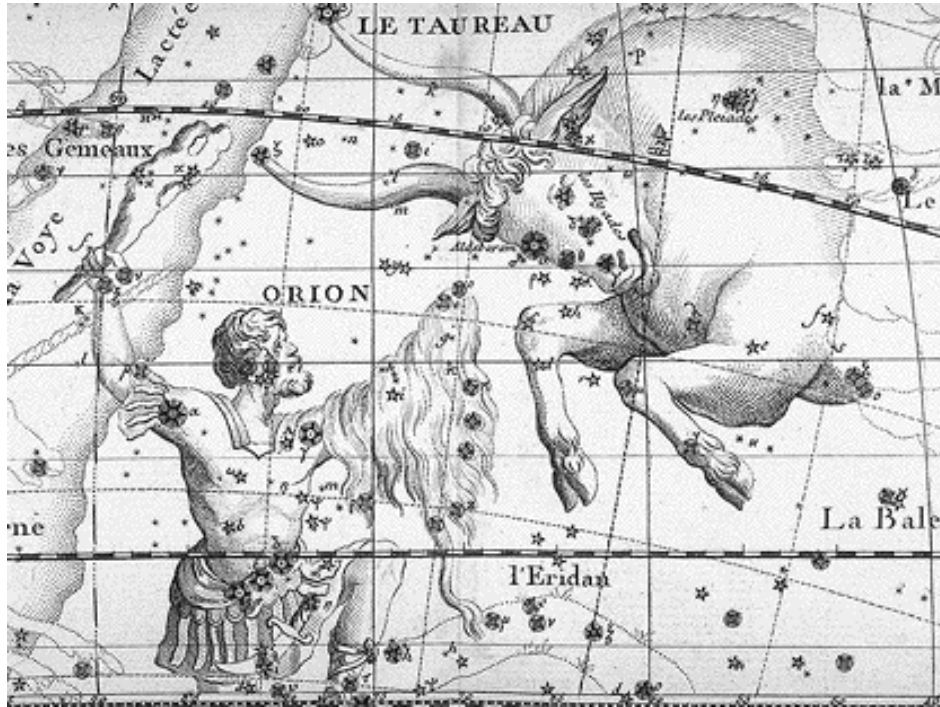


# My Simming Memoirs

## The Dream, the Hope, and the Reality

By Chas Hammer; President, Trek Online (Retired)

Copyright 2004<sup>1</sup>



Orion battling Taurus, The Symbol of Trek Online<sup>2</sup>

Dedicated to the members of Trek Online... past, present  
and future.

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<sup>1</sup> The first edition of my memoirs was published in 1997 to coincide with the first anniversary of Trek Online. I published a greatly expanded second edition between 2003 and 2005, which I made available on a simming website I maintained. In preparation for my retirement, I converted the web document into a pdf in 2014 so that my memoirs can be preserved after I disappear; in doing such I edited Chapters 1 through 3 to correct based on knowledge gained in subsequent years. I also edited Part 6 to reduce my ramblings. I corrected for grammar and clarity throughout the remaining chapters, but didn't make any drastic edits beyond the first three chapters and Part 6. In this pdf version, I maintained the fonts and images used on the website, including the comic sans font. Comic sans rules! Besides, my simming adventures are somewhat like a comic - never to be taken too seriously - so it's an appropriate font for my memoirs.

<sup>2</sup> *Uranographia* by Johann Bode (1801)

# Introduction

Even after all these years, I'm fascinated by simming and the fundamental question, why do we sim? What possesses us to sit in front of a computer for hours on end and construct an imaginary world? For me, it was fun. But there was more to it.

When I ran Trek Online, I was entering the adult world. Life doesn't provide young, intelligent, but socially awkward people finishing school and beginning a career with too many outlets,<sup>3</sup> so I simmed. I used my pent up creativity and energy to create a club that brought entertainment to hundreds of people.

But it almost didn't happen.

When I discovered simming in December of 1994, I didn't like it. Too many rules and stuck up people. I was unlucky, I suppose, for having come across a club that didn't suit me.

Fortunately, months later, I came across a free spirited band of simmers. My creativity was let loose and I was hooked. I was able to gallivant across the galaxy and play a dashing hero. Surprisingly to me, though, what I most enjoyed was the out of character aspects of simming - the unsung behind the scenes grunt work and management. There I was able to play boss, politician, and diplomat, and I learned about my talents and limitations. I soon realized I could do a better job than my simulated bosses, and after the club I was a Vice President in collapsed, I started my own club - Trek Online.

Given the unfettered nature of simming, everyone's imaginations go overboard. Clubs like Trek Online became republics. Disputes become wars. Leaders engage in great power politics. I'm guilty of this, but I - and I think others - do it because it's a harmless way to explore our desires and sort out what to do with our real life.

Most people who write about simming tone down these aspects to seem less crazy, but I've embraced them in my writings here. If nothing else, it makes the reading more interesting. My memoirs are a celebration our imaginations, online hobby, and the tremendous amount of work that sustains it. But above all else, I wrote these memoirs for myself. By writing, I've remembered much that I forgot and have forced myself to evaluate my strengths and weaknesses. It has helped improve my real life.

As a simmer, I hope you embrace the craziness and borderline delusions of our world. Those who don't usually won't last very long. But at the same time, please don't get carried away. I've seen too many good people have their ego become dependent on simming. I was lucky because I loved to partake in the craziness, but I wasn't swept away (most of the time).

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<sup>3</sup> Unless you're tremendously good at, say, sports or music or computer programming.

Because of that, I and my little band of self-described revolutionaries were able to build a great club in our day.

Trek Online became renowned for its quality, professionalism, and wacky spirit. Many lasting friendships were born in that club, and even a marriage or two. We pushed the boundaries of simming by experimenting with new styles and focusing attention on the importance of management, communication, and community. We were at the forefront of the revolution that broke down the old hierarchy of rigid militaryesque sim clubs and replaced them with open, dynamic, member run communities. We worked tirelessly to bring clubs together in the Simming League with the goal of eliminating ego trips, wars, and nasty power struggles.

Today, every club that elects its leader, has a constitution of some kind, focuses on good management, encourages communication and feedback, allows its simmers to move freely from sim to sim, or enjoys a common community with wacky inside jokes and traditions is, in part, echoing the spirit of Trek Online.

I hope that you'll read parts of these memoirs (I doubt anyone will read everything... but if you do, please let me know and you may win a prize), gain a new appreciation for simming, learn a thing or two, and above all else, enjoy my ramblings! We've created a fascinating imaginary world for ourselves.



## Admiral Chas Hammer

President, Trek Online

President, The Simming League

Commanding Officer, USS Orion, USS Vindicator, Viper Flight, New Horizons

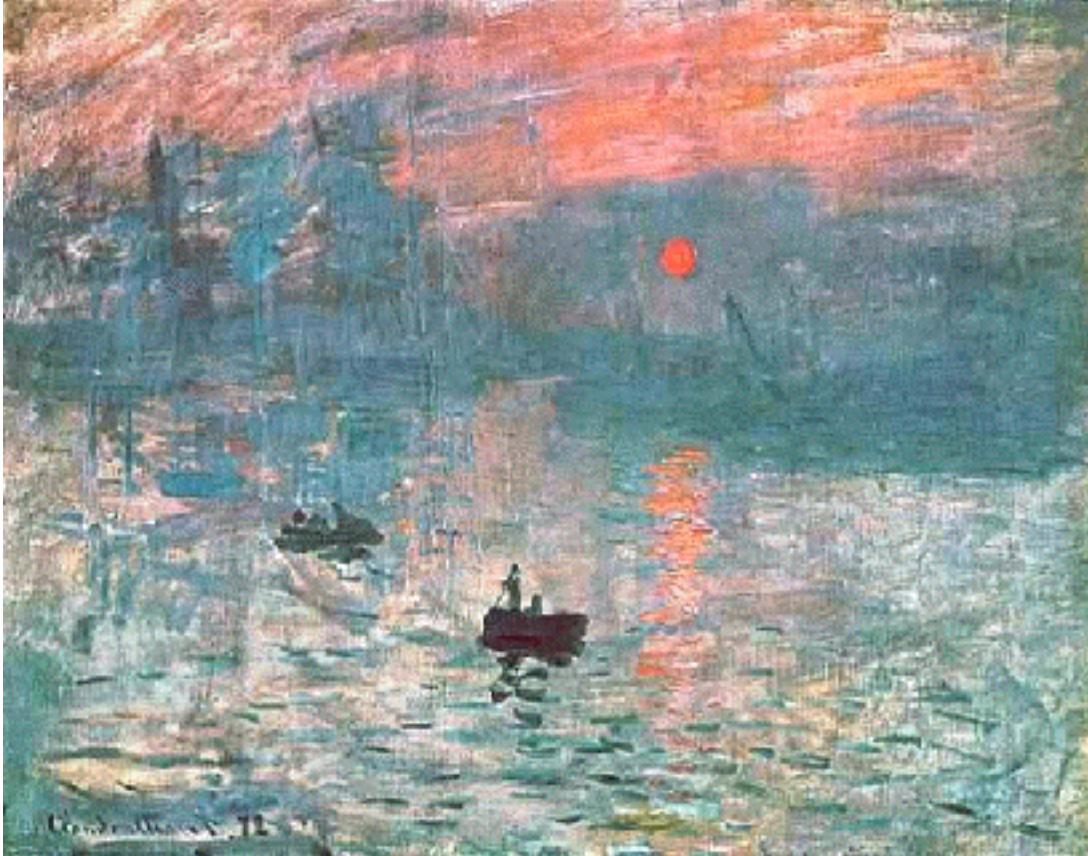
Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers, and I linger on the shore,

And the individual withers, and the world is more and more.

Alfred Lord Tennyson

# My Simming Memoirs

## Part 1: The Dawn of Simming



Sunrise, by Claude Monet (1872)

### Chapter 1: Births

*"There were ship subjects being mixed with government subjects being mixed with Trek Talk subjects." - Jim Midyette. Describing the early simming situation on Prodigy in 1992.*

The birth date of Trek Online is subject to debate. This is fitting as Trek Online's essence was linked to debate.

Trek Online came into conceptual being on August 31, 1996, was given its name on September 3, and held its first official sim on November 5. Complicating matters, the club on Prodigy - called Trek Online - merged with a club on AOL, called the UFP/SF, which also began in the summer of 1996. Regardless, Trek Online listed August 31 as its birthday because that was the day I decided to establish the club. However, as a compromise, the club always held its birthday party during the month of September.

Both Trek Online and the UFP/SF were born during a flurry of simming activity - a moment I term the "Lost Generation." Not lost because it failed to produce, but lost because it never had a chance to reach its fullest form. To understand the moment is to understand the balance Trek Online sought to achieve throughout its existence.

It is hard to imagine a world with computers but without the web, but that was the first half of the 1990s.<sup>4</sup> If you wanted to go online, you were limited to bulletin board systems (BBS), internet relay chat (irc), and online services. All three required a degree of computer savvy - not to mention a computer and modem; which bordered on luxury in those days. Of the three, online services were the easiest to use - install the program from a floppy disk, create an account, and soon you were online, able to browse the message boards, chat rooms, games, and other offerings of the online service.

The three main online services in the United States in the 1990s were America Online (AOL), CompuServe, and Prodigy. All charged by the hour. In 1995 for example, AOL charged, if memory serves, \$20 a month for the first five hours, and a few dollars for each additional hour. That hour limitation wasn't per individual, but per account, with each account having up to five screen names. If there were multiple family members on an account, each had to share the five hours. In other words - it quickly got expensive to be online!

Based on my limited experiences during the early and mid 1990s, and talking to those who were active at the time, this economic reality - the limited time one had online - shaped simming of the era. A chat sim easily took up 4 hours of your monthly allotment. Message board and E-mail sims were not as taxing; still, it took several minutes to sign on, download the messages, sign off, and sign back on to post/send your message once you wrote it - all multiplied many times a month. E-mail too could incur its own costs - overwhelmed by the popularity of E-mail, Prodigy, for a time, limited its members to 30 free messages a month, with a five cents charge for every additional message over the monthly allotment.<sup>5</sup>

Those who simmed tended to be those who were the most serious about the hobby, and they often remained with one game for an extended period as one simply couldn't afford to serve with multiple sims, or explore to find another game. As a result, sims were of a high quality. Players developed tight bonds. Characters were refined. Plots could take months to unfold.

Yet, on the flip side, because the sim had a monopoly on a person's online time, it could impose strict rules - and when I say rules I do not simply mean rules relating to discipline and attendance, but elaborate regulations concerning your character, your ship, your storyline, etc. Standards for promotions were also high, which in turn created its own incentive to remain with the sim. In a Star Trek sim, for example, it could take a year or

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<sup>4</sup> OK. If you were a pioneering computer person you may have used the web in the early 1990s, but for the masses it didn't arrive till later in the decade.

<sup>5</sup> Simmers on Prodigy got around this by sharing passwords; one account would be created and the password shared among players. Each player in turn would log in and update the draft e-mail, thus advancing the sim without ever sending an e-mail.

more to rise from ensign to lieutenant. After putting so much time into a game, people were understandably hesitant to leave and start anew in another organization. This mentality also meant new simmers were often ignored, and it took awhile for a new person to gain acceptance.

Throughout the early and mid 1990s, the general thrust of simming was to keep things realistic - to remain within the bounds of canon - and replicate the world at all levels of the player experience. It wasn't enough to meet once a week and sim. In many instances, hosts and club leaders always appeared online in character. They would speak to junior officers as junior officers. They would issue orders - from a club leader directing a captain to send their ship to a certain sector, which would then serve as the basis of the next sim - to establishing policies for the sim with official sounding directives from Starfleet Headquarters, and expecting people to obey. All of this made the sims intense and realistic, but also had a tendency to inflate egos of those at the top.

To manage a club under such economic constraints was difficult. Most bureaucratic work was conducted over E-mail, and - due to the limited online time - simmers hardly ever interacted with other crews within their own club. In other words, there was little community - the club was a bureaucratic container for sims. There was also little debate; even if someone disagreed with the heavy-handed regulations and in character approach of the leadership, there simply wasn't enough time to discuss it.

Yet, under the surface of the seemingly static system, there were high quality, dedicated simmers confined to one sim, slowly grinding away and bubbling with new ideas. They heard rumors about other clubs and other sims, and were curious to see what else was out there, but they could not afford to explore, let alone run a club of their own.

The first opportunity for change came when AOL shifted its billing policy in the late spring of 1996, giving its members 20 hours of online time a month per account. Similarly, around this time, Prodigy revamped its billing policies, offering its members an option - unlimited use of its bulletin boards and E-mail and 5 hours of chat, or 20 hours of online time a month for chatting, bulletin boards, and E-mail.

Simmers could now afford to explore a bit more, join an additional sim, or perhaps launch a sim of their own. They began to talk and get to know each other. People started to demand more control over their characters and stories, and more freedom to innovate. People started to think about the club as a whole - as a community of fellow simmers - and not just a listing of sims that were available to join.

Just as quickly as all this began to percolate, it was swept away. In December 1996, AOL switched to unlimited billing - you could stay online for as long as you wanted for one fixed monthly cost. The ability to reform some of the negative aspects of the old system - to develop a community and to encourage flexibility - but to, at the same time, continue to exist within the confines of the old simming order - and enjoy the benefits of simmers who refined their craft over years, of crews that remained together, of the intricate experience at all levels of the player experience - was lost. Unlimited billing unleashed



chaos. Games were overwhelmed by new players. Old timers left to start their own sims, and people without any experience launched their own sims. Regulations were ignored. Simmers bickered over long held assumptions and new problems. Crews were cast asunder. Clubs collapsed.

Even though this tectonic shift was unleashed by the changes in AOL's billing policies, the effects of 1996 and 1997 were not confined to AOL. Due to AOL's move, it became the dominant online service of the 1990s. By the end of the decade, its primary competitors - CompuServe and Prodigy - had ceased to exist. Soon though, AOL lost to the world wide web. Yet, by in large, the leading sim clubs of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century were those who had started on AOL and moved onto the internet - taking with them the traditions and history of AOL.

This is where the story of Trek Online begins. Trek Online was a unique sim club in that we were born during that briefest of moments in 1996, after the number of online hours had been increased, but before unlimited billing - the "Lost Generation" as I call it. As far as I know, Trek Online was the only major club to be produced during the "Lost Generation."<sup>6</sup>

Trek Online always struggled to balance the old and the new that defined the "Lost Generation." We worked to preserve the best of the past - the wonderful dedication and professionalism - but at the same embrace the new - creativity over strict adherence to cannon, openness over rigidity, and always working to make the club a true community, to break the bonds of the past that saw a club simply as a bureaucratic container for individual sims.

Of all that Trek Online confronted, questions relating to fundamental pillars of simming - the club and the sim - were the most interesting to me. Like everything else, we wanted to preserve the best of the existing simming community - but we experimented with the fundamental concepts with an eye towards improving. Why did the sim host also play the captain of the ship? Why have a set crew? A set ship or storyline? Why have ranks? Who had control over the characters, the story? What did it mean to be a club? Who had a voice? How were decisions made?

Grouping players into a sim, and combining sims together to form a club has obvious organizational advantages. Yet, as concepts, they came into being only a few years prior to Trek Online.

On a broad level, simming is a fanzine or a role-playing game (like Dungeons & Dragons) adapted to the online medium. The basic premise is the same - people come together, play a character, describe their actions, and work together to complete a mission, a quest, or what have you. How this transition from offline to online occurred is lost to history, although a few snippets remain.

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<sup>6</sup> Of course, other clubs were founded during the same time, but Trek Online is the only one that I know of which survived and prospered.

MUDs and MUSHes have been around since the mid 70s, affording individuals the opportunity to navigate a text-based world. In 1988 and 1989, Tracy Reed wrote the *QuantumLink Serial*,<sup>7</sup> a hybrid fanzine and online role-playing game for Quantum Link, the precursor of AOL.<sup>8</sup> Quantum Link also offered Quantum Space, an early play-by-E-mail game, from 1989 to 1992.<sup>9</sup> By 1990, CompuServe offered areas where offline role-playing games, such as Advanced Dungeons & Dragons and RuneQuest, could be played online.<sup>10</sup> Prodigy, however, took a different track - text based role-playing games were banned on that service until April 1992.<sup>11</sup>

Somewhere, out of this ferment, individuals made the leap, and created a sim, or play-by-post online role-playing game.<sup>12</sup>

It appears that when the leap was made, the concept of how to sim spread first, before the idea of organizing into sims and clubs. This makes sense. You need a large population to organize before you can produce an organization.

As late as 1992, chat simming on AOL was often unorganized. Simmers would come together at random, sim for an hour or two, and part at the end of the mission. Sometimes, people would form E-mail lists to organize a meet up. Sometimes, people would agree to meet at regular intervals. According to Admiral Trekker,<sup>13</sup> founder of the Star Trek Sims (STS) club, "There were only a few 'organized' groups (in 1992 and 1993). Most sims just happened on the fly. I only attended one or two 'on the fly' sims before I decided to start a group. Actually, I didn't know it would turn into a group. I just asked a whole bunch of people if they'd like me to mail them when I was going to have a 'get together,' i.e., a sim. It grew from there."

Often though, the simming that occurred during Trekker's 'get together' was not a sim in the standard way we think of Star Trek sims today. It did not consist of a bunch of people gathered together in a chat room with one captain and the rest playing various crewmembers on a ship as is commonplace today. Rather, there were several ships simming at once, with maybe just one or two people assigned to each crew - in other words, the sim was one big fleet action.

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<sup>7</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/QuantumLink\\_Serial](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/QuantumLink_Serial)

<sup>8</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quantum\\_Link](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quantum_Link)

<sup>9</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quantum\\_Space](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quantum_Space)

<sup>10</sup> CompuServe Almanac: An Online Reference of Online Service: Sixth Edition. CompuServe Incorporated. 1990. Page 182.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~geneh/startrek/nr02.html>

<sup>12</sup> I've had individuals claim to me to have been a part of Star Trek sims occurring on college BBS in the 1980s, or having helped create the first Star Trek sim on Quantum Link in the late 80s, but without hard proof or independent verification, they to me remain just claims, not fact.

<sup>13</sup> Interviewed in 1998. I have confidence in his revelations, as at the same time I also interviewed several others, both on and off the record, who had been involved with STS since its early days, and their stories matched up. Further, there was no doubt in my mind that the person who played Trekker in 1998 was the same person as he was in 1992.



Nor was this fluid simming universe and collection of simming friends confined to the chat rooms of AOL. On Prodigy, message boards dominated and the simmers there - who called themselves online role-players - experienced a similar fluid nature on the boards in the early 90s, which eventually coalesced into simming clubs.

In his history *No Regrets*,<sup>14</sup> Jim Midyette, one of the early president's of the Starfleet (STF) sim club - a club that began on the bulletin boards of Prodigy in 1992 - reports that STF started as a collection of Star Trek fans who would talk about Star Trek on a particular bulletin board, defend against the fans of other shows who would raid and disrupt their board, and who would themselves sometimes go off and raid non Trek boards. They had a particularly fierce rivalry with the 90210 fan board.

To foster these 'military' actions, a leadership of admirals and captains was created. However, some of the members of this organization were more interested in peace, and they wanted to engage in role-playing. However, as Mr. Midyette comments, Prodigy did not allow role-playing on its bulletin boards until April of 1992. When Prodigy finally changed their policy and allowed role-playing games to occur on their bulletin boards, the various captains and admirals began to run their own ships and organize their own crews.

Much like the early days of STS, it appears that most of the people in STF all simmed together in a chaotic jumble. Mr. Midyette discusses a number of in and out of character intrigues, which reveal no one had control, and makes plain everyone was struggling to figure out how to establish and run a club. It would be many months before any kind of modern Star Trek simming, marked by independent ships, each with their own crews, began to appear in STF.

This early struggle in STF reveals the beginnings of the first great simming upheaval and the establishment of traditions that still lie at the very core of simming - ranks, treating minor disputes as great power politics, and the organizational concept of the sim club. Today all of this seems so natural - Star Trek has ships with crews, so sims should consist of a ship and crew. From there, ships should be grouped together to make a club, similar to Starfleet. But just because that is the way it is today does not mean that is the way it has to be, or that it was always that way. As we have seen, early simming was quite the opposite.

The events in STF during the early days of the simming also help explain why Star Trek simming stood apart from all other kinds of simming throughout the 1990s. Clubs that focused on other genres of simming, Star Wars for example, remained a small collection of simming friends with a tight, intense sim - often a fleet action or epic story that connected everyone in the club to the same plot. Medieval/Fantasy sims organized players into clans, but each clan was part of the same larger plot. In effect, the club, the sim, and the in character universe in which the sim took place were indistinguishable.

Early Trek clubs tried develop in a similar way - but they were swamped by too many people, too many competing interests, and too many egos. Non-Trek clubs did not experience the

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.star-fleet.com/snn/history/nr.html>

population pressures that the Trek clubs faced, so, as a result, non-Trek clubs were able to stay small and tight nit throughout the 1990s. They never had to evolve beyond the early collection of simming friends. Trek clubs, on the other hand, were forced to evolve and reorganize themselves in order to find a way to deal with the large number of Trek simmers. In the beginning, STF, STS and other Star Trek clubs clearly attempted to evolve in the direction of having a club that was the sim, where everyone simmed together in a large fleet action, and where just about everyone commanded their own ship - even despite the fact that Star Trek as a show was focused on one ship and a crew. However, it just was not possible to have huge fleet sims as the chaos reported by Mr. Midyette illustrates.

In addition to the population overflow, STF had a large number of admirals, captains and self appointed demigods running around. No one had the power to get rid of them, so for a plan to organize the club to be successful, it not only had to organize the simmers, but it also needed accommodate the number of high-ranking officers. Jim Midyette reports that, in July of 1992, Admiral Adrian Kowalewski came up with a radical plan that solved both the population problem and the high-ranking officer problem. His plan for STF, quite simply, consisted of "a ship with an actual crew." It was such an unorthodox plan that Mr. Midyette, a normally detached author, comments that he "hated the plan with a passion" because it "called for a radical new concept."

The plan built a club and government hierarchy around individual ships and crews. This gave all the admirals and captains a ship and fancy job to soothe their egos. Also, in keeping with the rigid nature of the economics of the day, along with the cultural desire to have sims which accurately reflected Star Trek, the plan "called for strict controls on gov't and private affairs."

Regardless of if Admiral Kowalewski invented the concept of the sim club himself or appropriated the idea from elsewhere, the concept of the individual sim and sim club solved all kinds of problems and provided advantages. With a club, the organization became defined. Leaders now had a clear set of people to command and ships to run. To expand the club, all one had to do was find a new captain and crew. As a result, a club theoretically could grow to an unlimited size.<sup>15</sup>

As clubs began to appear, the fluid nature of simming started to come to an end. The unorganized collections of simming friends simply could not compete in the face of such a

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<sup>15</sup> But of course, there is a limit. After running a sim club for several years I can tell you that trying to manage people over a computer is probably one of the most difficult things to attempt. Despite all of the academic talk over globalization and how computers will eliminate the need for cities and business offices because we will all be able to work from an isolated mountaintop via a computer, I do not think it will happen any time soon. It is still far easier to converse and work with or manage someone in person then it is over a computer. It takes a completely unique person and business model to pull it off, which is probably one of the fundamental reasons why most sim clubs fail or encounter great difficulties because real life strategies for dealing with people and organizations just do not work very well online.

powerful organizational system. Either simming friends organized their own clubs<sup>16</sup> or joined a club. With time, even Admiral Trekker converted his collection of simming friends into a club - partly because his sim couldn't accommodate everyone simming together at one time, and partly because in order to compete against other clubs, he needed a club.

The development of organized sims and clubs was one of the innovations that allowed simming to diverge from fanzines and other role-playing games to become a stand alone hobby. However, it was just one piece.

How to divine the outcome of results is a central question of any role-playing game.

Dice appear to have enjoyed widespread use in early simming - an obvious example of taking a common feature of offline role-playing games and applying it to the online medium. Admiral Nfo, the second in command of STS, reported to me that early simmers frequently used online dice.<sup>17</sup> SFOL on AOL had provisions in its rulebook on how to use online dice in a sim.<sup>18</sup> However, dice proved problematic in a sim - they disrupted the flow of the sim - and by 1994 it appears that the use of dice in simming had largely disappeared.

In its stead, simmers worked out rules - both written and unwritten - on how to determine the outcome of events without disrupting the flow of the sim. By large measure, this involved leaving it to the crews to read each other and improvise - like jazz.

STS, however, was not comfortable with giving up dice and leaving it to the whims of the simmers to determine, as a group, the outcome of events in a sim. So, STS took the concept of the Game Master from Dungeons and Dragons and used it to create the position of sim master - an official person in every sim whose job it was to determine fate.

