — daughter of the Fifth House, holder of the Sacred Chalice of Rixx, heir to the Holy Rings of Betazed. Lwaxana is undoubtedly the most flamboyant personality in *Star Trek* history: a woman of ambiguous middle age, a

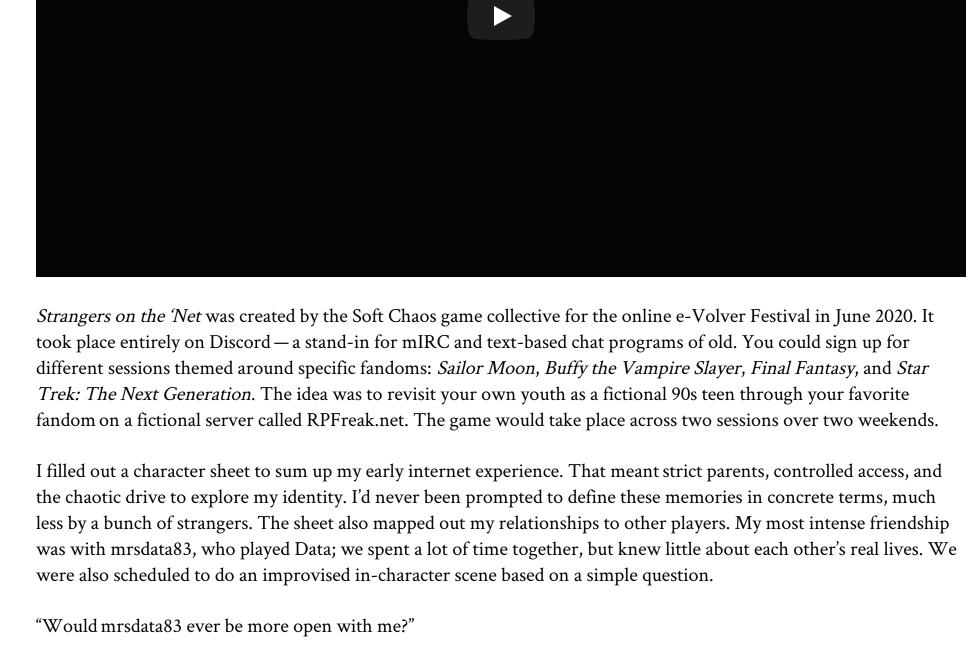
principled hedonist, and an incorrigible flirt. But it wasn't enough that I just role-play her. I was also playing an

awkward 17-year-old kid named Taylor, username: momageatroi, whose small teenage life revolved around a Star

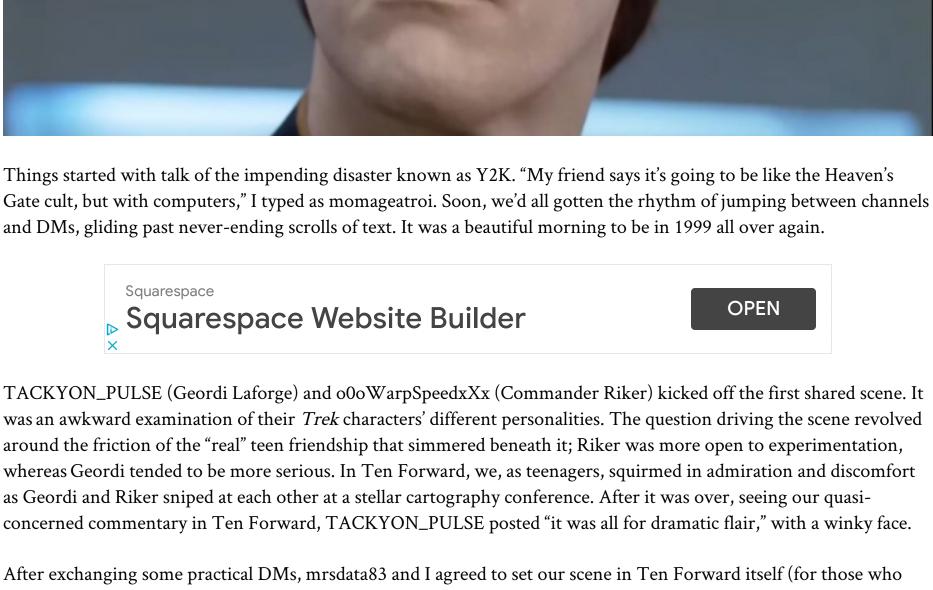
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Everything and anything was possible.