The concept of the sim master in STS was developed by TrekGuru,<sup>19</sup> who joined Admiral Trekker's sim in 1994 as it was evolving into a club of its own. TrekGuru loved D&D and thought the free form of simming being practiced just about everywhere else was "lame." She did not like "Everyone going everywhere with no performed concept of play. So, I talked to Trekker into letting me "DM" a sim with a concept only I would know. I was the computer, the enemies and the universe."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Either in a more formal fashion, like Star Trek clubs with ships and elaborate hierarchies and what not, or as an entity in another genera that put out a shingle and called itself a club in order to attract new members.

<sup>17</sup> Interviewed in 1998. The earlier footnote concerning Admiral Trekker also apply here.

<sup>18</sup> The SFOL rulebook was posted on America Online. I do not have a copy of it, but at the time it was on AOL at: <file://localhost/aol/::4344/3311.sfolhow3.13172925.657571033>

<sup>19</sup> Interviewed in 1998. The earlier footnote concerning Admiral Trekker also apply here.

<sup>20</sup> In my own humble opinion, I find the sim master form of simming to be far more interesting. It makes the sims more realistic and intriguing. Sadly for simming, TrekGuru did not come along until 1994. By this time, the simming world was already established and expanding in every direction. Had she come along a few years earlier, the sim master probably would have become a staple of Trek

All of this evidence - dice, game masters, chaos in early sim clubs, suggests to me that it is very likely that when offline role-players and fanzines went online, they began to use what they knew from the offline world and began to adopt it to the online environment, giving rise to simming. By 1992 and 1993 - even despite the constraints of only 5 hours of online time a month - the concept of simming had more or less been finalized and was spreading rapidly.

It is amazing that simming everywhere developed simultaneously into similar online cultures. While people did move between online services, taking ideas with them, the online services of the day were rather isolated. Yet, simming everywhere developed in similar ways. This fact is testimony to the unguided, uncontrollable, powerful forces that shape simming. All the online services were constrained by economics. Most likely early simmers carried with them experiences from offline role-playing and fanzines. This caused individuals to develop similar types of simming despite being on different online services.

All simming leaders should accept and be aware of the forces that shape our community, and should attempt to deal with them. Those leaders who try to fight or control the unguided powerful trends, forces, and realities will be swept aside. Those leaders who understand the forces, use them to their advantage, and shape their club around them will prosper. Simming history proves this time and time again.

## Chapter 2: SFOL

*"They are all just a bunch of strange people in their own weird universe talking with crazy symbols." - Me, December, 1994. My first reaction to simming.*

Regardless of if Admiral Kowalewski came up with the idea for a sim club or not, it was Starfleet Online (SFOL) who popularized it, perfected it, and used it to rise to unprecedented heights in the simming world.

I stumbled across SFOL on AOL during the end of 1994, but I did not last very long. I have always maintained simming is just a game - and from my very first moment in simming till my last, the egos, strict rules, and inequity of simming have always turned me off. Even to this day, I hate to stand at attention as some captains call for during the start of their sims. It is little things like that which create a mindset; in simming, all we have are words on a screen.

To me, the people in the corner of SFOL that I stumbled into seemed to be too concerned with their ranks and making sure that I addressed them as sir. Plus, no one took the time to explain to me what was going on in the sim. I later commented to a friend that simming was just a bunch of crazy people talking in some weird language of symbols and abbreviations.

It was my first experience with simming, and given how I responded, it logically should have been my last. Sims during this era may have been highly professional, but that

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simming. But by 1994, the sim master concept was relegated to a niche of clubs under the cultural influence of STS, TOL being one of them.

professionalism also created negative aspects which drove away potential new simmers like myself.

The only reason I was able to discover SFOL, and thus the entire simming world, is because SFOL had propelled itself to unprecedented heights on AOL - it had managed to become the official sim club of AOL. As a result, SFOL had its very own chat rooms, message boards, keyword, forum, and advertisements for me to stumble across.

In the walled garden of AOL, forums were everything. Forums were the main areas and subareas of the service - and there was a forum for just about every subject under the sun. News, weather, games, computers, sports, etc; and under the main forums there were subforums, for example, a forum for baseball, one for football, etc. Within the forum, you could find content geared towards the forum (for example news articles in the news forum), along with message boards, chat rooms, and other resources for use by the forum. To reach a forum, you could either click the links from the main window, to a main forum, and down the chain till you reached your desired sub forum. Or, if the forum was lucky, it would have a keyword - you would type it in, say Apple for Apple computers, and you would go directly to the Apple forum, skipping any intermediate forum for computers generally.

By the end of the 1990s, to get a forum and keyword, you needed to be a major company - but in the early days, seemingly anyone with a good idea and good connections at AOL could get one. Apparently at some point in time, someone on AOL thought having a dedicated forum on AOL for Star Trek simming was a good idea - and from a business prospective, it was. If you got someone to join a chat sim, 4 out of 5 hours of their monthly allotment would be consumed, putting the account that much closer to racking up additional service charges once they passed 5 hours of online time a month.

How SFOL received its forum and keyword I do not know. I've heard several stories - but having been unable to collaborate any with documents or other independent sources - they to me remain just claims, not fact. One story holds that SFOL began as a small collection of simming friends on Quantum Link, the precursor of AOL, and with time and superior management, the club simply grew, and caught the attention of AOL. Another story says AOL created SFOL. Another holds that SFOL started on Prodigy in 1991 as collection of E-mail simmers; when Prodigy allowed role-playing on its message boards in April 1992, some of the players started a version of SFOL on the message boards of Prodigy.<sup>21</sup> Others left to establish a version of SFOL in the chat rooms of AOL, and the club grew from there, catching the notice of AOL.

The general thrust of all the stories are believable. AOL could have created SFOL from scratch - Quantum Link, and later AOL, experimented with hybrid fanzines and online role-playing games in the late 80s. It isn't much of a stretch to imagine those efforts evolving

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<sup>21</sup> SFOL on Prodigy became the largest Star Trek sim club on Prodigy, although it remained a private club, not officially sponsored by Prodigy. Unfortunately, I've never been able to confirm if there was a link between it and the club on AOL, or if it was simply a coincidence that the clubs shared the name and also managed to dominate their respective online services.

into AOL setting up a sim club. Equally, SFOL could have started as a private club, and that AOL later made it an official club. Again, AOL had shown interest in role-playing games, and they had an economic incentive to keep people online. There is also a parallel example, Fleet 74 on CompuServe. Fleet 74 was apparently one of the first Star Trek sim clubs to establish itself on CompuServe, most likely growing out of a collection of simming friends. Perhaps because Fleet74 had a head start, perhaps because it had a superior management, Fleet74, like SFOL on AOL, was able to rise to become the dominate Star Trek sim club on CompuServe - and sometimes the only Trek sim club on CompuServe. Ultimately, CompuServe rewarded Fleet74 with its own chat room, which for CompuServe was just as good as a forum on AOL. While Fleet74 with its chat room remained a private club, where as SFOL with its forum was under AOL's control, the example remains that with Fleet74, an online service saw fit to provide a private sim club with extra resources.

How clubs like SFOL and Fleet74 grew to dominate their respective online services in the early 1990s was probably nothing spectacular. Competitors, like STF, were held back by internal conflict. SFOL most likely possessed strong leadership that allowed it to escape such problems, and this fact enabled it to grow with far greater ease. Key members of SFOL too were known to have communicated offline as well, both via phone, and meeting up in person at conventions.<sup>22</sup> Timing was also a factor. Simming was new and there was an increasing amount of role players signing online for the first time, creating an ever-expanding pool of talent for a club to tap into. When the majority of simming consisted of random get togethers and friends with E-mail lists, being one of the few organized, not to mention the best organized, game in town surely must have helped SFOL and Fleet74 vacuum up simmers.

By the time I stumbled across SFOL in December 1994, the club very much had an official forum on AOL, with 21 active sims, and 10 academy sims (essentially open sims designed to attract new recruits, like myself).<sup>23</sup> In later years, stories have been told that SFOL at its height had 500, even 700 members, but 21 sims would hint at a club with 200 to 300 members.<sup>24</sup> Still, that many sims is an impressive feat. TOL never grew that large, and even today, the largest clubs tend to peak at the 300 member level.

Yet, unknown to me, SFOL was a club in turmoil. Solid evidence of this can be found in an article from *The Recorder* (A San Francisco Legal Newspaper), entitled "Command Control," dated November 15, 1995, written by Robert Ablon.<sup>25</sup> The article details the plight of

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<sup>22</sup> I attended several Star Trek conventions in the 90s and early 2000s where entire SFOL sim crews attended just so that they could meet and talk about their sim for hours on end. This real life interaction must have been of tremendous importance, especially when one could only spend 5 hours online.

<sup>23</sup> The numbers come from two SFOL newsletters, December 11, 1994, and December 18, 1994, that I had saved on my computer.

<sup>24</sup> My data comes from December 1994, so it's possible there had been sims that had already left SFOL - still, to even reach the numbers later rumored, over half of SFOL would have had to already left, which I doubt was the case by that point.

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.aolwatch.org/parker.htm>



Stanley Parker, a 52 year old retired aerospace engineer and SFOL host who sued AOL after AOL kicked him out of SFOL on May 30, 1994, and later terminated his AOL account.

Among other things, the article notes, "Stanley Parker says he loved AOL when he first logged on in 1990. He fast became a regular player on a role-playing game called Starfleet Online, and by late 1992 Parker had landed a position he'd long been gunning for: hosting Starfleet, a *Star Trek* knockoff." It continues, "As a host, Parker would set up scenarios and answer questions for up to 15 players at a time. In exchange for each hour that he hosted the Starfleet games, Parker earned an hour of credited time in his AOL account. Although AOL considered him a volunteer, Parker says he sometimes worked as many as 50 hours a week -- all compensated with credited time -- and was allowed access to staff bulletin boards." It goes on, "But AOL stripped Parker of his Starfleet command on May 30, 1994, allegedly for expressing hatred toward AOL management and making derogatory comments against AOL staff nearly two years before. This summer (1995), Parker again ran afoul of AOL management when he protested a complaint that another subscriber had lodged against him for sending unwanted E-mail. Parker maintains that the recipient could have ignored or deleted the mail, and he demanded that AOL withdraw the complaint. When AOL refused, Parker informed the company that he had claimed the rights to the Starfleet Online name, and that AOL would have to secure his permission to use the moniker. A week later, Parker says his account was shut off, without warning or notice. That's when Parker launched his odyssey for attention."

All of this raises interesting points.

The article makes clear that SFOL existed in an organized fashion in 1992, and it strongly hints that Mr. Parker started simming in 1990 or 1991. The article does not make clear, when he joined, if SFOL was under AOL's control. The description of Mr. Parker being compensated for his time clearly indicates he was working for AOL on SFOL at some point, but it doesn't conclusively state when this occurred. The description could equally apply to a scenario where SFOL was always part of AOL, or a scenario where SFOL became a part of AOL at some point after Mr. Parker began to sim - and that after SFOL came under AOL's control, his time was credited.

The hints of Mr. Parker's duties are interesting as well. The article makes clear he hosted individual sims, but it also notes that he "had landed a position he'd long been gunning for: hosting Starfleet, a *Star Trek* knockoff." Perhaps it was just the language the author used, or the author was not familiar with the subject - but it implies Mr. Parker was put in charge of Starfleet (SFOL), the club, not a sim in SFOL named Starfleet. The fact Mr. Parker spent 50 hours a week working on SFOL is also revealing. I know of no chat sim host who spends that much time with their sim. Perhaps Mr. Parker ran multiple sims - but still, 50 hours is a lot. Perhaps he also performed other managerial duties within the club, but again, 50 hours is a lot. The only people who spend that much time a week on simming is the person who runs the club. The article also notes that Mr. Parker was stripped of "his Starfleet command," which could mean sim command, or command of the entire club. Further, Mr. Parker claimed ownership of the "Starfleet Online name," which is an odd thing to do if one was only a host - and is also an odd thing to do if SFOL had been created by AOL.

Under the versions of stories that hold SFOL started as a private club, the consistent element is that, one day, some AOL types approached the leader of SFOL and offered to give the club its very own forum, keyword, message boards, chat rooms, and to make it the official Trek sim club of AOL. The leader immediately signed the paperwork without consulting anyone - or at least, consulting only a small number of people - but I can understand the leader's eagerness. I think anyone would jump at the chance of having their sim club being endorsed as the official club of an online service. Reaction in SFOL to the leader's move though was split. Some saw the acquisition by AOL in a positive light - it would mean they would have their very own forum and all of the goodies that went along with it. More importantly, the captains would not be billed for the time they spent simming (but club members still would). SFOL had become the dominant sim club on AOL, and now with this move it would ensure its dominance for years. Others in the club, however, saw it as a hostile takeover, pure and simple. AOL's control of the club meant they had lost control of their sim. Now captains had to worry about lots of paperwork, new rules, politics and listening to AOL bosses. In addition, many were not happy over the fact that the leader of SFOL had unilaterally made the decision.

The article in *The Recorder* is vague enough to support this version of events. SFOL was a private club that Mr. Parker joined. At some point SFOL came under AOL's control and Mr. Parker was compensated for his work with the club - it's even possible that Mr. Parker was the leader of SFOL who agreed to AOL's terms to make the club the official Star Trek sim club of AOL.

Yet, the article is also vague enough to support the notion that SFOL was an AOL creation, which Mr. Parker joined, and potentially was placed in charge of by AOL, before he was booted.

In either case, both sets of stories consistently point to 1994 as the date turmoil began in SFOL. All the stories I've been told involving SFOL coming under AOL's control place the date of the AOL acquisition in 1994, and the resentment to the move soon after causing SFOL to break apart. Although, it's possible that the 1994 acquisition date is incorrect - SFOL could have come under AOL's control earlier, and the trouble in 1994 had a different source. In the event SFOL was always under AOL's control, or came under AOL's control prior to 1994, the actions AOL took against Mr. Parker surely had to have caused backlash within the club. Anyone who spent 50 hours a week on club business had to have been a senior leader - and for him to be removed by AOL would have undoubtedly caused a backlash against AOL's control of the club.

It though is interesting that he was stripped of his command for statements made two years earlier - perhaps it's a typo? Perhaps not. If correct, why would AOL want to dredge up statements made two years prior and use that to strip him of command? Why would it, a year after stripping him of command, terminate his account for sending an E-mail? All of it hints at a deeper power struggle occurring.

Personally, I have always been inclined to support the stories that SFOL started as a private club, and if that is the case, Stanley Parker might have been the unfortunate SFOL

leader who turned the club over to AOL without consulting his fellow leaders and members. His story becomes even more tragic because, after handing the club over, AOL terminated his account. From a political standpoint though, it could have been a basic move on AOL's part to get rid of anyone who could have claimed legitimacy the throne and thus have interfered with any AOL attempts to control the club.

Despite searches of court records, however, I have failed to find anything about Mr. Parker's case. Perhaps additional records would shed more light on SFOL's early history. In any event, it is testimony to both the tight lip policy SFOL's leadership had after 1994, and to America's liturgical nature, that perhaps the only surviving clues to SFOL's early days may be found in a court record. Who ever said simming was child's play?

### Chapter 3: The Times They Are a-Changin'

*"However, due to a sudden shift in SFOL managerial direction, Tigress left her position as USS Omni Captain and as "The Communiue OnLine" SFOL magazine Editor-in-Chief." - COL History Page, describing the break up of SFOL.*

Regardless of how SFOL had came into being or came under AOL's control, it is clear that by 1994, the atmosphere was poisonous, with AOL removing Mr. Parker from the club, and he suing AOL as a result. Equally clear is that simmers and hosts began to leave the club.

The economic risk one took to stand up for their beliefs and venture out on their own must have been staggering. As a captain in SFOL, a person would be able to sim for free. (Simmers didn't sim for free, they were still charged for their time online.) To give up that free time and return to 5 hours of online time a month would mean that the people who broke away from SFOL were willing to spend a significant amount of money just so they could get away from SFOL and sim as they saw fit. In doing such a thing, these people clearly loved simming, stood by their simming principles, and wanted to get away from SFOL.

The most substantial individual to leave SFOL during this period was The Tigress. She was a high-ranking SFOL leader responsible for publishing the clubs newsletter. As such, she possessed a lot of clout, respect and contacts with in SFOL, and yet, even she became so fed up with the situation in SFOL that she left in early 1995 to found her own club, The Continuum OnLine (COL).

A history of the COL (no longer posted online) stated, "The Tigress was a well-respected, charismatic and popular "Starfleet OnLine" (SFOL) host on AOL. However, due to a sudden shift in SFOL managerial direction, Tigress left her position as USS Omni Captain and as "The Communiue OnLine" SFOL magazine Editor-in-Chief. The Omni crew and the Communique OnLine staff enjoyed Tigress' management style, and with the permission of

SFOL, the USS Omni and the Communique OnLine left SFOL (a very rare event in SFOL history)."<sup>26</sup>

It continues, "Soon, Jats approached her with an idea to spawn an entire new organization, not limiting herself to just the Omni. Jats brought with him the crew of the USS Defiant. CmdrME was also a host who had left SFOL and was assigned as the Vice Admiral, and the name "The Continuum OnLine" was chosen."

"Over 100 people left SFOL to form an organization that would be supportive of its staff, minimize politics, and create a fun simming environment with mature, motivating leadership. CmdrME eventually left and Jats became the new Vice Admiral. In January, 1999, Admiral Tigress retired, leaving Jats as Admiral and "CptnEdD" as the Vice-Admiral."

Maybe out of fear of legal action, maybe out of respect over the fact that SFOL actually allowed her to leave the club and take her ship with her without a fight, The Tigress never publicly revealed any details as to what happened in SFOL or what the sudden shift in SFOL managerial direction involved. However, the language in the article hints at some of the problems - "to form an organization that would be supportive of its staff, minimize politics, and create a fun simming environment with mature, motivating leadership."

I know people who have been a host (captain) in both SFOL and in private sim clubs. According to them, the difference between the two could not be more striking - in a private club, it is a hobby. In SFOL, it is a business. High-ranking officials in SFOL treat their job as work, and in fact, some bitter ex-SFOL hosts refuse to call SFOL a club - for a club conjures up images of people who are friendly towards each other and work together to achieve a goal or to share a common interest, and to them, the image conjured up by a club is the exact opposite of the reality that was present in SFOL. Do not get me wrong, apart from my initial experiences with SFOL, everyone I have met from SFOL have been friendly, highly dedicated simmers. But when the AOL leadership treats SFOL as a business exercise, that is going to be translated down the chain of command, eventually into the sims.

As a result of SFOL's business attitude, I have been told there is a lot of behind the scenes bickering, politicking and paperwork, and hosts are often left to fend for themselves. They do not have much contact with those above them, and they do not receive much aid or support from those higher up the chain of command.

If the COL's claim that over 100 left SFOL to join the COL is correct, that would represent 1/3 to 1/2 of SFOL as existed in December 1994 - a staggering sum. And The Tigress was not the only one to leave. During the end of 1994 and beginning of 1995, many other captains, simmers, and in fact, entire ships left SFOL to start up their own clubs. As a result, the power of SFOL was shattered.

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<sup>26</sup> I would take this to mean that getting permission to leave was a rare event; others simply left without permission.

The impact that the breakup of SFOL had on the simming community cannot be overstated. It allowed new clubs to take shape and existing clubs to grow. Without the breakup of SFOL, I do not know how a vibrant community of private Star Trek sim clubs could have ever formed on AOL. When one looks at CompuServe, Fleet 74 was often the only Star Trek sim club on the service.<sup>27</sup> On Prodigy, there were but a handful of large clubs. When SFOL on AOL broke apart during 1994 and 1995, there were a few private clubs on AOL - but they were not that large, or they were still in the process of evolving from a collection of simming friends into something more solid, as with STS. There also remained a primordial soup of simmers who gathered at random. With it's position as the official Star Trek sim club on AOL, it is most likely SFOL would have continued to dominate - private clubs unable to compete but on the fringes, and the bulk of unaffiliated simmers eventually finding their way into SFOL.

The moment SFOL broke apart was the same moment online services hit the main stream, with thousands of new people creating an account a day, and with some of these people making their way into simming. The resulting combination of less pressure from SFOL and an expanding population produced something of a golden era for simming. As the history of the Federation Sim Fleet (FSF) summed up, 1995 was a time when "Simming (was) on the rise, a community (was) being born, (and) everything was nice."<sup>28</sup>

Despite its revolutionary beginnings, 1995 settled rather quickly, and there was peace and plenty. A large part of this peace was due to the fact that simming at this time was not a zero sum game. Because the overall simming population was expanding as more and more people ventured online for the first time, it was easy to find members. Had the situation been different, had this simming population growth not occurred, the tensions unleashed by the break up of SFOL and the competition among the successor clubs for members probably would have turned nasty. When pressure on the simming world increased in 1997, wars broke out among clubs. Yet, in 1995, just the opposite occurred - because the overall simming population was expanding, competition did not take the form of fighting. Rather, competition came in the form of measuring which club had the most simmers. This was true on both AOL and Prodigy. The motto of the era can be said to be "Bigger is better," and this motto would carry on well beyond the 1995, often with negative results for simming.

To make things even easier for clubs of this era, the internet did not exist in a popular form. Everyone was concentrated on online services, and these services responded by providing forums, message boards and places for simmers to gather together. After the breakup of SFOL, AOL quickly created a new forum, the Non Affiliated Gamers Forum

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<sup>27</sup> It was almost impossible to run a Star Trek sim on CompuServe considering the fact you had to compete with others for the use of the public chat room. Anyone who did try to sim would do so in full view of the public, and Fleet 74. More often then not the simmers would end up being recruited by Fleet 74 before the night was out. In fact, due to its high visibility and dominate position, a visibility and position similar to what SFOL enjoyed on AOL, Fleet 74 maintained complete dominance on CompuServe right up to the very end of CompuServe as a viable online community. As such, I feel that similarly situated SFOL on AOL would have sucked most of the oxygen out of the room, leaving only a few sim clubs on the fringes.

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.sb254.com/fsf/talk/history.htm>

(NAGF), as a place for simmers and clubs to hang out. The NAGF proved to be very fertile recruiting grounds for private clubs on AOL, and it also provided private clubs with their own message boards and file libraries. The creation of the NAGF was no act of simple kindness on AOL's part, however. It was simple economics. Provide the private clubs with a forum and hopefully enough simmers will stay online for more than 5 hours, giving extra money to AOL.

As for SFOL on AOL, it was badly wounded in 1994 and 1995, but it retained a commanding position in the simming world because it had the full resources of AOL at its disposal. It renamed itself Spacefleet Online and was able to rebuild, although it never again became as large or as powerful as it had been. (I have heard many persistent rumors that Paramount sued AOL for using the name Starfleet, and so the name was changed.)

With the peace and plenty of the era, 1995 and 1996 saw a flowering of ideas for how to manage a club.

The FSF was one of the first clubs to branch out across multiple services. The FSF had started in 1993 on the FIDOnet Bulletin Board System gateway. By 1995, it was running chat sims on AOL, as well as E-mail sims.

STS had developed into a full-fledged club by 1995; and in the process created its own triumvirate. In public, Trekker was the head of Starfleet Operations. He and TrekGuru approved sim plots, issued orders to ships, and maintained controls over people's characters - all to ensure a cannon recreation of Star Trek. However, behind the scenes, NFO was the real power. He wrote the rulebook, was in charge of placing personnel, and made many executive and administrative decisions. Thus a balance was struck between in character and out of character control.

The United Space Federation (USF), approached power in a different fashion. Andy, the head of the USF, saw himself as the Chief of Starfleet Operations, and this is a very important point. He was concerned with the content of the sims to ensure accuracy, and as the Chief of Starfleet, he would issue orders to ships to direct their sims. Furthermore, as the leader of simmers who pretended to be in the military, he expected everyone to follow his orders - both in character and out of character - without question.

According to interviews with people who simmed in the USF, while Andy was a very energetic and capable leader who was dedicated to his club, he did have his flaws, and his military mindset and desire for control caused resentment. Luckily for the USF, one of their captains, Brandon Connery, understood that just because people in the sims were pretending to be in the Federation military, it did not mean that out of character they would respond to military style leadership. Had it not been for his realization, and his diplomatic temperament, the USF could have descended into civil war. But, with both Andy and Brandon, USF was able to grow into a large club with around two dozen sims.

The extent of managerial experimentation during this era is highlighted by another major club of the era, the Alliance Simulation Group (ASG), which took an approach that was



completely opposite to the USF. Instead of rejecting bureaucracy in favor of personal control, the ASG embraced bureaucracy as the way to hold a club together. During its heyday, the organization of the ASG was so complex that to understand it, one needed to hold a degree in political science or business management. To some extent, it worked. For years the ASG was a stable and cohesive group, and despite its bureaucracy, it grew into a large club.

The ASG was more than just a simple sim club - it was a sim group. Sim groups are in essence a collection of several sim clubs cobbled together under one organization, and the ASG is the finest example of this era's ideal of "bigger is better." The ASG had separate Star Trek, Star Wars, Babylon 5 and Sea Quest divisions - each a club in its own right.

Outside of the ASG, a handful of non Star Trek sims found their footing during 1995 and 1996 on AOL - but they were few and far between. Throughout the entirety of the 1990s, and well into the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it was fairly obvious that Star Trek sims were the dominate genre of simming - perhaps 2/3 or more of all sims were Trek in nature. As time went on, the proportion of non-Trek sims increased - partly because Star Trek decreased in popularity and new shows gained, and partly because the increasing number of people online allowed non Trek games to be supported.<sup>29</sup> Yet, as mentioned previously, non-Trek sims never experienced the population pressures as their Trek counterparts during this period. A non-Trek sim typically consisted of a small core of people, all of whom simmed together in the same place at the same time. There often was no separate sims, no hierarchy of a club, to speak of.

Despite the managerial experimentation, culturally, the period of 1995 and into 1996 saw no great transformation. Due to the economics of the day, simmers were still largely confined to one club, one sim. People though, were bubbling with ideas.

#### **Chapter 4: STECO and the Lost Generation**

*"Please don't call me Cindy." - Julie, July, 1996. Inside joke from STECO.*

The story of the Star Trek Entertainment Club Online (STECO) demonstrates how quickly a sim club can expand when simming is new and there is no competition to get in the way. Such a situation probably explains why all of the early online services were dominated by one club. If you began early enough with a good set up, you were free to expand because there was little competition.

The story of STECO also demonstrates what not to do when running a sim club.

After my experiences with SFOL, I left AOL for Prodigy, which even as early as 1995, or thereabouts, was offering its members 20 hours of online time a month. Well, actually, Prodigy offered a choice. You could either receive 5 hours of chat and unlimited usage of its

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<sup>29</sup> The public perception that most early computer people were Star Trek fans is grounded in a degree of truth.

E-mail and bulletin boards, etc, or you could receive 20 hours of online time a month for chatting, bulletin boards, E-mail, etc - but all you got was 20 hours. Since Prodigy was a service dominated by bulletin boards and since chat on Prodigy was new, most people opted for the 5 hours of chat with unlimited bulletin board usage. I, however, liked chat, so I took the 20 hours and used most of that time chatting.

Despite my first reaction to simming, I managed to get involved with a developing free for all chat simming environment on Prodigy, and I quickly fell in love with it. Due to pressure from America Online, Prodigy began to offer chat rooms in 1994. By the time I discovered the chat rooms on Prodigy a few months later, chat simming was still quite raw, with almost no organization to speak of. It is how I imagine the primordial chat simming community on AOL and elsewhere to have been just a few short years earlier. Yet, the unorganized sims on Prodigy were the most fun and creative experience I ever had in simming. Everyone seemed to have had a role-playing background, so everyone knew what to do. As a result, everyone followed a set of unwritten rules that caused the sims to flow naturally among complete strangers. Since then, I have always felt that what I experienced on Prodigy is what simming should be. It should be fun, entertaining, creative and imaginative, but tempered by an unwritten dedication to professionalism.

The sim would normally go on for a few hours, usually as a fleet action. People would join and leave at random intervals, and eventually, after many hours of fun, it would fizzle out and everyone would go their separate ways. With most people limited to only 5 hours of chat time a month on Prodigy, a person had to wait a month, letting their head dream up ideas for the next sim.

Despite my SFOL setback, I probably was inclined to become a simmer. After all, when I was little I organized my friends at recess; we would take over a piece of equipment on the playground - usually the jungle gym - and pretend it was a starship. I, of course, played the dashing captain. Later, in junior high, we became more serious, designing our own uniforms and props, taking over an abandoned toolshed and turning it into a bridge, and tromping through the woods on away mission.

For me, my simming career slowly took shape during 1995 and 1996, and believe it or not, at the time I was not exactly a crazed simmer. I would just sign on for a few hours each month and happily sim away. However, in May of 1996, two things conspired to change all of that.

First, I established my own collection of simming friends. During the course of all of those random sims I had developed my own ship, the USS Orion, and several of my simming friends had developed their own ships. It only became natural that we would try to gather together once or twice a month for a few hours and sim. We eventually had a nice continuing story line going where we were battling Romulan renegades.

Second, I was recruited into a new club on Prodigy, STECO. Even though chat simming by this point had been around on Prodigy for over a year, it had not developed much beyond the random, primordial stage. In a world where no one had yet figured out how to run a sim club, it's understandable that it took a few years for chat-based clubs to take shape on AOL. Yet

on Prodigy, the leap should conceivably have occurred sooner. The fact it didn't is most likely because Prodigy was dominated by bulletin board based clubs. No one gave any serious thought to organizing a chat-based club on Prodigy because chat, on Prodigy, was seen as being a sub standard form of simming. Thus, STECO was one of the first, if not the first, Star Trek chat club to develop on Prodigy.

Unfortunately, the club had a slight problem from the get go. To sign on to Prodigy the clubs president, Admiral Rick, had to dial a long distance number. As such he could not spend too much time online. Why someone would try to run a sim club when they clearly knew they did not have the time to be able to run it is beyond me.

To make matters worse, Admiral Rick was a control freak. Even though he knew he could not be online, he refused to delegate responsibility to others. He would not even let anyone else command a sim in his club. STECO held 3 sims on 3 different nights, and each one was commanded by Admiral Rick. Yet, due to long distance bills, each sim was only a half an hour long. However, Rick had a 'brilliant' idea to get around this half an hour sim problem by requiring everyone to show up to all 3 sims. A member of STECO was expected to sim every Wednesday, Thursday and Friday night for a half an hour.

Although doomed, STECO was revolutionary in its own right and represented the lost generation ideal of community in the fact that STECO was designed around the club and was not broken down into ships. Everyone was supposed to sim together and show up to sim every night. In all other clubs of the day you were assigned to one ship and that was it. If your ship simmed Wednesday, you did not know anything about the sim on Tuesday. Even though Rick required people to sim together on different nights because the sims were only half an hour, that does not diminish how radical the concept was. Perhaps for the first time in Star Trek simming since the sim club was pioneered by STF and SFOL, STECO under Admiral Rick presented the club as a whole, not just as a collection of sim ships with an organization over it to keep those ships together.

Somehow, despite the obvious problems inherent in the system, STECO actually managed to thrive. Admiral Rick ran a good sim and STECO was the only game in town. By July STECO had about 40 members.

Most of the time I did not attend all three of the sims, and neither did anyone else. Yet, this did not matter. There were enough people in the club to provide each night with its own crew. Most people would just show up to one or two of the weekly sims, and everyone would keep everyone else informed about what went on at the sims they missed. After all, the sim was only half an hour, so a person never missed all that much.

I gained distinction in the club because I ran a Star Trek trivia session for STECO on Tuesday nights. At one point in time Admiral Rick had ran the trivia for half an hour, but I was able to convince him of the wisdom of saving his money and letting someone else, like me, run it. The trivia was popular and many people were recruited into STECO after they attended one of my trivia sessions.

Maybe if Admiral Rick had let others command their own ship and allowed each night to have its own crew, maybe if Admiral Rick had written logs and newsletters to keep everyone in the club up to date about what was going on, STECO could have grown into something great. However, that was not the case. In fact, starting in July, Admiral Rick set STECO on a course towards its destruction, for in July Rick was becoming concerned over the fact that people were not attending all of the sims as required, and that because of it people were becoming lost and confused when they did attend. I suggested that Rick should write logs to keep everyone informed, but instead Rick decided to crack down, and he attempted to enforce his unenforceable rule about attendance. He also began to take more and more control in the sims in order to ensure his vision proceeded smoothly.

The sims in STECO were complex because they were set in the 25th century, where the Federation had been destroyed by the Romulans. The one Federation ship we all simmed on, the USS Roddenberry C, had escaped to fight with the resistance on Bajor. I and others worked to keep everyone on the same page by explaining the sim background to all who joined the club, and everyone worked to keep each other up to date about what happened in the previous sims. But as the months went on, and the story line became more complex, this task became ever more difficult.

At the time, the 25th century story line seemed to present the possibilities for great simming, and it would have made a good movie or show. However, as I learned with the Roddenberry, and with countless other sims in and outside of Trek Online, sims set in future or alternative universes just do not work out very well unless you have the right captain and crew. It is hard to recruit for these sims, it is hard to educate the crew, it is hard to keep the crew on the same page, and it is hard to keep the sim going because such specific plots either run out of steam or become too complex to sim. The universal rule in simming is anything that would make a good book, show or movie won't make a good sim. A good sim needs to be organic, random, and as general as possible.

I think in July that Admiral Rick began to realize all of the problems inherent in running a complex sim. To try to solve them, Admiral Rick made the disastrous decision to force people to attend all three sims, and when that failed, he made things even worse by taking almost total control over the sim. He began to assign everyone's sim character. He scripted out the entire night's sim before hand and ended up IMing everyone telling them what to say and do. The sims effectively become a script reading.

Under Rick's new program Julie, one of my simming friends, was assigned a character named Cathy. She hated the name and would always snap back at Rick with the quote given at the beginning of the chapter. The name Cathy became an inside joke in STECO, and testimony to the fact that things were beginning to fall apart. The sims quickly went from being fun to boring. People began to quit STECO left and right. As more people left, Rick cracked down with more rules and requirements, which just made the sims that much more worse.

Perhaps as a way to keep me from quitting, on August 8th or there about, Admiral Rick made me the Vice President of STECO. He also promoted Julie and made her the second Vice President. By that time we were pretty much the only competent people left in the club.

Rick also promoted one of his friends, who I had only seen at one sim, as the third Vice President. The orders he gave all of us were clear. As the Vice Presidents, if Rick did not show up on a particular night to sim, we were to cancel the sim for the night and take no further action. Shortly thereafter, Rick stopped showing up to the sims, but it didn't matter since no one else was showing up. The only reason I stayed around was because of the trivia session I was running, which, despite the collapse of STECO's sims, was still going strong.

At first I did not want to attempt to save the sims. They were Rick's territory. After all, he was the one who invented the story line for the Roddenberry C. However, I did try to recruit some new people into STECO for the sims, and I convinced a few of the old members to stay on for another week or two in case Rick saw the light, changed his mind and returned to the old way of simming; or just bothered to return and sign online at all.

However, he never signed back on, and during the end of August, I left for a vacation. While I was away I occasionally thought about STECO, and I decided that when I returned I would confront Rick. To make my confrontation more productive, I decided that I would present Rick with some of my ideas on how to save the club. Under my plan I would take one of the three weekly sim slots and turn it into a classic Trek sim for STECO on a Constitution class ship called the USS Patton. Julie would take another night and run her own sim. Rick would have the third night and would continue to run the Roddenberry. Since I did not want Rick destroying my sim by imposing a lot of dumb rules, under my plan each captain would be responsible for their own ship, running the sim and managing the crew. However, captains could not dictate people's characters since this fact had turned into a major point of conflict in STECO. Also, in the tradition of the free for all simming environment on Prodigy, and in keeping with the early days of STECO, the sims would not be scripted. They would be kept as free and organic as possible. The crew would sim together, add their little bit to the sim, read off of what each other was doing, and a sim would naturally occur. Rick would continue on as the president of the club, but his exact role and powers were left up in the air.

To help orient new members into STECO, the club and each ship would have its own guidebook which would be E-mailed out to a person when they joined. Additionally, each captain would send out a weekly log to update their crew on what happened in the last sim. The plan was simple, but it represented the growing ideals of the lost generation of simming and eventually the core principles of TOL. I wanted the club to be a community. I wanted people to be connected to their club.

With 20 hours of online time, simmers like myself could spend more time simming, more time exploring and experimenting. I had caught a glimpse of simming in SFOL on AOL, where power flowed from the top down. I had seen that begin to form in Admiral Rick's ideas for simming. But I had also seen a different path in the free for all primordial sims on Prodigy, and that was the path I wanted to take.

My plan for STECO also represented the new economic reality. Simmers and leaders could spend more time online, so under my plan there was just to be captains and the president.

While it was not specified in my plan, captains were expected to get to know each other and work together to improve the club. Power over the sim was to be placed in the hands of the captains (the people who actually ran the sims) and not the president or a bureaucracy which just sat back and gave orders.

Communication was also an ideal of the lost generation. If a club in earlier years had bothered to publish a newsletter, it often was a weekly update that contained everyone's logs. That is essentially all that was contained in the SFOL newsletter. Club news, club wide announcements and declarations of club wide goals were not published. But all of these would be published in a lost generation club newsletter in order to promote a common club community. To help further communication, there would be guidebooks and logs that gave people information so that they could get involved in the club and sim. I figured, if simming is just words on the screen, the more words on a screen one can provide to help people understand the sim and the club, the better.

The plan I came up with reveals what I had learned from watching SFOL, STECO and other clubs. In developing my plan for STECO I developed an underlying pragmatic belief, one which I still hold to this day. I determined that the key to a successful sim club is an attention to details and communication.

Having an elaborate sim story line does not work. Rick had one which probably would have made a great movie, but it did not translate well into sim. In the long run it caused more confusion and problems than good.

Having lots of rules concerning the in character aspect does not work, it just stifles creativity and drives people away. Having rules or a constitution on the out of character aspects concerning how to run the club, however, can be very helpful in keeping the club united, distributing power, solving crises, and preventing civil wars.

Having a really fancy website is not the key to a club. Simming thrived long before there were websites. Yet, websites are very important tools and can be very helpful when it comes to recruiting, communication and organization of your club. But people too often forget that a website is just a tool and view it as the end all solution to all problems.

However, if you worry about mundane details such as logs, making sure a sim starts and ends on time, making sure every sim has a good captain, organizing an efficient system which promotes communication and interaction within the club, making sure there is a balance in your club between rules and creativity, between free for all sims and professionalism, the big picture will take care of itself. I have watched too many great people with great ideas and potential fail time and time again because they think some grand policy, some grand merger, some grand website is what is needed. No matter how much I say it, people do not want to accept the fact that the key is attention to detail. It is the job of the president or captain to worry about detail, to take care of the boring, mundane tasks. That is what is needed to be successful. It is these little details that bring reality to the simming world.



When I returned from vacation on August 31, 1996, I signed onto Prodigy and found several E-mails in my box. While I was away there apparently had been some kind of fight with Rick - Julie and the others who had stayed in STECO became so fed up that they left the club. In response, Admiral Rick sent an E-mail out to as many people as he could saying, in effect, that this was not happening, that the club was not dead, and all was fine. Now, as a distraction, just answer this trivia question and I'll E-mail you a picture of the Enterprise E. (Which, considering that it was before the movie First Contact came out, was a pretty good prize.)

With those emails and Rick's response, I saw no point in trying to save STECO. I E-mailed my resignation to Rick and saw that Julie was online. I IMed her and told her that I too had quit STECO. Then, out of the blue, I told her, "I am going to start my own sim club." I had never planned to start up my own sim club, I had never given it any thought, but with STECO now dead and plans swirling around in my head, I decided right there, at the spur of the moment, to try to run my own. Julie replied immediately and said "I'll be your first member and Vice President." "No," I said, "I was thinking more along the lines of Co-President."

After having witnessed STECO, a club I truly cared for and put a lot of time and energy into bleed to death and die right before me within one short month, I was determined that my new club would be successful. I had not planned to create TOL, but now that the idea was out, I would not let it fail. If for no other reason, the failure of STECO gave me the drive to keep TOL going despite all of the overwhelming challenges it was to face.

## **Chapter 5: Meanwhile, on AOL**

*"I'm not sure if Curoc or PJPerry ( I don't know which screen name he was under at the time) sent you this information. If he did i'm sorry to bug you again." - Chip Rollins, August 19, 1996. From an E-mail asking me to join his club.*

During the summer of 1996, AOL switched its billing policies and began to offer its members 20 hours of online time a month. Members of AOL also received a further bonus. A lawsuit had exposed the fact that for years AOL had been rounding up the amount of time people spent online, thus charging members for more time than they actually spent online. To settle the case, AOL gave all of its members several hours of extra online time.

As a result of this billing change, I returned to AOL in the summer of 1996. Realizing that STECO was beginning to fall apart, and seeing how there were no other Star Trek chat clubs on Prodigy (and not yet thinking I would run my own club on Prodigy), in July of 1996 I began to look around AOL for a sim club to join.

Well, looking is too strong of a word. Looking around means I was engaged in an active quest to find a club, which was not the case. There were plenty of recruiters milling around AOL, even though recruiting for anyone other than SFOL could get your account suspended or terminated. The recruiters made their cases to me and I listened. During the end of July, while I was sitting in the Bridge chat room, the Star Trek chat room on AOL, a recruiter approached me from the Star Trek Sims (STS) club. He sent me some info about the club

and I was impressed. After a few days of E-mail discussions - me asking questions and they quickly replying with detailed, clear answers - I decided to join the club.

What impressed me about STS is that they were totally unlike SFOL in their approach to recruiting. Also, unlike SFOL, which just rushed me into a sim without telling me what was going on, STS sent me to an academy to teach me their simming ways and rules. Additionally, they sent me a detailed guidebook that outlined their club. They also maintained an information library about their ships and personal. Everyone was friendly and took their time to answer my questions, and the club was well organized and efficiently ran.

Like other early clubs, STS viewed itself to be Starfleet. The club's bureaucracy and sims was organized like the military. Admiral Trekker was the head of Starfleet Command, not the president of STS. Instead of issuing public orders about how the club should be ran, he would issue directives about warp drive, contact with alien races, and so forth. Nevertheless, things were laid back and in most cases captains didn't let rank go to their head.

At the same time I was joining STS, some others were beginning to take advantage of their additional online time and the growing spirit of the lost generation to reform simming.

During the late spring of 1996, a person, whose name has been lost to history, became so fed up with SFOL's treatment of private sim clubs and of the treatment he and others received at the hands of the Star Trek forum, that he began a protest to attempt to reform those entities. He managed to get several hundred people to sign an E-mail petition before suddenly vanishing. Perhaps the person got fed up that they decided to leave AOL, perhaps AOL terminated their account for causing controversy.

At this point all could have been lost had it not been for a person named Ben, who at the critical moment stepped forward and assumed leadership of the protest movement. At this time he and his friends, Dan and Uridien, decided it would be better to forgo reforms and instead decided to lobby AOL to create a brand new forum for Star Trek and simming. To, in effect, make a new SFOL. Ben and the others were familiar with the stories of how SFOL received its own forum from AOL in 1994. They were inspired by it and honestly believed they could get their own forum if they tried hard enough and presented a better simming model to AOL.

In the middle of August, Ben and his group began to put together a sim club. One night they encountered Chip Rollins, computer engineer from Louisiana and a simmer in the Alliance Simulation Group (ASG). Chip offered to help with the forum and protest in any way he could. The group (Ben, Dan, and Uridien) were so impressed with Chip that they immediately offered him command of their new sim club, which possessed one of several ungodly names - United Federation of Planets/Star Trek Forum Simulation Group, the United Federation of Planets/Star Trek Forum, or the United Federation of Planets/Starfleet (UFP/SF). (It was never resolved which name was the official one, and we always just used the abbreviation.) In any event Chip accepted command. Since Ben and his group would be busy running the overall forum, they gave Chip complete power over the sim club.

My entrance into this story was brought about by a completely random set of events that clearly had to be the work of fate.

While attending the STS academy, my classmate was one M. L. Moses. We started talking and hit it off right away. I always felt that the name Moses was appropriate since he lead me to the promised land of the UFP/SF. (Forgive me for being overly dramatic.)

On August 19, 1996 (Gene Roddenberry's Birthday), and a few days after we had met at the STS Academy, Moses went to the Bridge chat room on AOL and there he ran into Chip, who was busy recruiting for the UFP/SF. Moses was interested and he signed up for the club, and he also gave my name to Chip and said that I may also be interested in joining. Later that night Chip sent me an extensive E-mail that outlined the new club and his ship, the USS Generation. The E-mail packet also included an application for the positions of Chief Engineer and First Officer onboard the *Generation*.

I figured STS was a nice club, but I was starting out as a cadet and it would take me forever to advance up the ranks. If Moses thought this new club was a good idea, and since STECO was falling apart, I decided to apply for First Officer onboard the *Generation* and see what happened. Maybe I would get lucky and land the rank of commander and position of XO.

Sure, it seems a little hypocritical that I complain about how simmers now a days move from club to club to see which one gives them the best deal, but the difference is I had earned my rank in STECO, I was dedicated to working my way up the ranks in STS (it was not until 2000 that I became a Commander in STS), and I figured this way I would be able to keep my STECO rank in a new club if the club died (keep in mind this was a few weeks before STECO actually died, but it was pretty clear that its days were numbered). Plus, I always worked to promote rank exchange programs among clubs to allow experience in other clubs to translate into a higher starting rank in TOL.

When I sent in the application I explained my situation in STECO, how I was a Lt. Commander and a Vice President, and how I was also starting out in STS. I stated that I felt I was qualified for the position and that it would be nice if my rank and experience from STECO could transfer over to the UFP/SF. However, after a few days I began to have second thoughts about Chip and the UFP/SF. In fact, I was overwhelmed with a sense of impending doom - a sense that would stay with me well into 1997.

Having applied to be the First Officer on the USS *Generation*, I was added to Chip's E-mail string and received several E-mails about the club and forum. I soon began to realize that Chip was in way over his head. He was only a Lieutenant in the Alliance Simulation Group and he had no idea how to command a ship or run a club. Don't get me wrong, Chip was a really nice and friendly person and he eventually grew to become a great captain, but at the time he had no idea what he was getting into. Why Ben and company picked him to become the president of the sim club is beyond me. Surly they could have found a better qualified candidate. But maybe, as we will see, they felt that they could control Chip, and that is why they picked him.

Not only did I realize that Chip was in over his head, I also realized that the ship and club was completely unorganized, and I did not like one bit the talk of protest and trying to get AOL to give us a forum. I suspected that AOL would never give us a forum, so why were we even trying and making a ton of enemies in SFOL, at the Star Trek forum, and AOL in the process? Plus, I had heard stories about AOLs take over of SFOL and how SFOL was sued by Paramount for using the name Starfleet. I personally wanted to stay away from all of the potential legal pitfalls involved with having a forum. But what bugged me the most was the fact that over the course of the week Chip kept on setting deadlines in which he said he would announce his decision about who would become the First Officer and when the Generation would start to sim, only to constantly postpone and push back his decision and the sim launch date.

On August 21st Chip sent an E-mail informing all of the first officer candidates that, due to the forum, all of us would be promoted to captain and we would be allowed to run our own version of the Generation sim once a week. Basically, one night someone would command the Generation. The next night someone else would pick up the story and command it, etc. It sounded too much like the situation in STECO for my liking. Plus there were more days than there were captains, so our schedules would rotate. One week a person would command on Monday, and again on Sunday, and again on Saturday, etc.

This idea of Chip's, however, is interesting, since it shows how similar economic and cultural trends randomly appear in the simming world in places that have no contact with each other. When Rick began experimenting with lost generation ideas on STECO, he ran the same ship every night so that everyone in the club could sim together. When Chip wanted to make a new ship and club, he called for running the same ship every night. Basically, people jumped to the other extreme. Want a club wide community? Let's have everyone sim together every night.

Before I could reply to Chip's multiple command proposal, a thunderstorm hit and the power went out. I remember pacing around in the dark wondering what I should do? Should I accept the offer of being a captain? No, I could not, there was no way my schedule would allow me to take part in the rotating command system. Should I turn down the command offer but still say I wanted to be considered for First Officer? I wasn't sure about that either because I had a really bad feeling about the entire situation with the club and forum. I wanted to quit. I had a bad feeling about the club, but I also felt like I belonged there.

Nevertheless, when the power came back on I replied to Chip and said that I was sorry, but that I could not be a captain since my schedule did not allow me to take part in the rotating command, and further, I no longer wanted to be considered as a First Officer candidate. Chip accepted my refusal to be a captain, but he talked me into staying in the running for first officer. He already had big plans for me and didn't want to lose me.

Shortly there after I left for vacation. While I was away, events that would dramatically effect my future were unfolding on AOL as well as Prodigy. To this day I still wonder in amazement at the completely random chain of events with Moses, STECO, and everything else that brought about TOL. Too many things happened to make it seem to be more than

just a simple accident. Had I been a few minutes late and missed Rick that day he recruited for STECO. Had I not joined STS. Had Moses not joined or been assigned to my academy slot. Had Moses not ran into Chip or had not passed my name along to Chip, none of this would ever have come about. But it did occur, and as a result the lost generation of simming produced a very wonderful and unique club - Trek Online.

In some ways the lost generation was a brand new way to look at simming, a revolutionary attempt to reform the sim club model. In other ways, however, it was the last flowering of the primordial generation of simming. In 1995 and 1996, that primordial generation was still alive and well in the chats on Prodigy, and it gave direct rise to STECO and TOL. It was as if simming had one last chance to start over, to create a new paradigm around a different set of ideals.

# My Simming Memoirs

## Part 2: Dreams



USS Vindicator Senior Staff, by Josh Riker, 1996

Left to right: Commander M. L. Moses; Captain Chas Hammer; Ensign Kyrin Troi; Lt. Commander Josh Riker; Lt. Commander Alx

### Chapter 6: My Ship and My Dream

*"Ahhhhh I would like to join." - Cadet Alx, September 7, 1996, asking to join the Vindicator.*

During the second half of 1996, the dreams that would drive Trek Online for most of its history were first articulated and set into motion. These dreams would lie at the very heart of the club, and we would struggle for years to make them into a reality.

August 31, 1996, proved to be a very important day in my life. After deciding to start up my own sim club on Prodigy, I signed onto AOL to see what had transpired there while I was on vacation. Amazingly, my E-mail box did not contain any letters from Chip. He had actually listened to my request not to send me any E-mails while I was away. Today, that really is not much of an issue. People often check their E-mail while they are away on vacation, or simply read all of it when they return. However, in those days, it was a courtesy to stop sending E-mails when you knew the person was going to be away for a few days.



Of course, the lack of E-mail may have been because Chip decided he wanted to tell me what he had planned for me in person, for shortly after I signed online, Chip IMed me and invited me into a private chat room. There Chip introduced me to CmdrCurok and informed me that he had selected Curok to be the First Officer of the Generation. To say the least, I was relieved. Now I could take my leave of the entire mess that was the UFP/SF, the forum protest, and the Generation to focus on my club on Prodigy.

However, my monumental day was not yet finished. Immediately after informing me about his first officer decision, Chip told me, "Chas, I want you to be my Vice President and I will let you have your own ship." Needless to say, I must have submitted a pretty good application. In fact, as I later found out, I possessed far more simming and command experience than Chip, which really isn't saying much for either of us. Of course, I did not know that at the time, but I did have a feeling that Chip was in over his head and didn't know the first thing about how to organize a sim or run a club. I was impressed by the info packet he had sent me on August 19, but as I would later discover, he had just sent me a revised copy of the ASG info packet where ASG was changed to UFP/SF. Clearly, when Chip found out about my experience as the Vice President of STECO, he decided he wanted to keep me around to help him with the club. That is probably why when I withdrew my application on August 21st Chip worked to talk me into staying.

Now, one would think that if I was having doubts about being a First Officer, I would have turned down being the Vice President. However, as we all know, I of course accepted Chip's offer to become his Vice President and command a sim in the UFP/SF. After all, it is not every day when you are made that kind of an offer. I quickly decided that, despite my strong reservations and concerns about the UFP/SF, the mess that was the club was now my mess, and I would do everything I could to fix it up and get it running. I would simply take the plans that I had developed for STECO and apply them to both the UFP/SF and to my new club on Prodigy. I further figured that since the UFP/SF already had a number of people in it, milling around and waiting to sim, I would take a few months and focus on getting the club up and running, step back, and allow Chip to manage it after I had set up the initial club machinery. With that, I would turn to Prodigy, start up, and run my own club there.

It was presumptuous, of course, but it was pretty easy for me to tell that Chip would appreciate help, and I have always exuded self-confidence, so I figured I would be up to the task. I really did not know how to organize a sim or ship, but I just thought through everything that needed to be done, remade my STECO for AOL, and got to work.

All in all, I possessed a very simple dream, but my timetable would turn out to be completely wrong, and my sense of impending doom would soon prove to be all so true. But, on August 31, and during the first few days of September of 1996, I was upbeat and brushed aside all fears and reservations.

I quickly took the E-mail that Chip had sent me on August 19th, combined it with my ideas about how to sim and organize a club, and wrote a comprehensive guidebook for the UFP/SF in order to provide all club members with data on where to sim, how to sim, how the club was

to be organized and governed, what the basic rules and legal procedures would be, how to contact and petition the leaders of the club, and so forth. Chip was quite pleased with my work and immediately approved its use as the clubs guidebook.