Trek digital role-playing community on a server called RPfreak.net.



Going into the game, I mulled over the vast gulf of personalities between me, Taylor, and Lwaxana. It was time to regress. After the GMs explained the rules and safety guidelines, we were pointed to various channels, including a Ten Forward out-of-character channel for us to mingle in our teen personae, plus an in-character channel for us to perform the shared scenes.



aren't Trek savvy, it's the bar on the starship Enterprise). Our characters were supposed to talk about Data's

of mrsdata83 and momageatroi's online friendship.

Very many thanks,

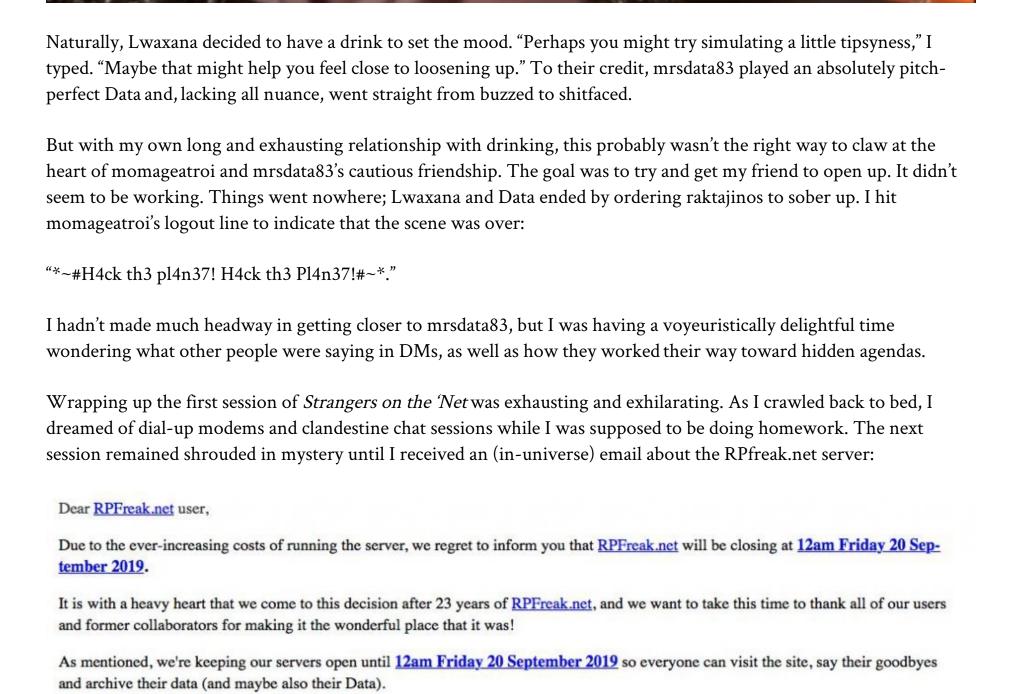
in touch, others hadn't.

with it," they mused.

RPFreak.net

Well, shit...

controversial emotion chip — something he'd been forced to give up — while low-key prodding at the stunted dynamics



Mrsdata83, my once-good pal, had actually become besties with another player, earlgreyhottie. She'd had a daughter, Kathryn, named after Captain Janeway of Voyager. CaptainQueer, who had played Worf, had come out as trans nonbinary over the fictional years. Using the in-character chat, someone started putting together an away team. We bitched about the new Star Trek shows. I revealed that I was now an adjunct university professor teaching creative writing. o0oWarpSpeedxXx revealed they'd also come out.