A guidebook really is one of the most effective ways to organize a club and keep everyone on the same page. It ensures that people sim the same way, follow the same rules, know what the club has to offer and know how the club operates. It provides a foundation of reality for the club.

In 1996, the guidebook had the immediate effect of organizing the protesters who expressed an interest in simming and focused their thoughts onto the new club and provided them with a document of what their new club was going to look like. And this club was going to be a radically new club, based on the principles of the lost generation. The sims would be for fun. Captains would be in charge of their ship and report directly to the president. And most radical of all, people could attend other sims in the club. It is hard to imagine today, but that is how rigid simming was. When AOL allowed people to spend more time online, many clubs simply forbade people from joining other sims within the club, and from joining other clubs.

At the time, Chip commented that he was impressed I worked so fast. The truth is I had things somewhat planned out for STECO, so it was just a matter of writing them down for the UFP/SF, and that did not involve much major work on my part. Years later, Chip stated if it had not been for my efforts during the first few days in September of 1996, the club would never have been born. I feel that the club guidebook was a key component of my success. For as long as I was the President of Trek Online, I would constantly update the guidebook. My belief in its power as the basic component in helping to organize a sim club has never wavered.

I really do not know why I was so timid with Rick in STECO and why I was so bold in asserting my ideas with Chip. Maybe part of it had to do with the fact that after watching STECO die I was not going to let the UFP/SF die before it even got started. Maybe it was because at one point in time, Rick proved himself to be a capable leader and simmer and I was just waiting for that to return, where as I could tell that Chip needed help. Or most likely, I felt comfortable with Chip. Since day one we got along and we would quickly become friends, where as with Rick it was a very cut and dry business relationship.

At the same time I was working on the club guidebook, I also began to construct my ship. After all, it was Labor Day weekend, so I had a few days off that I could use to work on the club. Chip had suggested that my ship should be named the USS Mariner, which was the name he was going to use for the Generation before he thought up the name Generation. However, I had another name in mind, a name that I had been storing in my head for a few months. The name was Vindicator.

The name USS Vindicator name came from Prodigy and my Orion sim. During the free for all sims on Prodigy, I had developed my own refitted Galaxy Class ship called the USS Orion.

Part of the refit allowed the Orion to carry a Defiant Class ship under the belly of its drive section. One of my friends commanded the Defiant Class ship, named the Vengeance.

One day, after the sim where the Vengeance made its first appearance, my friend and I were trying to remember what we called the ship. I remembered it started with a V, so I said, "Is it the Vindicator?" That sparked his memory and he replied, "No it is the Vengeance, but I like that name as well." I also liked the name Vindicator and decided to store it in the back of my head in case I ever needed a name for a new ship.

The NCC number that I picked for the Vindicator, 16052, is derived from my old days of playing Star Trek at recess and after school. The class - Patton Class - was taken directly from my STECO plans to run a ship there called the USS Patton. While I would have liked to run a TOS or movie era sim, which is what I planned to do in STECO, Chip wanted all of the sims in the UFP/SF to be from the DS9/Voyager era of Star Trek, which is what was airing in 1996. As a result, the Vindicator was set in the DS9/Voyager era.

The Patton Class is, of course, a class I made up. On Prodigy, in our random sims, we made up our own ships and classes all the time, but to people on AOL, it was a revolutionary idea. The point of simming at the time was to accurately recreate Star Trek. As a result, SFOL and many other clubs only used classes that had been seen in Star Trek. It simply was not permitted to make up your own.

The Patton Class was a battleship by definition. The Deep Space 9 series had opened up a vast new frontier for the Federation in both the Alpha Quadrant (Bajor, Cardassia, Maquis, etc) and the entire Gamma Quadrant. The Patton Class was designed to explore, patrol and defend those vast regions of space. In addition, the Patton Class incorporated all of Starfleet's most advanced technologies and was designed to fight the Borg. However, I never liked super ships or completely battle oriented sims. To prevent this, I made it so that Patton Class ships possessed a number of weaknesses. The most notable being that the ship was so jammed packed with new technologies that they often were not fully tested. As a result, they were prone to break downs and suffered numerous engineering and software conflicts. In addition, because there were so many things jammed packed onto the ship, there simply was not enough power to run everything at once.

These little quirks make the Vindicator feel more realistic. After all, real life naval ships each have their own unique characteristics, flaws and quirks. It also provided a layer of detail to the sim that could be developed and explored. But overall, the only mission the Vindicator had was to explore, patrol and defend the vast new territories opening up to the Federation, a very simple story line that all could understand and would leave us free to engage in all kinds of simulated adventures.

All of the information about the Vindicator was put into a welcome letter that I sent to everyone who joined the crew. Aside from info about the ship itself, in the letter I also welcomed the person to my crew and thanked them for joining, explained where and when the sim occurred, and provided a little blurb about my simming philosophy, (how I felt we were all here to have fun, to be creative, and to enjoy ourselves). In addition, I started that

our ranks in the sim were imaginary and had no bearing outside of the sim. Simply call me Chas and if you ever have any questions, comments, complaints, etc, to feel free to talk to me.

I also wrote up a character info sheet, which new crewmembers were expected to fill out. I asked everyone who joined the Vindi to make up their own sim character and to write down some basic details about their character - such as name, age, race, sex, physical build, personal history, personality traits, abilities/talents, fears/negative characteristics, etc. While I had developed a strong belief from STECO to allow people to create and develop their own characters, I would try to work with everyone on the Vindi in refining their characters, or in rare cases where they made a Q or God like character which simply was not acceptable, I helped people create a new one. Again, it is all about attention to detail. When you get people thinking about their character, they begin to think about the sim, how their character will act in the sim, and as a result, a simmer develops a much more professional attitude. Also, the development of everyone's character, and the relationships people develop in the sim become the basis for many story lines, and it helps to create a framework that keeps a sim flowing.

With my ship and character info in hand, I E-mailed all of the protesters who were interested in simming, introduced myself, and explained that Chip had authorized me to start a new sim on Thursday nights at 8pm eastern. I provided everyone with the info on the Vindicator, and sent them the character info sheet to fill out if they wished to join. I also asked people to specify which posts they would be interested in. Within a few short days, I had received a number of responses. By about the 10th of September I had a crew in place and we were ready to sim. I had selected Moses to be my first officer, but since he was going to be busy on most Thursdays till December, I decided in the mean time to pick one of my crewmembers each week to serve as the first officer in order to give them some command experience. A few weeks earlier, at the STS academy, I had made an agreement with Moses that someday I would be the First Officer on his ship and he would be the First Officer on mine. Little did we know that our agreement would come into effect only a few weeks later. We figured it would have occurred years in the future, after we both, hopefully, became captains in STS.

With everything coming together, I soon announced to the public that the Vindicator would begin to sim on Thursday, September 19, 1996, at 8pm eastern. One month after being recruited by the UFP/SF, I had risen to the rank of Captain and Vice President, had organized my own sim, and helped to get the club onto its feet. Very impressive if you ask me!

As a result of my competition, Chip got his act together and organized a crew for the Generation. Although he did not write up any thing about the Generation that was as extensive as what I had put together for the Vindicator, the little info packet/welcome letter for the Generation that he did write, which stated, among other things, that the Generation was an Intrepid Class, did help to generate interest in the sim, and this allowed Chip to recruit and organize a crew out of the pool of protesters. He also used the character info sheet I made up for the Vindi crew, which also helped him in his quest to put

together his sim. (The Generation as an Intrepid Class was not to last, however. In fact, the Generation's seemingly constantly switching of its class without any major refit or destruction of the old ship caused the Generation to become the subject of many TOL puns - but also a reflection of the freedom enjoyed within Trek Online.)

The Generation held its first sim on Friday, September 13, 1996. Given all of the bad luck that was to plague the club in the coming months, it probably would have been best had we not tempted fate and held our first sim on Friday the 13th. Regardless, the first Generation sim was fun for everyone who attended and the UFP/SF was finally up and simming.

## **Chapter 7: Ben's Nightmare**

*"I am the sim director for the new Star Trek Universe Forum. That isn't going so well. Basically we got rejected." - Chip in an E-mail to Chas, August 24, 1996, explaining the situation with the forum.*

Ben's dream was to create a new Star Trek and simming forum on AOL. As soon as I heard of the idea I thought it was complete lunacy and it would never happen, but many - including Ben - fueled by the growing reform spirit of the lost generation, were absolutely convinced that they could change AOL, and, like SFOL, get a forum of their own. The only problem was that AOL was rapidly changing into a mature business. It was no longer the rough and tumble pioneering days where anyone with a good idea and the right connections had a shot at a forum.

In mid August, Ben and his team, including Uridien and Dan, made Chip the sim director of the proposed forum. Since they were going to be too busy running the entire forum, Chip was to have complete control over the sim operations. However, a week or so later, AOL officially rejected Ben's idea for the forum and his dream started to turn into a nightmare. Chip was informed, and he spread word so that all of the protesters could bombard AOL with complaints about the rejection.

This entire episode with the forum, Ben and Chip, probably deserves to go down in the annals of simming history as one of the strangest ways that a sim club ever came into being. I do not know of any other sim club that began as the result of a protest against a major corporation, and where the leaders of the protest informed one of the protesters to put together a sim club on the side because it may give the protesters a better chance of being heard. But this strange episode was not to end there.

For all practical purposes, when AOL rejected Ben and his forum on August 24, the protest began to fall apart. Thanks to extremely good timing on Chip's and my part, we were able to recruit about 30 or so of the hundred plus protesters into our sim club before the protest completely evaporated.

After August 24, a few protesters did E-mail complaints to AOL. Ben and his team attempted to make some last ditch appeals to AOL, but it was all in vain. In reality it was Uridien, not Ben, who had been communicating with AOL, and he actually managed to present

his ideas to some very high AOL gaming officials before it was officially rejected. However, as a result of all of the time he had spent online in August talking with AOL, he had spent way more than his allotted 20 online hours and probably racked up a several hundred dollar bill from AOL for the month of August. As a result, when the forum was rejected, Uridien decided to cancel AOL, probably sometime around the end of August or the beginning of September.

When Uridien left AOL, something very amazing happened. Ben began to go around telling everyone that, miraculously, he (Ben) had contacted AOL, that the last ditch protest after August 24 had worked, that AOL had given him a forum, and that it was currently under construction. With Uridien gone, no one could confirm or deny what Ben was saying since apparently only Ben and Uridien had the names of the AOL officials to contact. Yet, at the time, being the skeptic that I am, after I had the club and my sim in order, I decided to investigate.

During the weekend prior to my sim, on September 14th and 15th, I finally met Ben and held two meetings with him and his so called forum staff. Being new to AOL (my short time on AOL in 1994 aside), I had a ton of questions and probably came across as an idiot. However, I was curious enough to have already been exposed to the gossip and stories about the now legendary break up of SFOL, and Paramount's supposed legal challenges to the name Starfleet. So I asked Ben about this history and any possible legal problems we would have. Quite naturally, I just wanted to sim and didn't want to have to worry about lawyers. Unfortunately, the chat turned into a huge argument and Ben constantly avoided all of my questions, did not provide any clear answers and just smiled and told me to trust him. Of course, this was due to the fact that Ben was lying about the forum having been accepted. His lies had convinced Chip and the forum staff, but I left the chat suspicious and convinced that Ben was lying. Ben probably left the chat feeling that I was on to him, that he had to get rid of me in order to protect his lie, and that I was an idiot so it would be easy to get rid of me.

Ben immediately sprang into action. He contacted Chip, and to this day I have no idea what Ben told Chip, but it was enough to convince Chip that it was a bad idea to have me in the club.

It was September 19, and the Vindicator was ready to sim at 8pm eastern. However, to borrow a quote from the Hitch Hikers Guide to the Universe by Douglas Adams, "things got rather muddled, but that isn't to say some very muddling things weren't happening." When I signed on early that evening, probably around 5pm, Ben began to IM me and told me that Chip didn't think very highly of all I had been doing for the club, that I was acting like a child and that he was going to stop my sim. Then, almost as if on que, Chip E-mailed me and ordered me not to hold my sim that night.

Well, to say the least, I was pretty ticked off, and after all I had done for the club. Plus, my ship was all ready to go, my crew wanted to sim, and I promised them that we would begin to sim on the 19th. Unlike Chip, I would stick to my announced deadlines. I was not going to postpone the sim and push it back to a future date, like Chip had done on several

occasions with the Generation. At the same time, my sense of impending doom returned with a vengeance and I wanted to get out of a club where its leader would treat me so badly after all I had done to help him, so I did not care if I was fired for what I was going to do next.

I prepared two E-mails. In the first one I stated as nicely as I could, despite my rage, that I had heard from someone (I did not mention Ben's name because I did not want to get him in trouble for speaking up, at the time I thought he was trying to help me, I did not know he was behind the whole thing) that you (Chip) did not think very highly of me despite everything I had done, and that because my sim was ready, I was going to ignore your order and sim. In the second E-mail I very angrily and bluntly wrote that despite everything I had done for the club in a few short days (and I listed everything I did and blasted Chip for being incompetent and not doing his job), you (Chip) feel the need to ungrateful. I told him to 'buzz' off, that I was going to sim, and if he doesn't like it, too bad, I will just quit the club and take my ship with me. I decided to send the first, much nicer, letter.

I then sent a letter to my crew explaining that Chip did not want us to sim, and if anyone wanted to follow his order and not show up, fine, but I added, "By God, I am going to sim because I am ready."

To my immense joy, my entire crew showed up. We simmed, and we had a great time. The Vindicator's first sim was, in effect, a mutiny. We had ignored Chip's orders not to sim. Towards the end of the sim, Chip signed on, read my E-mail, and entered the sim room. He saw that all of us were simming and were having a great time. He saw that my crew was behind me, and despite whatever Ben had told him, Chip must have realized and appreciated all I had done for the club and that he needed me, so he wisely stated to all us at the sim that, "Well, I guess a lot of you guys didn't follow orders but that's ok." As a result, no one was punished for the Vindicator mutiny.

Amazingly, Ben took part in the Vindicator sim that night, and he did a good job simming. I was so impressed that I decided to make him the first officer at the next sim, and I was thinking about making him the full time first officer until Moses was able to sim. I also asked Chip if, in November or so, we could start up our planned third sim with Ben in command. Chip said he would think about it.

However, it would never be. A year later, when talking to Ben, I would find out that he never wanted me to be the Vice President of the club. Chip was someone that Ben could control and manipulate, but Ben feared that I would eventually take over the club and expose his lie about the forum. Ben planned to move back and forth between Chip and myself to try to stir up trouble and animosity between us. He hoped this would either lead to my firing or resignation. Ben also figured that I would have obeyed Chip's order not to sim, and had I done so, Ben would have seen to it that the Vindicator never simmed. But as soon as I proved myself by running the first successful sim, it became immensely harder to get rid of me.



Why, if Ben wanted to get rid of me he decided to sim and behave himself that night is beyond me. Perhaps it was part of his plan to stay on the good side of both Chip and myself so he could stir up trouble between us. If he disrupted the sim right out, he would have been unable to come to me and whisper rumors about Chip, like he did earlier that night.

But why did Ben feel the need to lie and engage this byzantine intrigue? Well, that is simple enough really. Ben's job was to get us and run a forum. He failed at that, but he did not want to lose the position of power and influence he enjoyed over Chip and the club by running the protest. In other words, Ben liked the ego trip that simming gave him. The only place he could now get power was with the sim club, but he had already given Chip authority over it. Ben was smart enough to realize that he could not take over the sim club, either by simply declaring Chip deposed or by launching some kind of coup. Further, Ben was smart enough to realize he did not know how to run a sim club. However, he still wanted power. So, after the forum was rejected, Ben attempted to lobby Chip to become the Vice President during the days I was away on vacation, but that plan was dashed on August 31st when Chip appointed me as the Vice President. So, in reality, because I had beat Ben for the job, I was already an enemy in Ben's mind when I met him on September 14 and 15.

When Ben failed to become the Vice President, he, at first, hoped I would just simply fail on my own. But when it became clear I was very successful at my job and that I was going to sim, he sprung into action with his new plan to stop me from simming and to cause trouble between Chip and myself, but that too had failed. Now Ben thought his only hope was to drive me from the club. As long as Chip thought Ben was going to come through with a forum, Chip was going to listen to Ben, and Ben realized he could influence Chip because of that. But Ben realized I did not believe him and that he could not control me. The longer I stayed around and slowly worked to convince Chip that Ben was lying, Ben would see his hold over Chip gradually erode. Perhaps, Ben figured, if he could get rid of me, Chip would make him the new Vice President, in which case the forum would no longer matter.

Ironically enough, had Ben simply behaved himself, simmed and had a good time, he probably would have received a position of authority in the club that he so desperately wanted and quite frankly deserved for helping to get the entire club started via the forum protest. Eventually, he would have been appointed to command a ship in the UFP/SF. His position in the sim club would have been secure, and he could have announced, and lied to get out of his first lie, that AOL had rejected the forum again, but we have a great club and I have a great ship and we don't need the forum, so let's move ahead without AOL. Everyone probably would have listened and no one would have punished him for failing.

However, it is questionable as to if Ben would have specifically received command of the third ship. More likely, he would have gotten the fourth or fifth ship, for, unknown to me, in August, Chip had promised a ship to one Captain Sisko. However, she lived in the Pacific time zone, and it proved very difficult early on to find enough simmers among the protesters to join the crew of her sim, which she planned to hold at a late hour for most folks in the US. Also, because she was in the Pacific time zone, she was unable to attend the *Generation* or *Vindicator* sims, and eventually, everyone just lost contact with her. (Amazingly, she would return in the summer of 1997, ask what ever happened to the club, and disappear once

more.) It was only a few days after I told Chip I wanted Ben to command the third ship that Chip got back to me and finally told me that he wasn't going to give Ben command of the third ship since he had already promised it to Sisko.

I had no idea we had a third captain, so between that little fact, and the Vindicator Mutiny, Chip and I decided to start talking - a lot. We talked about the club, about our simming experiences, about ourselves. Luckily, we quickly became friends and found that we could work together as a great team. Our rapidly developing bond defeated all of Ben's attempts to muddle and turn us against one another.

Both Chip and I started to E-mail Sisko, but she had fallen off the face of the Earth and never responded. We eventually decided to find someone else to be the captain of our planned third sim. Perhaps had Ben behaved himself he would have been offered command, but by the time we declared Sisko to be missing in action, Ben had begun to cause all kinds of trouble.

One week after the Vindicator Mutiny, Ben realized that his plan to stop me from simming had failed, and he probably was starting to realize that Chip and I were become fast friends - so he realized his plan to cause friction and mistrust between us would fail as well. As a result, a change in strategy was in order. Ben decided he would attempt to disrupt and destroy my sims, and hopefully, cause me to become fed up and quit the club.

At the second Vindicator sim on September 26, Ben started to act up. He spent a good portion of the sim saying how he didn't want to be the temporary First Officer, that he hated the sims, why did he ever join this club, that he wanted to quit and so on. Than in a flash, Ben, under his CmdrDukeSF name, he signed off, deleted that name, than signed back on as Sisko1701E and returned to the sim. For the most part, he sat quietly and did nothing to disrupt the sim. When the sim finished, Ben than started up again and said that he wanted to be the Chief Medical Officer. The ships doctor offered to switch positions with him, but Ben refused, and decided to quit.

After the sim I talked to Ben, during which he was a pain saying that he would quit, only to quickly change his mind and decide to return, than quit again and return again. Needless to say, Ben was no longer going to get a shot at being the first officer of the Vindicator, and after that little episode I wasn't going to let him have his own command. However, I was nice enough to ignore the little fact that he decided to quit and return many times in one night. I was still a young and naive captain. (On a side note, this sim was the first sim for a CdtJaceSF. Jace was a friend of LtCRikerSF (Josh), who intern was a friend of Uridien, who was a friend of Ben. Just remember these people and their close ties because it will be important many pages from now.)

Ben did not show up for the third Vindicator sim, but he returned for the fourth sim and caused problems. Ben showed up with a new name, ComoBenSF, more or less in an attempt to cause myself and others to think that he outranked me since he had a commodore name and I was only a captain at the time. Of course, it didn't work. No one was going to listen to him even if he said he was the Admiral of the Turkish fleet because he was acting so immature.

Regardless, Ben did manage to disrupt the sim. He showed up to the sim late, kept on asking what was going on, what was the mission and so on. Then he disobeyed orders, stole a runabout and went flying around on his own mission.

After that little incident, Ben decided to avoid me and not show up for the 5th Vindicator sim, but he was back, this time as EnsBenSF, for the 6th Vindicator sim on October 24. This sim, by the way, was the first Vindi sim that Moses was able to attend. It was also the first sim for a one CdtOdenSF who would eventually live out my dream of commanding the first Classic Era sim in TOL. At the 6th Vindicator sim, Ben again showed up late, and went off into his own plot that had nothing to do with the actual sim at hand. When no one paid any attention to him, he became mad at everyone.

All during these many weeks I kept on asking Chip again and again if I could kick Ben out, suspend him from my sims, punish him, or even simply poke him with a stick. But every time Chip said, no, don't do that, he will shape up soon enough. Plus, as Chip explained, Ben was working on building a forum for us. We cannot punish him. If we do, he may become mad and we won't get our forum.

I honestly believe that at the time Chip had a number of doubts about Ben and about the forum, but he was unwilling to act on them or express them publicly because Chip still held out hope that we would somehow get a forum. Plus, because he felt that he owed Ben his job, he was not yet ready to 'betray' Ben. The old simming world was very medieval in that sense. Feudal ties of loyalty were very important. Chip owed his position to Ben, so as a result, Chip was going to defend Ben no matter what. I owed my job to Chip, so I was going to look for out Chip and defend him, and defend my own crew who I had an obligation to protect, even if it meant having to fight Ben.

However, Chip's argument for the need to keep Ben because he was going to provide us with a forum was soon to lose its creditability. I decided if Ben was to be punished and stopped, I had to prove that Ben was lying and that there was no forum. I started to constantly badger Ben and tried to force him to tell me who he had been talking to at AOL and to forward me the E-mails he had relating to the forum. Ben eventually gave in and gave me the names of some AOL officials to contact. I E-mailed the AOL people myself to find out what was going on, and on October 28, I was informed by AOL that they had not talked to Ben for several months, that they had told Ben not to contact them anymore, and that there was no way we would ever get a forum. I of course informed Chip right away, and soon there after, any hold Ben had over Chip started to evaporate. (On a side note, AOL told me that they could not start up a new Star Trek sim forum for copyright reasons, which lends credibility to the rumors that Paramount sued AOL and forced SFOL to change its name from Starfleet Online to Spacefleet Online.)

In response, at the 7th Vindicator sim, which was on Wednesday, Oct 30 (We had the sim on Wednesday because most of the crew would be busy the next night, Halloween), Ben spent the entire time causing a scene. Angry that I had exposed his lie, Ben wanted revenge, pure and simple, and revenge would be his motivation for a long time to come, and he decided to take his anger out on my ship. In the sim, he went around on a rampage. He killed himself

in the sim and he tried to blow up the Vindicator - making him the first person to attempt to blow up my ship (it later became a reoccurring humorous theme among TOL members to try to blow up the Vindicator). Luckily, no one paid much attention to him.

Despite all of Ben's disruptions, and despite the fact it had been exposed that he had lied to the club for months on end about the forum, Chip was amazingly leant. On November 5, in the clubs monthly newsletter, Chip published "A Tribute to Ltjg Ben." In it, Chip wrote, "Last Friday we decided to give up trying to get the forum. Ben took it pretty hard and these are somethings I have to say about him and his efforts."

It continued, "LtjBen is a person with many sides. Yes most of us think he is a pain, but the truth is that if it wasn't for him this group wouldn't be here today. In August I was just coming into the Bridge after work to talk some trek when I was approached by a person asking me if I would like to join a group of people who were trying to create a new Star Trek forum. I said sure and I will offer my services in the simming department if you have one. Fifteen seconds later I became in charge of a sim group. A few days later I met the person in charge of getting the forum together, Ben. He told me that things were looking good and we should have it in a few weeks. Well, it is now November and we don't have a forum. That isn't what this section is about though. I would just like to thank Ben for making this possible. He truly tried his best. He held meetings, wrote many letters to people trying to get them to help, and even made a web page. It is a shame that Aol doesn't "have room" for something he has worked so hard for. Ben I salute you and all of you efforts."

Ben replied to the entire club, thanked Chip for the tribute and declared that "You are looking at a new Ben." It was a very touching moment, or something like that. It was also a very amazing moment in that by now such editorials and discussion of club matters in public was becoming very common in the UFP/SF. No club at the time, and even very few clubs today, discussed such matters in public. The seeds for the republic had been planted.

A few days later, at the 8th sim, I found that Ben did change, somewhat. Instead of showing up late and going on a rampage, he showed up, sat there and did nothing. After a while, Ben started to complain that he had nothing to do, so I readjusted the mission, out of spite, so that it centered around Ben and I gave him lots of things to do. But Ben just sat there and did nothing. The next day, Ben started to criticize everything and say how boring and stupid the Vindicator sim was. When I told him I had given him plenty to do, Ben said, "You did? I wasn't paying attention."

Ben had hoped that all of his various disruptions and attempts to be annoying would either cause me to become so fed up that I would quit, or would cause my crew to become fed and stop simming. I was becoming fed up all right, but my anger was going to be directed at punishing Ben for all he had done, not quitting. I had tried to be nice, I had tried to work with him, I had tried to be lenient, but my patience was running out. He may have possessed some claims to legitimate power, as Chip pointed out, by helping lead the protest that gave rise to the club, but his actions since that time had discredited him in my mind. However, in Chip's mind, as his editorial reveals, he still deeply felt that he owed Ben his job, and that despite all Ben had done he was not going to punish him.

Even as I write this I wrestle with the ethical ramifications of having expelled Ben from the club he helped to create. As we will see, Trek Online history is filled with a cycle of Ben being punished and later being forgiven because of that ethical debate. But eventually, his actions discredited all he had done in the beginning and he had to be punished. However, in November of 1996, after having refused to follow Chip's orders once on September 19th, I was wary about tempting fate once again and disobeying Chip's orders about not punishing Ben. As a result, I had tried everything short of punishment with Ben, but nothing worked because Ben was out to destroy me.

As far as my crew went, they were wonderful. They understood that my hands were tied because of Chip, and there was little I could do about it. They all continued to show up and sim, and just ignored Ben.

Yet, the next day, Friday, November 8, 1996, I finally had enough. For the sake of all that was good and holy in simming, I took matters into my own hands.

For part of that week and the weekend, Chip was away on a business trip. Command of the *Generation* should have passed down the ranks to Chip's first officer (who was also away) and so forth among his crewmembers. However, Ben decided to show up and insisted that he really was in command. Now keep in mind that Ben was, at this time, just a self appointed Lieutenant junior grade since that week he signed on under his Ltjg name. Arguments broke out between Ben and the crew as to who was in command, and lots of people became fed up and left, causing the sim to be canceled. This was Ben's first attack on the *Generation* sim, and when I signed on later that night, I found a rather nasty E-mail from Ben in my E-mail box sent to both Chip and myself about how he should have been in command, how he had a great sim ready for the night, and how Chip's crew just wrecked it. Now, why Ben tried to take over the *Generation* sim I have no idea. His world was collapsing around him and he probably had nothing better to do I suppose.

I figured if Ben had disrupted Chip's very own sim, now was as good of a time as any to try to punish Ben. This time, I figured, Chip may support a punishment. I sent an E-mail to Ben outlining all of his many disruptions over the months and because of all of them, I declared that Ben was now suspended from the *Vindicator*, and I expressed hope that Chip would suspend him from the entire club.

Now, before you get the impression that all I did as Vice President was go around disobeying Chip's orders, keep in mind that both times I had good reasons to do so. The first time my crew was ready to sim and there was no solid basis for Chip ordering me not to sim. If I had not had the courage to sim, the club probably would not be here today. The second time I disobeyed Chip's orders, Ben was a major threat to the club and he had repeatedly attacked and disrupted our sims. Furthermore, this time I had the legal right to punish Ben. As part of my general theory from STECO that captains should have full control over their sims, the guidebook gave all captains the right to punish or suspend anyone for disrupting their sim. That power had never been invoked on my part before because Chip had made it very clear he didn't want me to punish Ben, but after two months of putting up with Ben, I had enough and decided to put the language in the guidebook to the test. Secondly, since Chip was away

on business, as the Vice President I had the right, in theory at least, to take any action necessary to preserve the club if there was a problem while the president was away, and Ben clearly fit the definition of a problem. Ben had acted up on the Vindicator sim on November 7th, and on the Generation sim on the 8th, all while Chip was away.

Ben replied to my suspension letter, and sent his reply to his fellow forum cohorts. As a result, Saturday, November 9, 1996, turned into a large rolling argument between myself, Ben, and Ben's friends who went around complaining to anyone in the club who would listen that Ben was being treated unfairly. During the course of all of this, a Lieutenant on the Vindicator, named Scott, became caught up in the argument and he decided to volunteer to serve as Ben's lawyer. Fearing that this situation with Ben would quickly consume the club, I agreed to hold a trial. I laid out my entire case, all of the evidence and sim logs showing how Ben disrupted sim after sim and as such he deserved to be punished. As a result of the trial, Scott and everyone was convinced that Ben truly was guilty of some serious crimes and that it was just not a case of a personal vendetta on my part and trumped up charges against poor innocent Ben. (As we will see time and time again, Ben is very effective at playing the poor innocent victim and getting people to feel sorry for him and help him.)

As punishment for all he had done, Ben was suspended from all Vindicator sims. In addition, Ben was to attend Scott's simming academy. Scott was a first officer in another sim club called the Independence Group, which possessed a simming academy. If Ben graduated from the academy and proved that he could sim with out goofing off or causing a disruption, he would be allowed to return to the Vindicator. The suspension did not apply to the Generation or the club at large.

The trial actually turned out to be quite successful in calming everyone down and making people feel that justice had fairly been dispensed. It was common practice at the time - and even today - to give the captains and admirals total power over judicial matters. There was no hearing, no trial - just a letter from the appropriate authority saying you were out. But simmers in the lost generation had suffered from judicial abuses for years, and they wanted more rights. In the UFP/SF, Ben was given a fair trial, and the precedent in TOL for holding a trial to deal with matters of suspension and expulsion was established. Besides, the club was new. It takes time to gain respect and authority, and that had not yet occurred. If Chip or I had tried to act as a military dictator - as so many other sim leaders do - it would have been a disaster. Ben would have spread rumors and ripped the club apart. Perhaps Chip also realized this and this explains why he was afraid to punish Ben. Luckily, Scott came forward with the perfect idea to diffuse the situation.

When Chip returned on Monday and saw all that had transpired, he upheld the court's decisions and decided to suspend Ben from the Generation until Ben graduated from Scott's academy. If Ben successfully graduated but acted up again, Chip informed Ben that he would be finished. Chip finally saw the light and realized that Ben had been lying for all these months about the forum and that Ben could not offer the club anything of value that would justify ignoring his disruptive behavior. Chip had matured enough as a leader to be able to stand up for his club, even if it meant standing up against the person who gave him the club in the first place. He scolded Ben and told him, "This is your absolute last chance to be a

part of a great simulation group. We are sorry we have to write this type of letter to you, but you have left us no choice. In my opinion you have a temper worse than a drunk Klingon and you need to learn how to control it. You do not run this group and you aren't considered real high up in it either. You have no right to disrupt any sim for any reason. You will be given another trial some time in December so we can re-evaluate. Until then you are to carry out your punishment like a Star Fleet officer and not like a baby."

Ben's dreams had been shattered, but even after being rejected by AOL and being exposed as a liar, his dream for a forum was not dead yet. Chip only announced to the club that "Last Friday we decided to give up trying to get the forum." Because of that fact, the few people 'working' with Ben on the forum did not hear the news that AOL had rejected the forum. They believed that the UFP/SF had given up on the forum, and that it was just a matter of finding a new club for the forum. Even in December, Ben was still sending out 'forum newsletter updates' to his few followers. He was eventually able to convince others that hope for the forum still existed, and that it was just evil, paranoid Chas who had convinced Chip to give up just as Ben was about to reach a major breakthrough with AOL. As a result, the club was to be plagued by the forum and attacks by Ben and his supporters for almost another year. In retrospect, much would have been solved had Chip simply communicated the truth. Chip was radical in publishing a monthly newsletter that dealt with club topics beyond just what had happened in everyone's sims, but he did not go far enough. However, I would learn from this mistake. In the future, I would try to explain everything I could to the club. In retrospect, my first memoirs, published in September of 1997, probably ended the wars with Ben. As a result of my memoirs, everyone fighting for Ben could read about what had really happened with the forum, Ben, and everyone else. Over night, the wars stopped, and, completely exposed, Ben was left with little choice but to embark on a campaign to 'redeem himself.'

Regardless of Ben's attempts over the coming year to hold onto the forum, as early as November of 1996, Ben's dream for a new SFOL and a new simming forum had been shattered. Because Ben could not tell the truth and had underestimated my resolve, his campaign of disruption had failed to drive me out of the club. As a result, Ben's simming career had turned into a nightmare and a cycle of violence that would plague the club.

## Chapter 8: Chip's Dream

*"Hey, do I look any different as an Ensign?" - Ensign Jace Alexander, Oct 25, 1996. It can also be said that by October the club had matured from a timid newbie to a young and eager Ensign like organization.*

The main driving force of the lost generation was to create a club community. Out of everyone I have ever met during my simming career, Chip was - by far - the best person to do just that. Chip possessed a tremendous personality. He was a great person, pure and simple. His energy, his enthusiasm, his playful nature, his wacky sense of humor touched everyone who encountered it, and it set the tone for how the club was going to operate.



I still find it curious as to why people sim. I really have never been able to figure out why so many people do sim, do dedicate their time to their ship and club. For me, it is fun. It was my hobby. Because it is online, it is a hobby that does not get much respect, but I do not care. I simmed because it was fun, I ran a club so that others could have fun, and Chip was great at making sims fun.

Yet, as much as I wanted a club to have a sim community that was friendly, open, and humorous, I do not think I had the personality necessary to produce the community I wanted, but Chip did. I made a system that eliminated rules, opened the club, and focused on creativity and having fun - but Chip gave that system life and energy. To work, the club needed a serious administrator - like myself - and a larger than life personality - like Chip. Within the framework created for the club, these two personalities were able to balance professionalism and dedication with fun and wackiness - creating the powerful dichotomy that drove Trek Online to tremendous heights.

Somehow too, because Chip, Ben, myself, and later Scott, all had broad dreams, and because in a sense there really was no true leader of the UFP/SF, Chip, Ben, myself, and Scott all competed and worked to advance our own vision. As a result, the best aspects of everyone's ideas, talents and personalities were somehow assimilated together to make a truly dynamic club. Chip set the tone for the club and set us on the path to develop our own unique culture of smites, spam parties, MIBs and so forth. Scott gave us the idea for a republic. I gave us the organization which allowed the club to carry out its business - to be open and truly revolutionary in order to perpetuate Chip and Scott's dreams. Ben forced us to unite and in his own way - made us consider impossible dreams, giving us the mindset to think big.

Also, because there was no true leader, and because I really wanted a club where the captains controlled their sims and there was no outside bureaucracy to stifle creativity, people in the club who did not have grand visions of their own but who had little ideas about how to improve the club were able to present their ideas directly to the President or their captain and get involved in the club. This caused the club's engine, our simming style, and our culture to rise up from the members - it was not imposed from above by admirals and their decrees. I think it was all of this - which was set up during Chip's Presidency - that made the club so unique.

The amazing thing is that none of it was really planned. Sure, we all had various ideas and we were swept up in the lost generation and wanted to make a free and dynamic simming community, but we had no idea that we would ever be successful; we had no idea how what we were doing was going to play out. We just implemented our ideas, took things one day at a time, dealt with tremendous challenges, and never gave up. Somehow, we survived and thrived.

It took a few months for Chip to mature into his role as a captain and the president of the club, but as he gained confidence, his own dream for the future of the UFP/SF began to take shape. By late October, one could say that Chip had finally become comfortable with being a leader and as a result, the club gained its footing, the training wheels had come off, and to throw in one more cliché, had matured to become an ensign. Chip's maturation can be

seen in the fact that he began to articulate his own vision for the future of the club, but more importantly, it can be seen in the fact that he began to take care of the paperwork, E-mail and talk to people who needed to be contacted, make routine decisions, and so forth. Up to that time, I had either been doing most of that, or in our many chats telling Chip what should be done. But Chip was finally beginning to assert himself and take actions without me having to remind him. So, I decided to step back and let him run things, just as I had planned to do in August.

Chip first articulated his vision to me in mid October of 1996, before I proved that there was no forum. Chip wanted to make a sim group, something that would offer Star Trek, Star Wars, Babylon 5, Sea Quest and other kinds of sims. He felt that by offering so many kinds of sims, the forum would be much more successful and AOL would be more willing to support it. Ben only wanted to create a new AOL Star Trek club, a new SFOL. Even though Chip was not yet ready to punish Ben for his disruptive behavior, Chip was starting to show his independence as the forum's sim director by thinking bigger and articulating his own vision. What Chip really wanted to do was imitate the Alliance Simulation Group. But Chip hated bureaucracy and paperwork and rules as much as I did, so his group - as he saw it - would be an improvement on the ASG because it would not include all of the ASG's elaborate bureaucracy.

A few days later, when Ben's talk about a forum was exposed as a lie, and Ben was suspended for his constant disruptions of our sims, Chip's dream for a forum with many kinds of sims became a dream for a club with many kinds of sims. Chip began to articulate his vision for the club in public, and began to assert his command authority as the president. Chip had finally gotten over the mindset that Ben was the boss. It never made any sense to me that Ben should be in charge. Ben was immature, and he did little for the club. All Ben did was tell Chip to start up a sim club, and Chip and myself did the rest. Now that Chip saw we were a sim club pure and simple, and that there was no forum, he finally saw himself as the boss of a sim club and began to act like one. As I had hoped, I no longer needed to pick up the slack. After having set up the club, Chip was starting to assert himself. I could now step aside, let Chip run the club, and I would focus on running my own club on Prodigy. At least so I thought.

How closely Chip and Ben worked together previous to November of 1996, how much Chip really consulted Ben, I am not sure. From what I observed Chip did not seem to be too involved with the forum or ask too many questions about it since the forum was Ben's territory. Ben claimed to have helped think up the name USS Generation, and in the E-mail sent on August 21st, Chip said that he was promoting all of the first officer candidates to captain because the forum hosts wanted a sim every night. However, I do not know if the decision to run open sims every night was made by Ben. It could have been someone else, perhaps Uridien.

Ben, aside from trying to get me fired, trying to take command of the Generation on November 8, and trying to gain a position of power in the club, showed very little interest in the operations of the club. He didn't care for the work or issues involved, and he really did not know the first thing about running a sim club, which is why he put Chip in charge in the

first place. Thus, as far as I know, he never contacted Chip about club affairs, never gave us any advise or made any demands, etc. (Except for the one demand for the Vindicator not to sim, which Chip followed.) All Ben wanted was power, which is pretty sad really, to cause so much of a ruckus over a simulated rank and position. But Ben enjoyed the power - he liked the delusion that simming provided.

However, the problems with Ben were not the only thing occurring during the first few months of the clubs existence. If anything, they were a huge annoyance, but they did not stop or slow the club.

Ever since August, Chip had been planning to start up a third sim in the UFP/SF. But who would run it? By October it was clear that Sisko had fallen off the face of the Earth. Ben was no longer an option. Commander Curok, First Officer of the *Generation*, was usually missing in action due to his career and soon would have to leave simming all together. Moses had not yet officially taken his position as the First Officer of the Vindicator and also lived in the Pacific time zone, which is what caused so many problems for Sisko. Thus, the question was, who would run the third sim?

The question was solved not by Chip or myself, but by my Chief Engineer, Lt. Commander Josh Riker, who in October gathered together some of his simming friends into a ship of his own, the USS Endeavor. Chip and I asked Josh to make his ship part of the club. He accepted, and so, on October 20, 1996, the USS Endeavor joined the UFP/SF.

Josh was friends with Uridien, and became involved with the protest and club because Uridien had told him about it. However, Josh was never a leader of the protest or showed any real interest in working on the forum. Yet, because he was close to one of the main leaders of the protest, Josh, in August, felt that he could give himself the rank of Lieutenant Commander. Chip immediately yelled at him and told him to start as a cadet like everyone else, but Josh soon regained his rank on the Vindicator as my Chief Engineer.

Many of the early club members were involved in the protests. Others, like myself, were recruited into the sim club and did not care much about the forum. Josh represents most of protesters who joined the club - even those who were friends with Ben and Uridien - and they were able to smoothly integrate themselves into the club and rise to leadership positions by just simming and having a good time. Had Ben and Uridien simply done the same, they too would have probably risen to leadership positions in the club.

After news spread that the forum was officially rejected on August 24, 1996, most of the protests simply shrugged their shoulders and didn't care too much. Some joined the club spawned by the protest, and others simply went their own way. Only a few hot heads with nothing better to do clung onto the forum idea and caused a great ruckus.

Josh was a good captain who inspired tremendous loyalty. He managed to build a small, but dedicated core of simmers around him to be his crew. However, I had concerns about the size of his crew. On nights where one person did not show up, there usually were not enough people to sim. I worked with Josh to try to recruit new people into the Endeavor crew and

the club at large, but Chip had decided on a different, more traditional approach to club expansion - mergers.

Mergers between sim clubs have been the method of choice for expansion since time began - or at least since the sim club model first came into being. The USF grew to a large size by merging with other clubs. The FSF became large through mergers, and so the ASG, and everyone else. However, mergers are filled with hazards. Civil wars often occurred when mergers went bad, and, even today, it is very difficult to create a common club community through mergers because everyone comes from a different club, a different background, has different dreams about what simming should be, and so forth. However, these risks were mitigated by the fact that in earlier times, a person could only sim on one ship. As a result, no one - not even myself (:::gasp::: something I did not know, LOL!) - was fully aware of the hazards that mergers presented. As a result of the merger, Chip's Presidency would come to a cataclysmic end, and what was left of the club would be plunged into a desperate struggle for survival.

The club Chip decided to merge with was Scott's little Independence Group. During November, Chip began to work with Scott to ensure that Ben received a tough training regiment at Scott's simming academy, and from that, the two began to talk, and the idea of a merger between the UFP/SF and the Independence Group was raised.

I had nothing against the merger. I figured that because Scott was a crew member on the Vindicator he was familiar with our system and would be able to work with in it, and that would make it much easier for people from the Independence to take part in our community. In addition - because of my negative experiences joining SFOL and my positive experiences joining STS - I desperately wanted the UFP/SF to have a simming academy where we could train new cadets so that no simmer would (as I initially had) ended up not liking simming because no one took the time to properly train them. As such, I was all for the merger with the Independence Group. Because we lacked an academy, people recruited in the UFP/SF were sent strait to the sims. While I helped to train people as much as possible with the guidebook and all, I was very concerned that many new people were becoming lost and frustrated. Scott's academy, I figured, would solve that.

The Independence Group really wasn't much of a club, however - but neither was the UFP/SF. The Independence Group just consisted of the USS Independence which (note the reoccurring theme) simmed every Saturday AND Sunday night. After all, it was the lost generation and the attempt to make a club wide community once again resulted in someone thinking lets have everyone sim together every night. However, like STECO, the people in the Independence Group found a system requiring them to sim on two different nights caused problems. As a result, by the time Chip started talking to them, the Independence Group was planning to turn the Sunday sim into a separate ship or starbase sim.

The planned merger with the Independence Group was all part of Chip's dream to make a sim group. Combined the UFP/SF and Independence Group would give the club 5 Star Trek sims, a reasonable size. From there, the club would expand into Star Wars, Babylon 5 and any other kinds of sims when we could find enough people to make a sim feasible. If we had

to, we would start up our own sims. If we could find clubs which offered such sims and merge with them, all the better.

Amazingly enough, I was not all that involved with the merger and development of Chip's idea to turn the club into a sim group. When he asked for help, I helped, but Chip was running the show and I stepped back and let him. (By this time too, I was busy working on Prodigy, as I discuss in the next chapter.)

On November 29, 1996, Chip publicly announced his plans for the future of the club, and as a part of that announcement, the UFP/SF became the United Sim Group (USG). Chip also promoted both him and myself to the rank of Fleet Admiral. (Prior to this time Chip was a Commodore and I was a Captain.) The UFP/SF name existed on in the USG as the Star Trek division of the USG, and the plan was that it would be joined by Star Wars and Babylon 5 divisions. I personally had mixed feelings about the entire arrangement. I was only interested in a Star Trek club, but Chip was in charge, so I was going to do what I could to make his dream into a reality.

A few days after the creation of the USG, the Independence Group merged into the club. Due to this timing many thought that the USG was the new club created out of the merger of the UFP/SF and the Independence Group. Because of the name change (and with no other reality aside from names and words on a screen) people in the Independence Group did not feel that they were joining into an existing club, but rather that they were making a new club in which they would have an equal role and would share power. But that was not the case at all. As I understood it - as Chip articulated it to me and those of us in the UFP/SF - the Independence Group was joining the UFP/SF, and the UFP/SF was the Star Trek division of the USG. Chip and I would be the co directors of the UFP/SF. Chip would be the President of the USG, and I would be the Vice President. Chances were that one day Chip would become the director of the Babylon 5 division in the USG, since that was where his main simming passion was, and I would become the soul director of the UFP/SF.

The Captain of the Independence was simply to be a captain, like Josh. He would just run his ship, and while we would consult him about matters in the UFP/SF, he would not have any position of authority outside his ship.

However, things with the merger became rather muddled. While the main point of contact with the Independence Group was Scott, he was only the First Officer of the Independence. Captain Pat Lynch was the one in charge, and I can only assume that Chip talked with Pat and they had agreed to the merger. Unfortunately, before the merger went into effect on December 1, 1996, Captain Pat was suspended from AOL for cursing in a chat room or something along those lines. While the suspension only lasted for a few weeks, Pat apparently was so fed up with AOL that he opened a new account on the Microsoft Network and E-mailed his crew from there saying he decided to leave the ship and start up a new sim on MSN. As a result of the tone of Pat's letter and its implied abandonment of the sim, Scott took full time command of the Independence.

Both Chip and Scott claimed that Pat had agreed to the merger, so it went ahead on December 1 with Scott now in command of the Independence. To some of the crewmembers, however, it appeared that Scott had ceased power and had sold the Independence out to another club. It's always possible these cynics were right, that Chip and Scott may have sprung into action after Pat left command and merged the sim without having ever talked to Pat, but that was not Chip's style, and I have never accepted the cynics' point of view. Still, the general consensus among the Independence Group was that Scott had cased power and sold out the sim. This would lead to many problems.

And there would be even more problems because Scott thought that due to all of the name changes with UFP/SF and USG, the merger had precipitated the name change and as such he would possess some kind of equal leadership role in the new club created by the Independence Group and the UFP/SF. This idea was only helped along when Chip promoted Scott to the rank of Admiral.

To make matters even worse, Uridien had returned to AOL. He quickly reestablished contact with Ben, and since Ben was a crewmember on the Independence, Uridien joined the crew as well. Together, the two of them began to exchange stories. I'm sure Ben told Uridien all about how the protest had worked after all, about his unfair treatment at my hands, and how I had convinced Chip to reject the forum just when Ben was about reach a break through with AOL. Together, Ben and Uridien convinced Pat, and to some extent, Scott, that they could get them a forum for the Independence. Only if Chip had told everyone that AOL rejected Ben and that Ben lied to everyone about the forum, instead of saying that we decided not to go with the forum, maybe the forum mess would have come to an end in November of 1996.

During his few weeks on the Independence, Uridien became friends with Pat. Outraged at Scott's apparent seizure of power, and its implied selling the Independence and forum hopes out to the same Chip and Chas who had supposedly rejected the forum before, Uridien decided to take action.

## Chapter 9: Prodigy Dreams

*"Silently, one by one, in the infinite meadows of heaven, blossomed the lovely stars, the forget-me-nots of the angles." Longfellow - from Evangeline; Ship's Motto of the USS Orion.*

Let us backtrack to August 31, 1996, but this time let's follow the story as it unfolded on Prodigy. Quite frankly, the Prodigy story is boring - no protests, no byzantine intrigue, no attacking of sims - sorry to disappoint.

On August 31, STECO died. The plans I had been developing to reform STECO no longer had a club to be applied to, so I decided to start up a new club. A short time later, when I found out I was the Vice President of the UFP/SF, I also applied my STECO reform ideas to the UFP/SF as well.

The first critical decision I faced on Prodigy was what to call my new club? After all, names matter.

Julie (my old STECO friend who I made the Co-President of my new club), and I tossed around a number of potential names. I forget what most of them were, but three names have stuck with me, The Alpha Quadrant Club, Quark's Bar, and Trek Online. Quark's Bar was an interesting concept. Everyone would play a junior officer on Deep Space 9, along the lines of the TNG Episode, "Lower Decks." The sims would be focused mostly on character interaction, lounging around in the bar, carrying out assignments on the station, and occasionally going on an away mission with a main character from the show. In the end, however, we decided it probably would be too constrained and too hard to pull off in a sim.

That left us with the names The Alpha Quadrant Club and Trek Online. I honestly do not remember which one of us proposed the name Trek Online. I know that one of us thought it up on September 1 and it was agreed to on September 3. Trek Online just sounds better, and has a better abbreviation - TOL as opposed to AQC. Plus, the name Trek Online conveys what we do - Online Star Trek simming - and is also playful - the history of the club turned out to be one vast online trek.

The initial plan to get Trek Online started was to simply turn my Orion sim - my loose collection of simming friends who met every few weeks - into a weekly sim for TOL. The Orion had met a few times during the summer (even while I was in STECO) and we had planned to meet again on September 3. The sim that night went well, and 8 people attended. I decided to hold the sim again the next week, but only 5 people showed up, the week after that, only 3. The problem was that my friends simply were not interested in simming every week or being part of a formal club, and school was beginning again for most of the people, so they did not have as much time to sim.

Per my plans to focus on the AOL club first, I did not do much work for Trek Online. I did not write a guidebook, ship info, character info, or assign ranks. All I did was try to turn the Orion from a monthly sim into a weekly sim. I had figured with it running, it would at least be a start, and when I had more time, I would develop the club and expand the sim. However, my plan to convert the Orion into TOL had failed, and I was becoming increasingly consumed by AOL and all of the problems with Ben, so I decided to temporarily put the Orion and TOL on hold. When I attempted to restart the sim and club only a few weeks later, I found it to be very difficult - the momentum had been lost. That is the reason why ever since I have always told my captains to keep on simming, even if only 3 people show up, because if you stop for a week or two, it will be very difficult, if not impossible, to get the sim going again.

In addition, Prodigy reveals another lesson. Despite all of my talents (not to brag, but hay, I was successful), because I did not focus on the details and put a lot of hard work into the club on Prodigy at the get go, I was never able to catch up. So, if you are thinking about starting a club or sim or taking over a club or sim as its new leader, do not think you can delay and figure things out later. Have a plan, have the details thought out, have your work and resources in place. If you do not, you will never be able to catch up.

By the end of October, Chip was beginning to assert himself as the President of the UFP/SF, and AOL had exposed Ben's forum as a lie, so I felt confident enough to turn my attention back to Prodigy.

With the help of Julie, I wrote up a club guidebook, ship info and character info sheet for Trek Online. Most of it was similar to what I had written for the UFP/SF. Later, Julie wrote a series of mini guides for the Captains, Game (Sim) Masters, First Officers, and other posts. Such items would later evolve into Trek Online's Command Bible.

Everyone knows about the club guidebook because everyone receives it, but few are aware of the existence of the Command Bible, and for a while, its very existence was classified. After all, for a while Trek Online was at war and we did not want our command secrets to be revealed to our enemies. The bible was Julie's idea, and she has had a lasting impact on the club because of it. Basically, the bible is a guidebook for captains, first officers and other important types. It teaches people how to be a captain, how to run a sim, how to write logs and take care of paper work, when to promote people, how to deal with disruptive simmers, how to put on a fun and effective sim, and so on. It helps to keep the captains on the same page. Perhaps if the USG had a command bible, it not have been destroyed because all of the captains would have been on the same page and not killed each other. But, I never wrote one for the UFP/SF or USG because Julie did not come up with the concept till January of 1997, just a few days before the USG imploded.

For Trek Online on Prodigy, I came up with my basic organization, most of was also duplicated on AOL. All of the sims in the club were to be grouped into a Bureau of Simming. The captains would have power over their individual sim. Each captain would report to Julie and myself. The President would work with the captains on developing their sims, would keep everyone in the club coordinated and on the same page, would take care of necessary paperwork, make day to day decisions, consult with the captains to make long term plans for the club, and so forth. In other clubs of the era, the President took on the role as the Chief of Starfleet. As such, he was interested in issuing directives about simming content, making up missions for each ship, and generally micro managing the clubs operations. But there would be none of that in Trek Online. I was interested in making a club community, so the President was given the job of overseeing the entire club and keeping it coordinated and together and functioning. The job of making up missions and micro managing the sims went to each captain. That simple devolution of power eliminated the need for a vast bureaucracy to ensure the president's will over the sims, and allowed the simmers to use their creative talents to develop their own wonderful and dynamic sims. Yes, the President lost direct control over the sims and what every week's mission was going to be, but I really did not care.