"I was pretty into Riker's playboy persona as a teen — with all the toxic masculinity and inappropriateness that went

The weekend rolled around. Once again, I got up at dawn, ready to become an awkward teenage boy playing Lwaxana Troi. It wasn't hard to turn on the melodrama this time. Our beloved server was shutting down! We were all coming

second session kicked off with the unmistakable psychological stench of a high school reunion. Some people had stayed

back after a decade to get closure, say goodbye, or whatever other personal reasons people had manufactured. The

As Worf and Barclay played out a scene in the in-character channel, the rest of us talked about one day having a better, more inclusive society. It all felt so beautifully sincere and real. Finally, it was time to wrap up my scene with mrsdata83; a little after the events in Ten Forward, Data went to Lwaxana's quarters to tell her that Captain Picard wouldn't join her for dinner. "You would think the captain would make time for an ambassador," Lwaxana pouted. "This is the 5th time in a row he's canceled an engagement with me." Adult Taylor was surely sulking at the revelation that mrsdata83 had formed a

stronger bond with someone else. "Perhaps I should just try and learn to be comfortable with myself," Lwaxana said

Back in the Ten Forward out-of-character channel, people were excitedly exchanging "real" names and Facebook

given them a couple hours of time-travel (a very meta way to describe the game's time skip).

profiles as the server shutdown loomed closer. Mrsdata83 remarked that the whole experience felt like someone had

unlocked something for Taylor. Or was it for me?

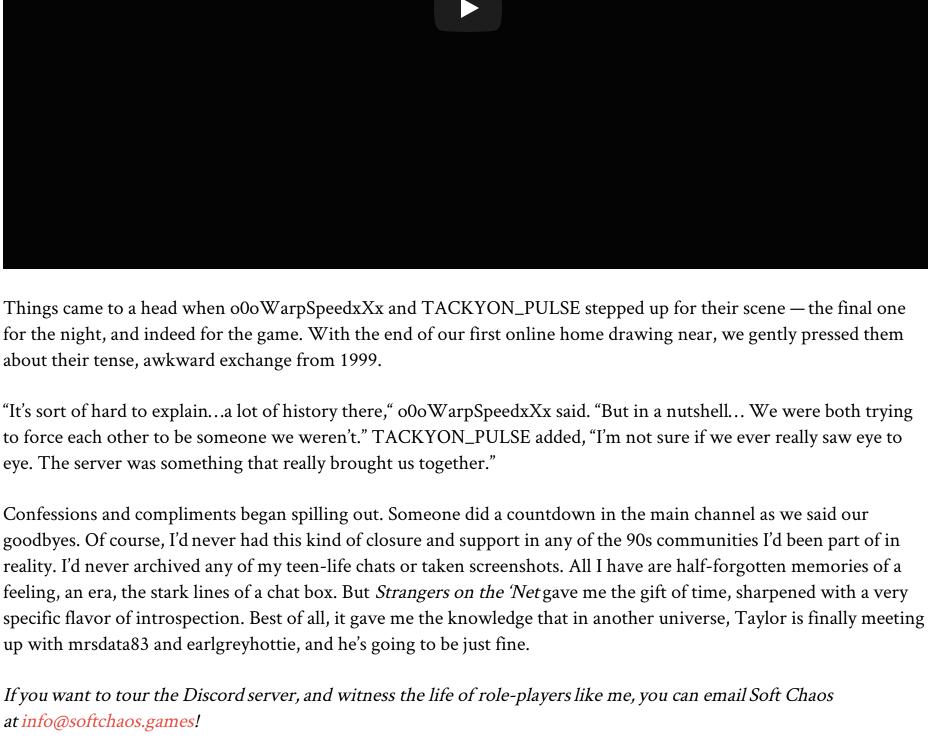
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dramatically, falling back onto a chaise. At this point, as with all good role-plays, the careful mental compartments I'd put up for this game were eroding; the holy trinity of Lwaxana, Taylor, and I was crumbling. Yet I felt like I'd finally



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