In addition, my STECO trivia would become the Trek Online Trivia Bureau, which run both chat trivia sessions and an E-mail trivia string. Later, other bureaus were developed for Trek Online, such as an academy, and a newsletter/publishing bureau. Each bureau would be headed by a club member. The bureau chief would also directly report to the President. Since these bureaus were focused on providing activities for the club, they always remained small and focused on providing a productive service. As such, despite the name bureau, they



never grew into a large bureaucracy. Most of the time, bureaus beyond the bureau of the simming were nothing more than the one or two people who had an interest in running a trivia session or publishing a newsletter or what have you.

The only thing that had changed - and where my plan was lacking - was in the area of government and justice - but Scott's dream filled in for that.

By November, Julie and myself had developed a wonderful system for Trek Online. The only problem was that we did not have many members. Only a couple of my old simming friends expressed interest in the club, so I went out, advertised and recruited. Unfortunately, I have never been good at such things, and I was attempting to start a club when most simmers were busy getting into the swing of things at school. Rick had a talent at recruiting, and he was helped by the fact that he was running his club during the summer. So, my efforts only netted a few people, but it was enough to scratch out a sim. Thus, on Tuesday, November 5, 1996, at 8pm eastern, the USS Orion simmed once again and TOL awoke from its slumber.

In December or so, I ran into Admiral Rick in a chat room, recruiting in an attempt to rebuild STECO. Despite his talents at recruiting, virtually all of Prodigy's chat rooms were deserted that winter, and STECO was never reborn. Chat had never become popular on Prodigy, and the competition from AOL even at this early stage was beginning to have devastating effects. (This, of course, also did nothing to help my efforts to build the club on Prodigy.)

Rick and I did talk for a little while about what happened to STECO. I told him that I had started up my own club called Trek Online. We parted ways with no hard feelings, wishing each other success and good luck. After that, I never again encountered Rick.

Aside from that, Trek Online on Prodigy was very uneventful. The only conflict to speak of was a conflict over the sim between myself and VtrCharile. VtrCharile, with my approval, commanded a group of Starfleet Marines on the Orion, and also acted as the chief of security. Unfortunately, he wanted every sim to involve a battle of some kind in which his Marines could go on an away mission, but I just was not going to allow that. I wanted to have a wide range of Star Trek missions. I tried to accommodate him as much as possible, and we were both very professional about it and never fought and never were bitter, but in the end Vtr decided to leave the Orion to try to start up his own Starfleet Marine sim. I would have liked it if his sim would have been part of Trek Online, but he refused.

Julie attempted to get her own sim, the USS Sierra, up and running, but with little success. She did recruit a few crew members and had an occasional sim here and there, but she just did not have as much persistence as I had. It was hard to find enough people to keep the Orion going - on many nights in November and December only 4 people would show up to sim. But because I had canceled the Orion in September and it took till November to get restarted, I decided to sim even if only a small amount of people showed. Julie would normally cancel her sim if only a few people showed up.

Yet, the sims were fun and those who could manage to show up had a wonderful time. I think the Orion was able to survive because our sims were so great, which caused the small hand full of people I could find to keep on coming back. Had there been a high attrition rate due to lousy sims, I would not have been able to recruit many new simmers to fill the gap because there just were not many chat simmers on Prodigy by this time, and there were few - and sometimes no - clubs to merge with.

That truly was the amazing thing. The dominance of bulletin board simming on Prodigy was never broken. For the longest time, Trek Online was the only Star Trek chat sim club on Prodigy. Occasionally other clubs would appear, and we would always have friendly relations with them, but they were always just as small as TOL, only a handful of simmers, and they would always die after a few months. By the time summer of 1997 rolled around, Prodigy was already a dying service, and most of the chat simmers who had been there for the summer of 1996 had already left for other online services.

Yet, somehow, my simming style and basic philosophy about communication, working with the crew, letting people be creative, along with my simply desire not to give up and to keep on simming, allowed TOL to survive and at times thrive in a sparsely populated and dying simming environment. Eventually, my dream of what the perfect sim should be became a reality with the Orion and my dream of what the perfect club became a reality on AOL. However, before that reality, I would face almost a year of hardships and one cataclysm after another. To survive, I would need to be persistent and never lose hope in the belief that some day I would be able to turn my dreams into a reality.

## Chapter 10: Scott's Dream

*"The president of the club makes the day to day decisions regarding the running of the club. His/her day to day decisions may only be vetoed by the club's two Vice Presidents, both of which must agree to veto." - Draft Constitution, February 1997.*

When I first heard about Scott's dream, I hated it with a passion. It was too new and revolutionary even for my tastes. Besides, I found it to be totally unnecessary - a republic, a government in a sim club? It is a sim for crying out loud, who needs all of that nonsense?

Would Trek Online have been better served had I listened to my initial reaction? Probably not. The club needed to grow first. But as the club matured, the more Scott talked, the more I thought about it, and as events in the club spun farther and farther out of control, the more it made sense.

I still do not think that a republic makes sense in a new or small club. A capable, egalitarian king makes more sense. After all, if the club is not yet established, or if it only has 30 or 40 members, all you need is one leader and one voice making decisions. If you have several people in charge, it creates unnecessary confusion. Even in large clubs - and real life republics for that matter - you still need one leader, one president.

Scott was always vague about the details of his republic. He said the idea came from his old sim club on e-world (Apple's attempt to run an online service), and he proposed various ideas for what the republic should involve - a council of COs and XOs, Co-presidents to check each others power, and a court system like had been used in the Ben trial - but he never wrote any specifics about exactly how the council would be run, what powers people would have, and so forth. Regardless, the ideas he did present were too excessive to be helpful to a sim club, so I opposed them.

I also opposed the timing of the republic. Scott wanted one to be established right away, but I did not think that was a good idea either. As I went around saying, "The colonists did not show up and write the constitution and establish the United States right away." It was my way of simply explaining in a metaphorical sense that the club was too young. We needed to develop and grow. (Of course, I fear that sometimes people think I was actually comparing the club to the United States and thus people think I'm a little crazy.)

My opposition on these two fronts, and the general personality conflicts between Scott and myself, caused us to constantly clash. Things became even worse as Scott's vision for a court system became very harsh and I opposed him on that front as well.

However, I was not against the idea of a republic outright. Carefully crafted and utilized in a club as unique as Trek Online - where we were building an open and free community - made perfect sense to me. If we were going to make a community, why not allow it to govern itself? A republic is not the answer for every club, and it was not the answer for TOL for a while. But when the club was ready, when it grew to a point that one person simply could not run it all and something was needed - we established a republic, as will be discussed in later parts of this memoir.

Plus, I honestly do not think Trek Online would have survived for as long as it did without the republic. 1997 saw the initial conflicts of a community trying to assert power over its destiny. Had we continued in 1998 and 1999 with an open community and with captains having large control over their sims - but with myself or anyone else set up at the top as a king or dictator - it simply would not have worked. Sooner or later, someone would have revolted. That is what happened in 2003. By that time, history had come full circle and the club had abandoned the republic but kept the open community. With no recourse to Penny - that incompetent president - a revolt occurred.

Yes, there are things I would have changed about the republic we eventually developed. We did not need a court system or trials - they only caused more problems then they solved. Allowing the captains to make disciplinary decisions and having a judicial review - not a full trial - would have been far better. In addition, I would have never abolished Assembly elections. The balance between captains and elected club members was vital to the success of the Assembly. Without it, the Assembly became dominated by dead wood and ineffective captains past their prime that no one could get rid of. But aside from that, the revolutionary idea of a republic served Trek Online well. Scott's dream filled in the gaps that Chip and myself had not accounted for.

# My Simming Memoirs

## Part 3: Hope



Battle between Heraclius and Chosroes by Piero della Francesca

### Chapter 11: Revolution

*Scott: "I love debate."*

*Chas: "So do I." - IM, December 14, 1996*

Fruck is one of those Trek Online cultural concepts created by Chip. For as much I have become over the years something of a philosopher about sim government and organization,

Chip really was a genius when it came to simming culture and club community. I don't know if it was calculated or just an extension of his personality, but because of him, Trek Online developed a cultural alter ego of smite buttons, MIBs, a city named Trekonlina and so forth. I know other clubs have copied our cultural alter ego, but I really do not know of any other club which has been able to tie its sims, history, and community all together into a simulated culture outside of the sims which is just as rich and dynamic as the sims. It was luck, or fate, that brought together Chip and myself. In a time when people wanted to make club wide communities, I had the skills to invent a new organization that allowed clubs to grow beyond their traditional role as simple containers for sims, and Chip had the skills to infuse the club with a spirit and cultural energy.

Fruck was envisioned by Chip as a God forsaken place, rumored to be somewhere near North Korea, where those who were punted offline or went absent without leave ended up. It was also a place where generally bad and evil things originated from. In other words - Trek Online's mythological underworld.

The year 1997, which for economic reasons started in December of 1996, truly was the year from Fruck for the simming world because the year 1997 marks the death of the old simming order and the premature death of the lost generation.

In December of 1996, AOL switched its billing policies to allow its members to spend an unlimited amount of time online. When this went into effect for a particular person depended on when they first signed up for AOL. If they signed up on the 1st day of a month, their billing period always start on the 1st of every month, so that person received unlimited usage on December 1st. Unfortunately for my, my billing period started sometime during the last week of the month, so for me, unlimited usage did not begin until almost 1997.

As a result of unlimited billing, the USG quickly experienced what just about every other club of the time faced - evolution at work - adapt or become extinct. Leaders began to spend more time online, a lot more. They talked, a lot. They got to know each other, debated club policy, and put forward their own ideas. People very quickly realized that because economics had never allowed for discussion or the development of a club community, everyone in the club had a vastly different impression of it. Often what a person had felt for so many years to be the true purpose of the club, the proper direction of the club, or their official position with in it, was completely wrong. Even worse was when the leader of the club found out people were not doing things as he or she had expected all those years. The USG may have been spared this problem had Chip and myself remained the soul leaders. But the merger brought Scott into the mix, and we quickly realized we had different ideas about what the merger meant. With only 5 or 20 hours, we may not have had enough time to debate it to a point where it became a problem, but with unlimited, we were always online, and always yelling at each other.

At the same time, there were larger forces at work than just clashes of personalities. The economics of the past had kept everyone apart. It created a ridged, static and bureaucratic simming world. Now, everyone who had been bubbling with an idea could give it a try. People



wanted more control over their characters, they wanted to design a ship, they wanted to be promoted faster, they wanted to start their own sim, they wanted to be the sim master for a night, they wanted a better club newsletter, they wanted a weekly trivia session, heck - they wanted to join a second sim in the same club.<sup>30</sup> What happened in 1997 was a clash of ideas over how to reform the simming system. The economics which had kept the old static system propped up for so many years vanished overnight, and chaos swept the simming world as Trek clubs everywhere had to struggle with new demands.

The speed at which the old, apparently rigid and stable system collapsed was astounding. In January of 1997, the UFP/SF fought a civil war. In March, STS broke apart. At the same time, the FSF was rocked by massive turmoil, split apart and died, only to be reestablished by Shuni in its present form. The ASG began to experience a rapid decline as its massive bureaucracy proved extremely slow in adapting to the changing landscape of the simming world. The USF sim USS Potemkin almost experienced a mutiny.<sup>31</sup>

Many more clubs were simply destroyed by internal revolution or failed leadership. When it was all over, the old simming order had been swept aside. Most of the old clubs were dead or mortally wounded, and a new generation of clubs were emerging. The chaos of 1997 completely altered the simming landscape, not just in club organization, but in simming style. Clubs had kept alive a certain simming style and traditions. With the old clubs gone, the old way of simming was gone. Even though the same language of ::: for actions and abbreviations of CO meaning Commanding Officer are still used, the substance of the sims today are drastically different from what they were before 1997. Even though I have tried as best as I can to describe the simming world prior to this era, it truly is impossible to understand that world unless you were there because the simming world we now inhabit is almost completely different from all that came before 1997. It is almost impossible to overstate the importance of 1997.

For those few clubs and leaders who were lucky enough to survive their own internal struggles, unlimited online usage eventually proved to be a boon to their clubs and simming in general. People could now afford to join as many clubs and sims as they wanted. People who knew about simming or had dabbled in it before, but decided in the end not to join a sim or had to leave a sim due to economic reasons returned. The overall simming population swelled and it became easy to recruit and find new members.

At the same time, all of the support mechanisms of the previous generation were still in place. The internet was just starting to get going, so to go online, people still had to use an online service, and most online services had forums dedicated to simming. This caused all of the simmers to cluster together in one place, making it easy to go and find recruits.

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<sup>30</sup> For a time, STS prohibited its members from joining a second sim; as all sim plots had to be approved by Trekker and TrekGuru, they often recycled plots among ships. They didn't want anyone to sim the same story twice.

<sup>31</sup> The near mutiny was sparked because its old CO, Captain Putty, wanted to return to command the ship. But in this case, the crew supported the new CO, Captain Sierra, and threatened to mutiny and leave the club if Putty was brought back. Needless to say, Captain Sierra remained in command.

Trek Online, and several other clubs, were able to survive the dark days in the first half of 1997 because of that demographic fact. While I and the other leaders of the club, along a few dedicated members who stuck it out during the Civil War and following wars with Ben, Uridien and the FFSC, did everything in our power and worked very hard to save the club, we simply could not have done it without the demographic change that caused a huge amount of simmers to be available at central locations on AOL for easy recruiting. This, however, should not diminish the fact that we managed to make it through 1997, for many clubs did not. Had key decisions not been made, had key leaders such as myself and others not been in place, TOL would have died in 1997 and been forgotten just like all of the rest, regardless of the tremendous increase in simming population.

But in other places, unlimited destroyed simming and did not provide people to replace it. Online services like Prodigy and CompuServe could not compete with AOL and its unlimited plans. Prodigy did go unlimited around the same time AOL had, but its service was slow, old and text based. AOL was new and had fancy graphics. CompuServe, on the other hand, did not switch to unlimited for many months, and as a result it was clobbered by AOL. The simming worlds on both of those online services were devastated by the massive population loss as people moved to AOL.

In addition, many non-Trek forms of simming, especially Star Wars simming, which had increasingly become bulletin board based during the mid 1990s, began to die out during this era. Bulletin boards were ideal when people had a limited amount of time online. They could sign on whenever they wanted, download the posts, sim by replying, and conserve their precious online time. But the new unlimited world favored chats - and bulletin board sims were just too slow.<sup>32</sup>

## Chapter 12: Trouble A Brewing

*"Forum Ally is a funny kind of guy. You see he tried to get rid of Kris (Scott), and replace him with CaptPLynch" - Uridien, December 31, 1996, explaining his basic goals.*

The problems that the USG, later TOL, would experience during 1997 were two fold. First, there was the structural flaw that developed from the merger. Scott viewed himself to be a second Vice President of the club. As a result, Scott would listen to Chip, but he would not listen to me, yet most of the club members would listen to me and not Scott.

Secondly, there was Ben, Uridien and the forum idea that just would not die. As you will recall, the original captain of the Independence had been suspended by AOL for a few weeks in December of 1996. Ben and Uridien, who were crew members of the Independence and who liked Pat, but not Scott - the new captain - started to plot. As a result, in mid December, when Pat's AOL suspension was lifted and he returned to AOL, Scott received his first E-mail from someone named Forum Ally.

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<sup>32</sup> How times have changed; when online services were replaced by the internet, chatting was no longer a thing, and message board based sims became the most popular.

According to this brand new Forum Ally, I had supposedly betrayed the forum by convincing Chip to give up work on it and punish Ben for his behavior. Even worse, Scott had abandoned the forum as well, usurped Pat's position as the captain, and had sold the Independence out to Chip and myself by merging it into our club as soon as Pat was suspended. Forum Ally wanted Scott out of power, wanted Pat to return as the Captain, and wanted to revive the idea of a new simming forum.

Of course, all of this was news to me. Actually, I wasn't even aware of all of the ideological dimensions and Ben's lies till many months after the fact. No one let me in on such things, so while the USG and Trek Online was soon to find itself engaged in one war after another for many months, I had no idea why we were being attacked, and why I was personally being attacked. All I knew at the time was that I was being attacked and I had to fight back.

Just before Christmas, Scott informed me that a person named Forum Ally was causing a little trouble on the Independence. Why this person was causing trouble? Scott did not tell me, but he assured me it was a minor problem and it was being taken care of.

For me personally, most of December 1996 was rather uneventful as far as simming was concerned. Chip was supposedly handling most of the details of the merger, and he would occasionally tell me to E-mail Scott the club guidebook and tell him how things operated. I naturally sent all of the requested info, and Scott would cheerfully thank me for it. Towards the end of the month, however, I started to realize that Scott was not passing the info along to his crew members, and was not doing what was required of him as a captain - such as sending out logs, letting Chip and myself know how the sim went, and so on.

Then, on December 22, Scott informed me that someone named Forum Ally had been going around causing problems. We were not sure who Forum Ally was, but I figured he or she was someone from the Independence or Freedom crew who was upset with the merger, and that Forum Ally was just some petty troublemaker who wanted power or to have a little fun.

There perhaps could have been hope for a golden future in the USG had Scott and I been able to work together on the investigation. It would have built trust and a relationship between us which would have allowed us to tackle the questions of how to run and organize the club. Unfortunately, around the same time, Pat E-mailed Chip, Scott, and myself, telling us that he had returned and would like his ship back. I had always been told by Scott that Pat had abandoned his crew and that Scott had assumed command with the full support of his crew. Now, Pat had returned saying that was not the case and at least one crew member, disguised as Forum Ally, was going around saying he did not support Scott. So when Pat E-mailed us, I replied to the effect that I think we should give Pat his ship back. This clearly did not go over well with Scott, and if anything it sealed my fate with him. On top of that, Scott began to suspect that I was Forum Ally, because I, like Forum Ally, wanted Pat to return. But in my case, it was just simple fairness. It was Pat's ship, he should get it back. However, Chip ruled that Pat had abandoned his crew and thus would not get back command of the Independence, so I let the issue drop and Pat quietly disappeared to start up a new ship elsewhere. Forum Ally and Scott, however, continued to fight it out behind the scenes. Forum Ally would harass Scott, and Scott became increasingly paranoid.



Immediately there after I left for a Christmas/New Years vacation. While I was away, Chip and Scott conducted an investigation and discovered that Forum Ally was Uridien. There was ample evidence to prove it, and Uridien confessed that he was Forum Ally, but he later withdrew his confession. Chip and Scott promptly kicked Uridien out of the club and that was the end of that, or so it seemed. However, when I returned and I found out what had happened, my sense of fairness kicked in (or maybe it was my sense of hypocrisy). I argued that Uridien should be given a trial. After all, Scott forced me to hold a trial for Ben, so now I would force Scott to hold a trial for Uridien. This only enraged Scott, and it became quite understandable why there after he would fight me and oppose me at every turn.

On January 4, 1997, a trial was held. Forum Ally was charged with attempting to disrupt the activities of the club, insubordination, conspiracy, and sending of threatening E-mails. Scott acted as the prosecution and it was up to him to prove that Uridien was Forum Ally. Dan, one of Ben's old forum leaders, but who had never taken part in any of Ben's or Uridien's trouble making, acted as Uridien's defense.

At the trial, I was the judge and several club members were selected to be the jury. The trial opened smoothly enough, but about a half an hour into it, Scott was punted offline. We waited and waited. I finally ruled to suspend the trial for the night and declared that until the trial was over, Uridien was free to continue to sim on the Independence. When Scott returned, he claimed his computer had been infected by a virus and implied that Uridien had sent the virus. Never mind the fact that Scott had a Mac and Macintosh viruses are exceptionally rare. Uridien, however, decided to not show his face at any more sims. While on his Uridien name, he continued to plead his innocence and victimhood, but on his Forum Ally name, he continued to harass Scott.<sup>33</sup> At the time, Scott did not tell Chip or myself that the problems with Forum Ally were continuing, so as far as I knew the entire Forum Ally business was over.

While under constant personal attack in IMs and E-mails from Forum Ally - this was before screen names could be blocked on your buddy list - Scott pretty much shut down. He began to lash out at me. As January progressed, it became evident to Chip that Scott was not cooperating with his orders and that the merger was not working. The Independence had not been integrated into the club and Scott was not working out as a captain. It was also clear that the strain was causing the entire club to suffer. The USG was not functioning and we were losing members. A number of E-mails began to fly back and forth between all of the captains calling for various proposals to stabilize the situation. At first it was an exchange of ideas, but it quickly grew into a massive ideological dispute between Chip, Scott and myself. Amazingly enough, I never once thought that maybe we should fire Scott and Chip never discussed the possibility with me. We both thought we needed the Independence, its members, and its simming academy, and we both thought we could reach some agreement with Scott.

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<sup>33</sup> If only AOL had a feature in those days to block someone from contacting you... it's amazing how many problems we had to suffer through in 1997 evaporated with simple technological tweaks.

Scott, paranoid about Forum Ally, was the hardliner. He did not care about club structure, club integration, or club community. He just wanted more rules and more discipline to keep people in check. Chip and myself were against this - it went against our very simming nature and the purpose of the club. As far as Chip was concerned, the problem the club experienced was a result of bad simming content. He wanted to focus on improving the quality of our sims. I wanted us to focus on organizational reforms. At the time, and during all of my career, the bottom line for me was the organizational foundation upon which the club was built. I argued as long as all of the captains followed the same set of procedures, carried out the same basic administrative tasks, made sure their sims ran on time, and as long as communication and club participation was insured, everything else - including the generation of high quality simming content - would take care of itself.

In regards to these points, I had problems with both Chip and Scott. I clearly had the larger issue with Scott because he was not carrying out anything we had asked him to do, and on top of that Scott was undertaking his own projects and giving his own orders to captains and club members without consulting Chip. At a minimum, Chip and I wanted Scott to send out a weekly log, to send us a copy of his sim transcript, to send an attendance report, and to forward to his crew important club E-mails - but he wasn't even doing this. Matters were made even worse because Scott was running our simming academy. If people were not being trained how Chip and I wanted them to be trained, than well, new simmers quickly became lost when they joined the *Generation*, *Vindicator* or *Endeavor*. This all produced a situation where club members were becoming frustrated and leaving the club because every leader they talked to would give them a different answer.

Luckily, when it came to the future of the club Chip and I were generally on the same page, even though we did have our differences on club structure and organizational reforms. Sim Masters were the biggest point of contention between us because Chip had never simmed with a Sim Master. In the tradition he was used to, the sim kind of happened. Crew members just made things up as they went along and the captain would sometimes dictate the outcome of events or throw new problems into the mix for the crew to solve. I, on the other hand, liked the Sim Master style used in STS. Having one crew member step out of the sim for the night and play God, dictating the outcome of events, and playing the computer to give us info, made things much more exciting, interesting and challenging for me. It was boring as the captain to know what was going to happen and be able to determine the outcome of events.

As a result, a cultural split began to develop in the club between the *Vindicator* and *Endeavor*, which used Sim Masters, and the *Generation*, which did not. Simmers from those two different cultures in the club did not interact or attend each others sims, and I was worried it would divide the club. Since the point of making this club was to have a united sim community, this was a big deal for everyone. Fortunately, over time, the simmers themselves did begin to mingle and eventually learned both systems and could sim with ease if there was or was not a Sim Master present. But at the time in January of 1997, the divide was very real, and on top of it, the *Independence* added a further divide. The ideological and real power dispute that was unfolding between Chip, Scott and myself over how to unite the club was soon to explode into war... well at least we called it a war to make it sound important.

## Chapter 13: The Civil War

*"All the ships are fine, but when you put them together....poof everything goes wrong." - Chip Rollins at the Battle of Stonewall, summing up all of our problems. January 19, 1997.*

After a few weeks of intense debate between Chip, Scott and myself, with Josh and Fox (the captain of the USS Freedom, the old Sunday Independence sim) also occasionally becoming involved, things were not looking good for the club on the morning of January 19, 1997, a Sunday.

The United Sim Group did not exist in reality, it existed only in name and title. There was absolutely no communication between any of its leaders, nor was there any organization to speak of. In fact, we had no idea who was even in the club! Every single sim was different. The Vindicator sim was 180 degrees separate from the Generation. The Independence and Freedom sims were no where near the Vindicator or Generation sims to start with. The three separate divisions (Vindicator/Endeavor; Generation; Independence/Freedom) acted like three separate clubs. To make matters worse, the few bits of organization and rules we had created for the UFP/SF had gone out of the window since no one was following them anymore. The only reason the Generation and Vindicator managed to sim was because Chip and I were good captains and we pretty much recruited and trained our own crews by this point in time. In addition, any discussion of adding non-Trek sims to the club had disappeared because we could not get the Trek sims to work out. We all had big dreams for the club, but we needed to have an actual club in the first place.

These issues simply were not the problems of a new club finding its way. Had this been 1994 or 1995, where every sim was isolated, none of this really would have mattered. But the demands were such now that people could move about the club, so we had to make sure things were coordinated. Every club in 1997 faced these same problems, and most were not able to develop an answer. And, these issues simply were not some abstract thing that only effected leaders. Because of the chaos and confusion, people were leaving the club.

To make matters worse, Chip suddenly began to find himself busy with real life, so he did not have as much time to dedicate to the club, and this could not have happened at a worse time because the club desperately needed a leader. Scott was off learning how to become an AOL host in order to gain the power to discipline people more effectively, so his line of thinking was pretty much one-dimensional. Thus, by the middle of January, I felt I was the only one who was trying to do any real work to save the club, and I sensed that maybe I was the only one who had any contact with the members and realized how fed up people were becoming and how close the club was to collapsing.

I would propose idea after idea, Chip would say it was great but he would never follow up on it because he did not have the time to. Scott would just shoot it down with out proposing a counter idea of his own. No one seemed willing to budge or compromise, and there was no leadership from Chip to force the club to work together.

In the days before January 19, things started to reach a head. Chip had become so fed up that he actually proposed that we just all give up trying to make a club and have each sim join an already established club. I too had become so fed up that I was willing to disband or break up the club. Scott, luckily enough, was against breaking up the club.

On January 19, 1997, I signed on and found Chip and Scott in a private chat room named Stonewall<sup>34</sup> with a few club members. Before I arrived Scott had been busy giving Chip a pep talk to cheer him up and convince him not to disband the club. In this regard, Scott deserves much credit. For whatever reason, Scott was the one who wanted to keep the club united.

By the time I arrived, people there had begun to talk about the future of the club, and proposed ideas on how to fix the USG. I was called into the room, and seeing the nature of the chat, I decided to propose my own idea for splitting the club up into two different divisions. The idea did not go over very well (and how we would have ever managed to run a sim group is beyond me). Scott and Dan (of Uridien fame) were the most vocal critics. They accused me of wanting to divide the club - which I did want to do, but not in the sense they thought. I still wanted there to be one club, just two parts, like how most clubs today have individual fleets within them. I tried to argue that my plan would make things far more organized and convenient for the club, but luckily my arguments failed to convince.

The quick return to bickering between Scott and myself caused Chip to sink back into his unhappy rut. He began to talk about taking the Generation out of the club and having it join the ASG - the sim club he came from. Then, out of the blue, Chip said, "The thing is...I'm getting tired of running a group. I'm not experienced enough to do this."

In frustration, and unable to speak properly due to it, I followed by saying, "Look me and Chip have just about had it with this club here, we can't talk about we won't be organized because we aren't already. I'll take the Vindicator and go start up my own club if I have to, this is getting way out of hand. I'm just plain tired of signing on and getting E-mails about this problem or that problem. I'm tired of this not getting anywhere. I'm tired of us just talking and talking and than we all resolve that we will do something and than in two days its back to the old ways of us all fighting. I'm tired of constant fighting. I'm tired of constant arguing over trivial problems. I'm just getting tired of all of this, I'm just about to drop it all and start over."

Scott accused me of changing the entire mood of the room when I arrived. Before I was there, the mood was a lets work this out kind of mood. I showed up with the same intention, and had been struggling for weeks to work things out, but the rifts were already there, so when I announced my plan, which did break the club up into different sections, the rifts appeared and Scott freaked. After that, I said some things that had to be said, and that did change the mood of the room. But everyone felt that way, and I had to speak the truth. Everyone knew the club had no direction and that we were just arguing over and over about

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<sup>34</sup> Somehow during the early months the private room Stonewall became our meeting room - who came up with the name I have no idea.

the same points and never making any progress. Had I not revealed my frustrations, had we maybe worked out some kind of plan, the fractures between Chip, Scott and myself still would have been there, and the next time some problem arose a few days later, we would be right back to where we started.<sup>35</sup>

Chip quickly echoed my sentiments by saying, "Let me put this short and sweet. Chas and I are tired of going through this, we aren't having fun, at all. We come online and get bombarded with IMs. We come online and listen to everyone complain about someone each day. We can't do this anymore." Chip then hit the nail right on the head when he said, "All the ships are fine, but when you put them together....poof everything goes wrong."

Scott called for suspending all of the sims until we agreed on a reform plan, but I successfully argued against that. From Prodigy I knew that if you stopped simming, it would be hard to get a club started back up. Scott countered by insulting my sim, which to this day still makes my blood boil when I read the transcript of the meeting. I was very proud of my crew, and I looked out for my crew and I did not take it lightly when someone insulted them. All during this time, I had been IMing Chip to figure out what to do, and Scott's comments pushed me over the edge. I decided to stop trying. A minute later Chip announced our decision.

"I'm sorry to tell you all this but we have decided to let the ships go off in their own ways. We feel that this is the best way to handle this."

With that declaration, the real battle began. For the most part, everyone had been civil, even if the debates and confrontations we had were frustrating. Now, the insults began to fly. Scott compared Chip's decision to sucking the brains out of an unborn baby. Dan insulted Chip as a man. Scott started to have a nervous breakdown and could no longer spell. I was insulted as someone who was just trying to destroy the club. Chip snapped back by defending me, and I offered to not sign online for a week to allow Chip and Scott to work things out without me.

But then things suddenly turned again. Scott still refused to let the club as a united force die, so he staked claim to the club and said he would run it. Well, I was not going to let Scott run the club, so I vowed to stay. With both of us deciding to stay, Chip decided he would stay too, but not as the President, just as the captain of the *Generation*. With that, the battle began to wind down and Scott and I decided to meet in separate private room to try reach some kind of agreement over how we were going to work together and keep the club alive.

In a private room named Peace Talks we agreed that I would become the President of the club and Scott would become the Vice President. I did not want to make Scott my Vice

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<sup>35</sup> I see this all too often in sim clubs and in real life. People are more than happy to blissfully ignore problems until it is too late instead of just confronting them, working through them, and moving on. Debate is not bad. It is a good and healthy thing - but people see it as a bad thing because they ignore and ignore and ignore and do not debate until it is too late.

President, but given the situation I had no choice. I figured I needed to extend an olive branch to him in order to keep the club united. I also told Scott about my club on Prodigy, Trek Online, and we agreed to merge the two clubs together, to rename the USG and make it TOL, and to use the guidebooks and organization I had come up with for Prodigy for the club on AOL as a basis to give the club some kind of foundation to hold it together. With that, we went our separate ways for the day and agreed to talk again the next morning, which was the MLK Jr day holiday. Being a holiday, we both had the day off, so we were free to talk and work on club matters. After months of fighting with Ben and Uridien and ourselves, there was a glimmer of hope for the future. However my sense of impending doom was still with me.

Unfortunately, my new found relationship with Scott did not last very long. Aside from our vastly different ideas about how to run the club, our personalities were ones that always seemed to clashing. After many months and years, we figured out how to get along - but it took a tremendous amount of effort on both of our parts to understand each other.

I wanted the club to have one strong leader. I felt this was necessary to give the club some direction and to get it back on its feet. I also felt that a new guidebook which combined the best aspects of the AOL and Prodigy club - something that I wrote up very quickly in the wake of the battle - needed to be enforced by the captains. We needed some objective statement of reality and how the club was organized.

Scott, however, started to talk about wanting a republic. He did not want a strong leader in part because he did not want me to have too much power over the Independence, and in part because he believed that everyone should have a voice. I was not against a republic, but I did not think the club was strong enough for a republic at that time. A republic would only cause a number of voices to appear - and that was exactly the problem with the USG - we had too many people trying to be in charge at once.

Scott also quickly turned against the idea of using items and ideas from Prodigy, fearing that simming on Prodigy was somehow different from simming on AOL. In addition, Scott constantly attempted to create a harsh discipline system for the club. I have always believed that a sim was just for fun and entertainment, but Scott wanted to write a bunch of rules and give out harsh punishments for violating them. Scott even proposed a system where people would join the club with demerits already assigned to them. With good behavior and time a person could prove their worth and have their demerits erased. This idea was just totally outrageous to me, to punish people before they did anything wrong? Who would join a club that gave them demerits for joining!?

As I had done in August, I worked quickly and within a few days I had completed work on a new comprehensive guidebook, sent out a lot of emails to captains and club members to let them know what was going on and to try to get everyone on the same page. I also drafted a constitution that accommodated some of Scott's ideas for turning the club into a republic, and I took some discipline actions against a few troublemakers to show Scott I was willing to at least listen to his concerns about discipline. However, Scott was unwilling to

compromise. He did not like my constitution and my new guidebook because it did not have everything he wanted. With that, I finally lost all of my patience.

Any real pretense of working together disappeared and the fighting went public. The civil war (as we called it) went into full force as E-mails flew back and forth across the club, and violent debates erupted at the end of each sim. By January 30th, things had grown particularly nasty and personal between Scott and myself. After a Vindicator sim that night, in full view of the public, everything came out. Scott said he did not need my dictatorship. I told Scott to shut up and let me run the club. Scott told me to leave for a month and let him fix things. I told him that I was the President, that it was my job to run the club and that he should stand down or quit the club. The next day, our arguments spilled over into E-mails that were address to many club members. I tried to once again spell out my position, my vision, and my simming experiences as justification to why I felt the way I did. Scott replied and rejected everything out of hand. He began to preach to me that my problem was that I did not put Jesus first.

Club members tried to step forward to broker a solution, even though the entire situation had become laughable and ridiculous. Scott clearly was not going to budge, and the fighting was causing even more people to leave the club. I did not want to see the club die, so I decided to resign. It was really the only choice I had available. I could have stayed, the fighting would have continued and the club would have died. I could have fired Scott, but if he refused to go I would have lost all credibility as a leader and if he did go, I figured he would have taken half of the club with him, which would have defeated the purpose of keeping the club united.

So, on January 31, 1997, I E-mailed a little speech to the club saying that I was resigning. Scott followed by E-mailing his inaugural address - if it can be called that - to the club. In his speech, Scott announced that he was going to make Jim B., Ben's brother, his Vice President. Amazingly enough, Ben's brother was not a troublemaker, but he was just a junior officer in the club and had done nothing to warrant being made Vice President. But that was just the beginning. Scott's speech got better. Scott called for the creation of a command board to make decisions for the club - which was a good idea - but he also enforced his discipline plan and gave everyone in the club 5 demerits. Demerits were to be removed through good service and by accumulating 'helping points.'

Scott's speech went over well - the people rose up and threw him out of office. Within hours of my resignation, Chip and the entire crew of the Generation, Josh and the entire crew of the Endeavor, my crew of the Vindicator, and many crew members from the Independence and Freedom were flocking to me, publicly pledging their support and saying that they did not want Scott as their President and that they would follow me to start up a new club.

When I resigned I had figured that maybe some people from the Vindicator would follow me, but I really did not have any plans or idea what to do next, and I did not expect the tremendous public outcry.

Scott, worried that he would be virtually tarred and feathered by the online mob, quickly agreed to step aside as the President, to let me return as the President, to renounce all claims to power and leave the club. I was very generous, however. I allowed Scott to stay on as a Vice Admiral, CO of the Independence, and chief of the Academy. However, he was no longer going to be my Vice President. Perhaps I am too nice. I suspect anyone else would have accepted his resignation, and my life would have been far easier had Scott gone away. But I wanted to show that I was dedicated to unity, and I wanted to use this example to show that I was open to debate and the harshest criticisms.

On February 1, I announced my triumphal return to the club, or what was left of it. The weeks of fighting and bickering known as the TOL Civil War had almost destroyed us. When it was all said and done, there were only 16 people left supporting 5 sims. In December we had about 40 club members. The club was demoralized. The club's organization was a mess. And to top it all off, Ben and Uridien were still looming out there. No one, not even I, thought that the club was going to survive, but I was determined to do everything in my power to give it a fighting chance, so I got to work.

#### Chapter 14: February

*"AdmChasTOL sucks and is a dirty no good (censored) freak, he sucks and should be kicked off AOL his sim sucks too!!!!!! Don't speak to him cause he is mean and will kick you out of TOL!!!!!! So don't join his sim group!!!!!!!!!!" - Ben, in an E-mail he sent to a club member who was just 11 years old. February 20, 1997.*

February was a very tense month, but luckily Ben and Uridien did not launch an outright attack – they probably figured we would destroy ourselves soon enough. Had they attacked in February, it likely would have destroyed the club. However, they did continue to cause headaches. Ben took the petty route, comparing me to Hitler and circulating E-mails to damage my and TOL's reputation. Uridien took a more sophisticated route, continuing his campaign from his Forum Ally name to harass Scott, and attempting to deflate the bit of hope in the club by going around making statements like, despite the new name Trek Online, the club still had all of the same old problems. Forum Ally also began to personally contact me, and tried to convince me to give him some position of power in the club as a First Officer and to get rid of Scott. I suppose Ben and Uridien had little better to do than bug us.

One of the first things I did in February was to suspend Ben from the club for one year. (His previous suspension – given by Chip – only applied to the Vindicator and Generation and was contingent on his completing the academy.) My logic was that it had been two months and Tim had not yet graduated from the academy – he had failed to uphold his side of the deal. Little did I know that Tim had also copied the USG's guidebook, without permission, and republished for a club he had attempted to start in December – the United Sci-Fi Sim Group, or USSG (sound familiar?). Luckily, Ben's members quickly grew sick of him and quit.

Because Ben and Uridien give us a bit of breathing room, the biggest problems TOL faced in February were internal. Scott did have some good ideas about making TOL into a republic,



so I worked to write a constitution for the club. I tried to incorporate Scott's ideas of having a council of COs and XOs, and Chip's idea of having an Assembly of club members that met once a month, but unfortunately, my draft constitution almost caused the Civil War to erupt again. As soon as Scott saw it, he did not like it because it did not follow his ideas word for word.

With tensions once again rising, Chip threatened to resign, so both Scott and myself decided to back down. Thus, the idea of having a constitution and making the club a republic was put on the back burner. However, I realized the value of giving the captains and first officers a say in club affairs, so I was always sure to get their advise and have them unofficially vote on certain key items - a kind of defacto republic until it finally became safe in 1998 to have a formal republic.

But Chip was great. I personally think he was relieved that he no longer had to serve as the president, and he never once expressed or hinted at any animosity towards Scott, myself, or anyone else. He just wanted us to all act nice. Nor did Chip ever once try to assert himself into club affairs, give orders or try to cling onto power. He simply went back to being a captain, helped out where he could, and was always available to give me advice and to be someone who I could trust and vent to. He was TOLs greatest ex-president and without him, I do not think the club would have survived.

So how exactly did we all manage to save TOL, often despite of ourselves? Well - having Chip around to help us aside - my simple theories about sim club organization proved to be true. I felt that if you communicated with your members, you would see great benefits. I cracked down and enforced the rule that all of the captains needed to write ships logs and report their attendance to each other. I personally tried to contact every club member, talk to them, hear their concerns and explain my position, and I also sent mass E-mails to the club to let them know what was going on. The club's newsletter, renamed the Trek Online Times<sup>36</sup>, was expanded to provide more info about the club and some humor to lighten the mood.

The club guidebook, rewritten as I wanted it to be - unencumbered by compromises between Chip's and Scott's visions - not only gave the club a clear organizational foundation, it also conveyed to everyone who exactly we were, how exactly we were going to sim and conduct our business, and what rules people were expected to follow. Overnight all of the confusion between conflicting systems was cleared up and the club was given a reality - a document of words in a world that exists only in words. Plus, the fact that I was now the sole ruler, that everyone came to me and me only for questions and orders helped immensely. No more conflicting orders from both Scott and myself. And with my orders I made sure to work closely with the captains to give them clear advise and direction and get their impute so everyone was happy with the direction of the club.

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<sup>36</sup> The name TOL Times was inspired by Josh, who in January had sent me an E-mail entitled Simming Times in which he gave me a list of times for a proposed sim he wanted to start up. I really liked the title of that E-mail and named the newsletter the TOL Times as a result.

Changing the name of the club on AOL to Trek Online gave the club a clean break with the past and a new sense of purpose, even though Uridien tried to argue otherwise.

I also worked to promote a sense of community in the club by holding a club wide sim during late February. I also launched a recruiting contest, which promised top recruiters big rewards and promotions for getting people to join the club.

Somehow through all of this hard work the club managed to right itself. Our spirits lifted. People began to enjoy simming again and started to talk to their fellow club members as friends when just weeks before they were following Scott and myself in trading insults. (Chip's Spam Poem helped to lift everyone's spirits.) People from the club on Prodigy joined AOL, and people from AOL, including Scott, joined Prodigy (I think his joining Prodigy and seeing first hand that simming was not vastly different ended Scott's resistance to my plans to bring TOL to AOL). The recruiting contest helped to bring precious new members into the club, including 3 people, Lara, Kyle and Nuvok, who were recruited by a Vindicator crew member named Shadow. All 3 joined the Endeavor and as a result, the Endeavor found itself with enough crew members to continue simming. Had it continued to function much longer with only 3 or so people showing up every week, I would have canceled it. Trek Online was very close to shrinking back to having just a few sims on AOL, and that probably would have taken the club down a completely different historical path. For their own part, the three Endeavor recruits all rose to high ranks with in Trek Online. Lara became a Captain, Kyle became a Vice President, and Nuvok became a distinguished simmer.

By the end of February, things were starting to look a little better in the club. Once again there was a glimmer of hope for the future - enough to at least keep me going and think that someday all of my hard work would pay off and that Trek Online would become a great club. Everyone was finally on the same page and the club seemed to be organized. People like Chip, Kyrin (the new CO of the Endeavor), Jace (remember her? The friend of Josh, who was a friend of Uridien), and Wormella (Chip's new first officer) took it upon themselves to work to cheer up the club, to overpower the ill rumors spread by Ben and Uridien, and to get beyond the scars of the Civil War. These actions, slow and cautious at first, grew into a unique sense of community and purpose. The little kind words, cards to club members, and sharing of inside jokes would slowly grow into TOL's unique culture.

## **Chapter 15: Freedom**

*"You threatened me! I HATE that! Now I'm going to pay you back." - Uridien, March 17, 1997.*

I always laugh at today's leaders who say they have never fought a sim club war and cannot understand how or why one would occur. Today, with all of AOL's and the internet's useful blocking features, trouble makers can easily be controlled. In 1997, however, these features did not exist. The few blocking features that did exist, such as ignoring a person in a chat room, would stop working as soon as the person you were blocking left and reentered the room. Plus modems were slow, so if your sim was raided and flooded by a bunch of people quickly entering and exiting and reentering the room typing nonsense onto the screens, your

computer would slow down and sometimes crash, making it very difficult to carry on with the sim. Things were even more difficult when you were dealing with enemies like Ben and Uridien who possessed intimate knowledge of the club.

But raids on sims were just one of the tactics employed against Trek Online during the first months of 1997. There was also psychological warfare by Ben and Uridien - getting club members to provide them with information, spreading rumors and lies, and IMing Scott and myself whenever they could to just bug us and distract us while we attempted to work on saving the club. We could have turned our IMs off (there were no individual screen name blocking features at the time), but that would have blocked our IMs from everyone, and thus, we would have been unable to talk to people we needed to talk to. We could let them IM us and try to ignore them, but with many windows open and the way AOL IMs worked back then, we would have to stop what we were doing each time we heard an IM sound to check if it was them or someone we needed to talk to.

How closely Ben and Uridien worked together I do not know. They clearly had a common interest in starting a forum and possessed a common hatred towards Scott and myself. I'm sure that they shared news, tactics and ideas, but beyond that, I do not know. What is clear is that by the end of February, both Ben and Uridien were not very happy. The members of Ben's brand new club had quit, and Uridien did not like the fact that I was still working with Scott, so the Forum Ally moniker was still out there bugging both of us.

Ben learned that on March 9, Captain Fox was going to retire from simming and that as a result, her ship, the USS Freedom, was going to be disbanded due to lack of crewmembers. As far as I know, Ben had no personal grudge with Fox. What happened at that sim, I think, was a personal attack on me because the Freedom was a sim in Trek Online. What happened is something that I can only call disgusting and childish.

Ben decided to attack the Freedom's last sim. By doing so he could make a huge statement - you may have kicked me out of the club, but you still cannot stop me. To help in his attack, Ben recruited a contingent of barbarians.

On Sunday, March 9, 1997, a few minutes into the Freedom's final sim, it was attacked. The room was flooded with people recruited by Ben, all of them scrolling and typing nonsense onto the screen making sure it was impossible to sim. The Freedom crew was IMed and we all moved to another private room, but the attackers followed us. Clearly someone in the club was helping Ben. Who that was we never found out. We moved again, this time inviting only people we could be sure to trust, and with that, we found some peace and quiet. Yet, by that time it was too late, the sim had been destroyed. No one had the will to continue. We were all completely disgusted and wanted revenge. Ben had disrupted some sims before, but this was totally different. This raid was something none of us had ever seen before, and it shocked and outraged us. Captain Fox was crying hysterically and we were all doing our best to comfort her. Fox was one of the nicest people I had met, she did not deserve what happened to her, and I vowed that the people responsible for this attack would pay for what happened.

Because the Freedom started as part of the Independence, I met with Scott in a private room entitled Rope and a Tree. The title of the room shows just how mad I was, and I do not get mad very often. During the chat, we did not discuss any possible punishments, it was more the two of us comparing notes and conducting an investigation into the attack. Our investigation did not take too long because Ben quickly 'confessed.' And Ben was no idiot, he 'confessed' that it was really Uridien who had planned the attack, something which Scott immediately believed, and something which I accepted since I was also becoming paranoid enough after having had to listen to Forum Ally IM me for a month. The attack was on such a vast scale that I did not believe at the time it could have been the work of Ben. In one quick breath, Ben played on our fears and was able to divert all of our anger off of him and onto Uridien.

Over the following days, while I was still trying to determine what kind of punishment we could give Ben and Uridien now that they were no longer in the club, and how we could prevent this kind of thing from happening again, Scott took it upon himself, without my knowledge, to punish Uridien. Scott created the screen name TOLJournal and began to harass Uridien in a manor similar to what Uridien had done with his Forum Ally name. Scott would constantly IM Uridien from his mysterious TOLJournal name and play mind games with him.

Scott's plan backfired, however, and Uridien, on both his Uridien and Forum Ally names, began to ratcheted up the intensity of his actions against TOL. All of the evidence today suggests that Uridien was innocent in regards to the attack on the Freedom, so, quite naturally, he was not happy over being accused of planning or taking part in the attack, and he was not happy about being harassed by TOLJournal.

What exactly happened between March 9 and March 17, 1997, I am not sure. There apparently was a lot of positioning between Scott and Uridien, using their various screen names in interesting combinations in hopes of being able to confuse each other and play mind games with each other. TOLJournal would contact Uridien. Uridien would contact Scott. Forum Ally would contact TOLJournal, etc. At the same time, I began to receive word that Uridien, using both his Uridien name and Forum Ally name, was contacting club members in an attempt to feel people out in order to find weaknesses in the club that he could exploit.

In particular, Uridien contacted the newly promoted Admiral Mike, captain of the sim that was to replace the Freedom, attempting to convince him that he had heard rumors that I was planning to take over the Indelphi (Mike's ship), or something to that effect. Mike was a crewmember on the Independence who had simmed with Uridien. After the Freedom sim had been destroyed, I learned that Mike ran a sim of his own, called the USS Indelphi. Desperate for members and new blood, I convinced Mike to merge his ship into TOL and in exchange I made him a Rear Admiral. Uridien probably figured that since had simmed with Mike on the Independence, he would be more incline to believe him and believe that I was a bad person. Unfortunately for Uridien, Mike was the crewmember on the Independence who convinced several of his fellow crewmates to support me on January 31. Thus, Mike was not going to turn against me, and Mike reported to me what was going on.

At the same time, Scott, using his TOLJournal name, went around contacting people in the club - myself included - quizzing them and attempting to find out what was our relationship with Uridien. Under any normal situation, I would have fired Scott. But, because getting rid of Scott was one of Uridien's major demands, I could not look like I was giving in.

On March 17, 18 and 19, when Uridien realized that he was not going to gain the support of Mike, both Uridien and Forum Ally began contacting me, attempting to stir up trouble with Scott by making up stories that Scott was planning to do this or that. Based on these chats, whatever lingering doubts I had about Uridien and Forum Ally being two different people disappeared and I decided to start playing some mind games of my own. By an amazing stroke of luck, I had been talking with my friends in STS and found out that Uridien had joined one of the ships there. When Uridien contacted me, I told him that I had scouts watching his every move and I knew that he had joined STS. Uridien, who in his chats was normally cool, manipulative and in the position of power, suddenly became angry and confused and worried. With that, Uridien lost it, declared war on TOL and began to resort to some Ben like tactics.

Uridien signed off, Forum Ally signed on and started to post on our message boards saying that he had taken control of the club and was going to put Uridien in charge. This caused harm to TOL's reputation, because at that time Mike was working with Admirals from other clubs to work out a joint sim arrangement, but in the era where simming was concentrated on one forum where everyone could view your message board and you did not have the power to delete posts - many people saw the post and suddenly became unwilling to get involved in a club that had so many problems.

The post about taking control, however, combined with his attempts in February to convince me to make him a first officer, shows that, like Ben, Uridien simply wanted to gain a position of power within the club, and when he failed to do that, he turned violent. Yes, both he and Ben were upset about the forum and hated Scott and myself, but really they were jealous and envious of our success where they had failed. Had they been made a commander or captain somewhere, I'm sure they would have forgotten all about the forum and their hatred. However, there was no way I was going to give anyone who had caused so much trouble a command position when there were so many other deserving, hard working, dedicated and peaceful simmers in TOL.

Over the following days, a few other club members, such as Admiral Mike and Aly82 reported that either Uridien or Forum Ally had contacted them, threatened them and the club. They, along with many other club members, were concerned and were wondering what was going on, especially in regards to the posts about how Uridien was now in charge of the club.

All the captains and admirals in the club were convinced that the best course of action was to keep the situation with Uridien quiet. I, however, believed that we should put all of the cards on the table and let everyone know exactly what was going on, and that is what I did.

On the 20th I wrote up - with the help of Jace, my first officer, who had gotten to know Uridien through their common friend Josh - a comprehensive E-mail that explained the history of Uridien and Forum Ally, and how to deal with him. Armed with this info, everyone in the club knew what was going on and knew how to respond. Club members started to come forward and provided me with evidence and pointed out things I had missed. People started to ignore Forum Ally and shrug him off. Uridien craved attention, he loved to play games and hide in the shadows, but now that people were ignoring him, it drove him crazy.

But what happened at just about the same time really knocked him for a loop. Scott, now an AOL Host, was able to use his connections to have all of Ben's, Uridien's and Forum Ally's various posts on our message boards deleted. It was a shocking and unprecedented move. The blow to their ego must have been astounding. All of their inspired posts, all of their history of disruptions, erased.

In desperation, Uridien spent the next week threatening myself, Scott, and the club. Using his Forum Ally name, he E-mailed Captain Pat in one last desperate attempt to convincing him to return and stake claims to the Independence. I do not think Pat ever bothered to reply.

Just when it looked like he was finished, Uridien caught a break. He discovered that I had not sent the E-mail about him to the crew of the Indelphi because I feared it would scare off the ship and its new club members. So Uridien went into full force at the Indelphi sim on Easter Sunday, March 30. He told them all of the usual stories and tried to convince them to follow him and cause problems in Trek Online. Luckily Scott was online at the time, and Mike, the CO of the Indelphi, alerted Scott, and Scott rushed to the chat room. I signed on a little later and was called to the room. Normally, Uridien would have played it cool or would have left to avoid being caught in a compromising position. However, he was so desperate for attention, and convinced that he still had some cards left up his sleeve, that he agreed to resume his trial, right then and there, with the crew members of the Indelphi acting as the jury. Well, it was not officially a trial. Technically it was W. Weasel, a crewmember on the Indelphi, 'conducting an investigation of his own.' However, for all practical purposes it turned into a trial and after several hours of an intense discussion, Cadet Clodo, the Jury foreman, rose and announced that the crew of the Indelphi found Uridien guilty of being Forum Ally and all of accompanying crimes. Uridien apologized to Scott and as a punishment, Uridien agreed to delete the Forum Ally name and to leave TOL alone. We - Scott especially - also agreed to leave Uridien alone. Uridien complied shortly there after by deleting the Forum Ally name. The club breathed a collective sigh of relief.

While Uridien may not have directly attacked a sim, as Ben had done, the covert and psychological campaign Uridien unleashed on the club in March of 1997 just added to the darkness and despair that the club had been experiencing since January. Uridien knew many of our weaknesses, and he played them skillfully. He could have caused the club to descend back into chaos and civil war - and Uridien's role in causing the stress, paranoia and hardline attitude in Scott which helped to bring about the Civil War in January should not be forgotten. Even though in February and March Uridien was unable to turn us against each other, or manipulate me into giving him a position of power within the club - a position he so

desperately craved - his constant psychological games, had they continued for a few more months, could have caused me to throw in the towel. Luckily, before that occurred, the battle turned and we managed to gain the upper hand against Uridien. While the struggle against him did not end in March, the path to victory was assured.

However, I was not overjoyed at Uridien's defeat, nor did we hold any celebrations, for there were still many problems facing the club. However, the events of March 30 did fill me with a new sense of hope and gave me some additional energy. I really do not know why or how I managed to keep on going during all of those dark days in 1997, when it seemed like nothing was going right within TOL and when it seemed like wave after wave of barbarians were attacking. I guess I just really loved simming, I had a tremendous amount of faith in my vision for simming, I loved my club, and after having witnessed the death of STECO I did not want to see another club die. On top of that, I had great people around me, people like Chip, Jace and Kyrin, who were always there to help out and cheer me up. While it was a very difficult time, I did catch a few breaks in the attacks - a precious few days here, a week there - where the club was at peace and I could get a glimpse of what was in store for the future. It was a glorious future at that, for my plans and hard work were beginning to pay off in Trek Online. Attendance was up. Club spirit was beginning to increase, and the sims were becoming ever more fun and exciting.

Ironically, instead of dividing us as Uridien had hoped he would do, the war against Forum Ally helped to unite the club on AOL. It gave us a common external enemy to rally against. Club members began to appreciate all of the hard work and torment that Chip, Scott, I and the other leaders put ourselves through so that they could enjoy their sims in peace. Plus, people began to think if someone really hated this club so much that they would go through all of that trouble to destroy us, there must be something really special about us to deserve that attention.

On April 1, Ben publicly announced that he supported Forum Ally and would continue his fight against TOL. On April 3, Ben reassembled his barbarian friends and raided the USS Vindicator sim. While Ben's methods at this attack were far more sophisticated than what he had done at the Freedom sim - he and his raiders employed illegal online tools known as Fate to send IM bombs and scroll in the room - we had learned from the Freedom attack and were able to quickly regroup in another private room and continue simming. In addition, because Ben used the Fate program, we were able to report him to AOL. Like he had done with the Freedom attack, Ben tried to pin this attack on Uridien as well, but this time no one bought it, and several of Ben's raiders were kicked off of AOL because they had a record of trouble making. This crippled Ben's war machine. But since this was Ben's first official offense with AOL, he got off with a warning from AOL. Unknown to me at the time, Scott also gave Ben a two hour tongue lashing in which he said that the cops were going to come and arrest him. This set Ben straight, at least for a little while. At the time though, it had seemed that with in a few short days, both Uridien and Ben had been defeated and peace was returning to the club.

And as far as I was concerned, the people who I felt were responsible for the Freedom attacks and other trouble making in TOL's past had been brought to sufficient levels of justice, by either TOL or AOL.

All that remained was the question of what to do with Scott. The TOLJournal stunt he pulled was unacceptable, but I could not punish Scott directly for it because that would play into Uridien's hands. Uridien had just been defeated and I did not want to give him a victory. Plus, it would have been a suicidal move on my part to - just days after the club had united together to fight Uridien - punish the man who, between his deletion of the message board posts and his prosecution of Uridien at the Indelphi trial, had become the leading champion of TOL's struggle against Forum Ally.

The really ironic thing is that at the time both Uridien and myself did not like Scott. But Scott was an admiral and I needed him to help run our simming academy and make a webpage for us. Uridien's attacks and behavior put me in the position of having to defend Scott, even when it was not something I was thrilled about doing, but something I did un-hesitantly because the future of my club depended on it. However, after Scott's TOLJournal stunt, I decided that in my own time, and in my own way, I would deal with Scott.

## **Chapter 16: April Peace Brings May Wars**

*"Most of you are aware of the changes taking place in STS during the last week, although some of you are not. For those of you who are, you may be confused; rumors may be spreading, and the like." - Admiral Trekker, March 31, 1997, announcing the break up of STS.*

The month of April of 1997 was like no other in TOL history. For the most part, it was a month of peace, but everyone was still on edge. Ben and Uridien had been defeated, but no one felt like celebrating. In retrospect, April was just a ceasefire, allowing all sides time to rest up and rebuild for the final battle.

TOLs rebuilding efforts consisted of the recruiting drive that I had launched in February. It finally kicked into high gear in April, thanks in part to the Indelphi. My gamble of letting Mike's ship join TOL only weeks after the disastrous Civil War had paid off. I was right in assuming that Mike's crew, who did not experience the Civil War and its associated fighting and public incriminating would bring new life to TOL. In addition, because the Indelphi had played a crucial role in helping to defeat Uridien, its crew members now felt that they had become a vital player in TOL, and rightly so. One such crew member, W. Weasel, inspired by his new club and the role he had played in defeating one of its biggest enemies, personally went out and recruited almost 30 people into Trek Online during March and April. His efforts - which I made sure to highly publicize and reward - caused other club members to spend the month of April out in force recruiting. A recruiting craze hit the club, and at the same time, people in TOL began to talk about and feel as if they were part of a great community. It was around this time that things like smite buttons, spam parties, and fruck began to appear.



On both Prodigy and AOL, our sims were going great and the club was really beginning to click and work together. We could have avoided a lot of fighting in December and January had we decided to just follow the old model and compartmentalized ourselves, but we were all dedicated to making a new and open system, and by April, it was paying off. Besides, had we decided to follow the old way of doing things, TOL would have been swept aside by the changing economic reality with all of the other clubs that still clung to the old ways.

That changing economic reality hit STS in late March. By April 1, the news was public and rumors were swirling around STS. And, unfortunately for STS, its seasoned and experienced leadership made the wrong decisions.

STS, like most other sim clubs founded in the early 1990s, was designed to resemble Starfleet. Its sims were compartmentalized and did not interact with each other, and its leadership was concerned with controlling the content of the sims to ensure accuracy to Star Trek. The leadership of the club was broken up into three parts. Admiral Trekker was the founder of the club and he operated as the head of Starfleet Command, issuing general orders to all of the ships about where to head and what missions to carry out. He also issued - through simming guidebooks and club E-mails - various memorandums about the usage of warp drives, promotions, how to use technology and equipment, etc. Supporting him in these operations was TrekGuru, STS' chief Sim Master. Every ship in STS had a sim master assigned to it, and the SMs would work with Guru in coming up with missions and sim plots that had to be approved by Guru.

The third person in this mix was Vice Admiral NFO. He was the person in charge of club operations and had the real power in the club. His job was to do what I as President did in Trek Online and what all modern sim club Presidents do today - he took care of the clubs administration, paper work and dealt with all of the non simming items that needed to be taken care of before a sim could occur - and trust me, it takes a lot of work to make a sim happen on a regular basis, and it takes even more work to run a club.

NFO joined STS in late 1994 or early 1995 when STS still consisted of one sim. It was, in fact, NFO who argued that STS should expand from one sim into an actual club because Trekker's weekly sim had grown too large to accommodate everyone. Further, NFO was able to convince Trekker and Guru to let him start up a second ship in STS, the USS Lancelot. Over time, several more ships were added to the club.

Because of the desire to control the content of sims, Guru ended up becoming the Sim Master for 3 STS ships. With the arrival of unlimited usage, NFO wanted to continue to expand the club, but Guru was against it. There were not enough sim masters to cover new ships, and she did not want to sim more than 3 times a week. Also, there were not enough simmers in the club to justify additional expansion in her eyes. The battle lines were drawn,

and as result of unlimited, "Little differences got bigger under so much time (spent online)" as Guru explained to me in an interview.<sup>37</sup>

An additional layer to this story is that prior to the arrival of unlimited, most of the paperwork duties were scattered among various people in STS. With the arrival of unlimited, NFO could spend more time online and thus began to appropriate these duties for himself, amassing more power in the club and stepping on a lot of people's toes in the process. Trekker did nothing to stop NFO because Trekker wanted to expand the club as well - bigger is better, as the theory goes. (And STS was soon to find out that the theory was very wrong.)

But all of the hurt toes and fault lines between Guru and Trekker did not destroy the club. As was the case with Trek Online, STS was rocked by a major dispute over how to handle troublemakers, which were appearing in ever increasing numbers due to unlimited usage and the lack of tools to control them. As Guru explained, "It just was getting very complicated and people were acting up and out since there was way more airtime." STS had a long established judicial system, but NFO tried to circumvent it by establish his own new court marshal system that enabled NFO to kick out the people he did not like.

What was the breaking point for Guru was that in 1997, her husband began to have serious medical problems and was frequently in the hospital. Despite having to be away, NFO continued to demand that she help SM more in order for STS to launch new sims. Guru could no longer take what she viewed as NFO's inconsideration, so in the end of March 1997, she quit.

What exactly happened in STS was never publicly revealed. Unlike the case in TOL, the leaders of STS did not feel the need to convey to its members what was really going on. While Admiral Trekker did send two E-mails to the entire club regarding the matter, but they did not explain what was occurring, and only attempted to gloss over the situation. However, it was clear to everyone that rift had apparently developed between TrekGuru and NFO, and rumors swirled.

When TrekGuru quit, she had no plans to start a new club. Indeed, she wanted to quit simming. However - and this is where all of these hurt toes come into play - many others were upset with NFO as well. About half of the club - or about 4 ships - quit STS and followed her, eventually establishing a new club called Final Frontier Sims (FFS). While STS always tried to officially hide the loses, it was a mortal blow. The fact that the leadership was all but silent over what was occurring on only contributed to the flow of rumors that caused many more people to quit the club. While STS did stagger and stumble along during the rest of 1997 and into 1998, by 1999 the club had effectively died.

In April of 1997, I was only a lowly Lieutenant in STS, so I was not privy to any info about what was really occurring. But that was a benefit to me because it made me understand

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<sup>37</sup> Interviewed in 1998, see notes in previous chapters about my interviews with Trekker, NFO, and Guru.

what it must have been like for the average club member in Trek Online to have to go through our Civil War and other wars. I experienced all of the fear and uncertainty and desire to just forget all of the nonsense that an average club member experiences. During almost my entire time as a Captain or Admiral in the UFP/SF or TOL, I made sure to secretly join other sim clubs and sim there as a simple member. While from time to time as an Admiral in TOL I was accused of being out of touch or not knowing what it was like to be a cadet, I knew that such accusations were wrong. By always having the prospective of joining a new sim club and having to work up the ranks, combined with my earliest experiences in SFOL, I was always concerned as the President of Trek Online to make my members comfortable with the club. Joining a sim club and taking part in this strange thing called a sim is a very awkward and intimidating experience, and I think the simming world would be a much better place if the leaders remembered that.

Even though I did not know the details of what was going on behind the scenes in STS, the news shocked me. If this kind of thing could happen in a sim club like STS - which had been simming for 4 years and seemed to be solid - it could happen anywhere. How could brand new and fragile TOL possibly survive? The news made me worry even more about the future, and it was another in a long line of realizations about how unforgiving simming is - that no matter how large or powerful the club, it can disappear over night. That is why I took great care in TOL to plan for every possible contingency, no matter how unlikely. It led to constitutions, detailed guidebooks and laws. It also led to my forceful desire that captains and future Presidents of TOL follow certain guidelines and have a certain mentality and work ethic. I wanted to cheat simming death. I thought I was smart and clever enough - I had figured out a new sim club model - so I was confident I could figure out how to make a club last forever. But I was wrong.

Before I could have time to think about such grand long-term problems, I still had to insure the day-to-day survival of the club. On April 20 Uridien joined the crew of the Indelphi - so much for his promise to leave TOL alone. While in March Uridien had failed to convince Mike to revolt, in April Uridien did successfully manage to convince Mike that he had reformed and should be given a second chance. I, quite naturally, was against letting Uridien join the Indelphi. I went as far as to order Mike to not let him join, but Mike refused to listen to me. Maybe Uridien honestly wanted to sim, I thought, or maybe his plan was to get me to kick Mike and the Indelphi out of the club. Thinking that, I decided to not punish Mike for his insubordination, but I made it clear to Mike that if Uridien acted up, I would put both of their heads on a platter.

With Uridien back in the club I did not have to wait long for events to once again quickly spin out of control.

Scott clearly was not happy with Uridien joining the Indelphi either, and once again he took matters into his own hands. He made a new screen name and pretended to be Josh - the old captain of the Endeavor and Uridien's friend - in an attempt to get Uridien to open up and say what he was up to. When we found out Scott was doing this, Josh, Uridien, myself, and a bunch of other people went ballistic. Scott apologized and Josh agreed not to report Scott to AOL, but I was still fuming and wanted to kick Scott out of the club.

However, events were moving so quickly that I did not have time to build a case to bring Scott to a trial, or think up a way of how to punish Scott without giving Uridien a victory. On April 24, I received word that Ben had started up a new sim club, called the Science Fiction Group (SFG) and once again had copied my guidebook, word for word. Ben actually forgot to change the guidebook in some key places to mask his plagiarism. His guidebook opened with the section, "What is Trek Online?"

One of the people Ben recruited for his new club realized this fact and contacted me, figuring that I would like to know that my work was being stolen. This person also provided me a list of Ben's club members and I E-mailed all of them to tell them what Ben had done - after all, I had spent days working on the guidebook, and I was not going to let someone just copy, word for word, with out my permission. I kindly explained to everyone that the guidebook was stolen and that I had written it. This was enough to disgust most of Ben's club members, causing them to leave his club, and Ben gave up on his latest attempt to start a club of his own.

Ben was once again angry at me, and he was still angry at Scott for the tongue lashing he had given him a few weeks earlier. Ben decided first take his anger out on Scott - but, after seeing how his attempts to personally disrupt sims had failed in the fall of 1996 and how his attempts to raid sims with hacker buddies had gotten him into trouble a few weeks earlier - Ben resorted to a new tactic. He created a new screen name, CmdrMulder, and attempted to sneak into TOL using a new identity.

Being a new club member, CmdrMulder was sent to the simming academy to be taught by Scott, who, at least when it came to the academy was cooperating and doing a good job. However, I still was looking for any kind of excuse to punish Scott for his TOLJournal stunt and for his Josh impersonating stunt without having to bring up those cases and involve Uridien in the trial, and this CmdrMulder seemed to provide me with the perfect excuse.

On May 3, CmdrMulder contacted me and told me that Scott had ignored him, been rude to him and harassed him at the Independence sim that CmdrMulder had attended for training purposes. Not knowing it was Ben at the time, and thinking this was a pretty good case - especially because it was a case I could use against Scott that did not involve Uridien - I decided to give Scott a pretty intense verbal lashing myself and I threatened to strip him of command.

However, trying to at least be judicial and fair - as I have always try to do, although not always successfully - I investigated the charges and discovered that CmdrMulder was Ben and that the entire incident was fake. The next day, Sunday, May 4, I dismissed the case, informed Scott that it was Ben, kicked CmdrMulder out of the club because Ben had previously been suspended the club, and apologized to Scott.

Scott needed time to let all of this blow over, but unfortunately time was a luxury that TOL received that night. In fact, the conditions could not have been better for what was going to happen next.

## Chapter 17: FFSC

*LeaderFed: "What do you think of our intelligence branch... one of our strongest features besides being able to put secret agents in groups and undermine them when the time is right."*

*AdmChasTOL: "Well our strong points are being able to have fun sims and being able to withstand a lot of stuff"*

*IM, May 4, 1997, My reply sums up why and how TOL was able to survive so many challenges.*

On May 4, 1997, the right person appeared at the right time with the conditions of history ripe for his arrival. That person was named LeaderFed. Had Scott listened to me and not got involved with Uridien's return on April 20th; had I been more forceful and not allowed Uridien to return; had I not tried to go after Scott during the CmdrMulder incident; had Uridien never showed up to the Indelphi sim on May 4, 1997, things would have been different. I even had the chance myself to make things different, for several days prior SamScottB, a cadet in TOL, had invited me to attend the inauguration of the leader of the new sim club he was helping found, the Federation Fan and Sim Club, or FFSC. Had I gone that day to that meeting, had I meet LeaderFed as he was elected, congratulated him on his election and gave him a few pointers, we would have gotten off to a totally different start. But it was not to be. I was too tired, too fed up with Scott, with Uridien and Mike, and I just did not want to go to the ceremonies, so I told Sam that I did not wish to attend. What a mistake that was.

Five hours after I had ended the Scott-CmdrMulder case, I attended the USS Indelphi sim, with Uridien also in attendance. During the course of the sim, LeaderFed contacted me and introduced himself. He asked if he could attend the sim, and seeing no harm in that (Uridien was a good simmer and never acted up during a sim anyway) I agreed and I invited him in to watch. Over IMs we discussed our clubs and simming. Almost off hand - at least it seemed to me - he mentioned the idea of merging, and I more or less said no in a polite way. I really do not know what was going through his mind, I don't know if SamScottB - who was a member of TOL and the FFSC - told LeaderFed we would be a club open to merger or what. However, LeaderFed apparently did not take kindly to my refusal to merge. For a little while later, in the chat room, in the middle of the sim, he blurted out that he was going to take over TOL.

With that, the sim came to a screeching halt. Scott was also in the room, and, still quite mad at me, he figured I had sold out the club to LeaderFed and promptly began to accuse me of doing so. Uridien's ears must have perked up and ideas of teaming up with LeaderFed in a new crusade against TOL flashed through his mind. And of course, Ben was quickly contacted and told about this potential new ally.

Scott immediately moved everyone who was at the sim, except LeaderFed, Uridien and myself, into another chat room and began to berate me. I figured TOL was on the brink of another civil war and for once did not know what to do. Scott began to tell everyone how I

was selling out the club, how no one should listen to me, how could I give the club to LeaderFed, how could I let Uridien sim, etc, etc, etc? It pretty much became a bash Chas party. At the same time, he bombarded LeaderFed with IMs, insulting him left and right. I tried to talk to LeaderFed to calm him down, but it was to no avail, for at the same time Uridien was also IMing him and telling him stories about how evil TOL is - and who is the guy going to believe? After all, he has TOL's Vice Admiral insulting him in public and in IMs. So LeaderFed naturally believed all of the horrible stories Uridien told him about Trek Online, and LeaderFed began to feel that it was his purpose in simming to launch a crusade to eliminate the wicked and horrible Trek Online from the face of Simulation.

After the events of that sim, I was finished. I signed off, went out side, looked at the stars and decided I was going to quit. I had not been fighting for all that time to just have to fight another war. I was tired of simming, I was tired of the club, I was tired of Scott and I was tired of all of the fighting. I had it and I did not want to go through several more months of war. In fact, I was so fed up, when I signed off I just signed off, I did not even bother to save the sim transcript or my IM with LeaderFed and Scott like I normally would have done in such a situation.

When I signed back on later that night around 10pm I immediately received an IM from LeaderFed declaring war on TOL. I started to IM Scott, again and again. He never responded. I was really getting upset - was he was ignoring me? After all of this? After what seemed like forever, Scott finally returned and said he was out at Taco Bell. So, in the middle of a crises he started, Scott just walks away from his computer without saying anything, and stays signed on so everyone can think he is ignoring them which causes them to only become angrier as a result?

When Scott returned I told him that I was resigning, that I had it, that I had enough of the fighting and the club was now his. I IMed Ben and told him that he had won and I was putting Scott in command of the club. Then the strangest of all things happened. Ben - who quickly followed Uridien's and was now a member of the FFSC preparing for war against TOL - began to try to cheer me up and convince me to stay. To this day I have no idea why. Maybe he was afraid of winning, but much more likely he was still very afraid of Scott and he did not want to see Scott in command of TOL.

Scott gave me a similar pep talk, I doubt he really wanted to be in charge of the club after the mess he had just created, even though a few hours before he sure acted like he wanted to be in charge. Scott tried to contact LeaderFed and work out some kind of peace, but it was too late. Scott also began to contact the club members who had been at the Indelphi sim and began to tell them nice things about me.

In other words, the events that had transpired on May 4, 1997, caused Scott's attitude to totally reverse. Maybe he felt sufficiently guilty about starting this latest war. Before May 4, I could not call Scott an ally or even a friend. He was someone who I had to tolerate and defend at best; someone who I tried to drive from the club and fought with during the worst moments. However, after the events of that evening transpired, Scott suddenly transformed into a loyal ally, friend, and someone who closely worked with me and made sure

my wishes were being carried out and made sure that he was not overstepping his bounds. It was exactly what was needed in order to get through the next few months. Had Scott continued to pursue his own policies when it came to Uridien and had continued to do all of the little things he did which bugged me to no end, it would have been a disaster.

And Chip, boy, Chip had been great during all of the wars. He had become my friend and his sense of humor always cheered me up and made me realize why I enjoyed simming in the first place. Plus he was also my closest advisor. He always put things into the right perspective. During the war with the FFSC, he was just spectacular and always reminded me to not take it too seriously, to just keep on simming and no matter what happens, we will survive.

I signed off a little bit after 11pm and that was the end of Sunday, May 4, 1997. It turned out to have been a day that was as important to defining the club - if not more so - than the battle of Stonewall had been on January 19. Yet at the time no one knew it. At the time we did not understand what had happened. We did not see how all of the events fit together so perfectly. All we knew is that we had to once again put our heads down and fight our way through another war.

Within a few days it became clear that Uridien had swapped war stories with LeaderFed, for on May 7 the name ForumsAlly began to appear, contacting and harassing club members. I figure Uridien and LeaderFed thought that the name ForumsAlly would inspire fear and terror in us, just as the name Forum Ally managed to do in December, January and February, before we figured out Uridien's tactics. But by May, it had become something of a joke, and the person behind ForumsAlly was also a joke. We quickly realized that ForumsAlly was LeaderFed, and all he really did with the name was talk dirty and curse out people. He even made the bright move to curse out Scott during the AOL chat he was hosting. That went over so well that the name ForumsAlly was terminated by AOL.

Having his ForumsAlly account terminated by AOL caused LeaderFed to reassess his war plans. He decided to take a few weeks to build up and train his club, and to prepare for a coordinated and sustained campaign against Trek Online. After all, at that time Trek Online had 5 sims and 57 members. The FFSC was a brand new club with only about 10 or 15 members. LeaderFed needed to recruit warriors and he needed a good plan if he was going to defeat a club that was larger than his own.

The plan the FFSC developed was two fold. First, LeaderFed apparently came up with the idea to launch a massive, long-term covert operation against Trek Online. FFSC members would make new screen names, join TOL, gather info, spy on the club, and buddy up to club members to gain their trust and support. They would also buddy up to TOLs captains and admirals to the point where we would trust them and download files from them, which would contain viruses. With the computers of TOL's leaders out, the FFSC would strike.

Using the friendships they had developed with regular TOL members, the FFSC spies would spread lies and rumors that TOLs leaders had abandoned them. From there, the FFSC types would either lead a revolution to destroy the TOL outright, or put the club in the hands of

the FFSC. But all of that would take time, and the club would have to be softened up at any rate - so LeaderFed followed Ben's advise and developed a second component to his plan. The FFSC would, with the aid of various barbarian and hacker types, attack and disrupt TOLs sims directly. The spies inserted into TOL via the first part of the plan would aid with the attacks, letting the FFSC raiders know what private room we moved to in an attempt to escape them. It was hoped by LeaderFed that the constant direct attacks by FFSC would be enough to cause me to resign or to sue for peace, the price of peace being I had to hand the club over to the FFSC. If that did not happen, the attacks would continue until they destroyed TOL, or drove enough members out of TOL and softened the club up enough so that the handful of FFSC spies would be enough to spring into action and destroy TOL internally. As was the case with Ben and Uridien, LeaderFed was jealous of TOL. Ben's price for peace was to be made the Vice President. Uridien's price was to be made a First Officer and get rid of Scott. LeaderFed's price was to hand TOL over to him.

LeaderFed also naturally assumed that because he was undertaking all of these grand schemes against TOL, I must have been plotting to do the same against the FFSC. This was his fatal weakness. Seasoned from my many campaigns against Ben and Uridien, I had a pretty good idea of how to fight an online war. LeaderFed had such a huge ego that he had to IM me just about every time he signed online, and because of his ego, I could get him to just talk and talk, which allowed me to get a good idea about what his strengths and weaknesses where. As the quote at the start of the chapter reveals, he even hinted at some of his own secret plans. Armed with that info, I began to exploit LeaderFed's natural fears for all they were worth. As a result, LeaderFed began to become paranoid and worry that the people around him were really TOL agents plotting to send him a computer virus. He began to put into place elaborate security measures and rules to ensure the loyalty of his members. He created a secret police force to keep an eye on his members and sims, and he in turn had others keeping an eye on the secret police.

LeaderFed rallied his club to engage in war against Trek Online by preaching to them how evil and bloodthirsty TOL was. However, I had no interest in fighting a war, and I made no plans to attack the FFSC. In fact, I had been making very public and personal appeals to LeaderFed and the FFSC council to end this childish stupidity and to sign a peace treaty. My attempts to work for peace, combined with the fact that Trek Online did not live up to LeaderFed's ranting's, was enough to cause some high ranking members of the FFSC to question LeaderFed's crusade against TOL. This questioning started with Dan.

For the most part Dan - despite having been a personal friend of both Ben and Uridien - had stayed out of trouble during the wars against Ben and Uridien, but when LeaderFed appeared, he could not resist the urge to join the FFSC and join forces with his old forum team, which seemingly was being reassembled over there. However, Dan became discouraged rather quickly. He had no real interest in war and trouble making, so he quit the FFSC after only a few days and told me everything he had learned. In my chats with LeaderFed, I started to hint that I knew about some of his battle and operational plans, and this helped to cause LeaderFed to become more paranoid. It convinced him that I must have had spies everywhere in the FFSC. He immediately launched a whole new series of security procedures and discipline plans on top of the outlandish measures he already had in place, some of them



as outrageous as Scott's plan to give everyone 5 demerits upon joining TOL. This only caused more of his members to question his actions.

In fact, as early as May 8, LeaderFed's measures had become so extreme and my personal appeals for peace so widely circulated in the FFSC that some intelligent and mature people on the Federation Council began to realize that TOL was not a threat. They could see that TOL just wanted to sim, and they too just wanted to sim in the FFSC. After all, in the lingering spirit of the lost generation, they had started the FFSC with high hopes of making a brand new sim club that would become one of the first simming republics before LeaderFed hijacked the club with his crusade against TOL. Amazingly enough DataBev, the head of FFSC Intelligence - the one responsible for the covert campaign against TOL - contacted me on May 8 and began to feed to me all of LeaderFed's plans. Over the following weeks, others followed. I had about half of the FFSC council working for me by the end of May. At first I thought maybe this was all part of some scheme by LeaderFed to feed me false info, but it turned out these people really wanted to help TOL and avoid a war.

LeaderFed must have realized that something was up when all of the spies he sent into TOL found themselves assigned to the USS Independence, where Scott - whose AOL hosting powers were now becoming very useful - could keep a close eye on them.<sup>38</sup>

However, when we knew to look for spies - even if we had not been provided their screen names - they easily stood out, giving rise to my advise to captains and admirals everywhere never to trust a cadet who asks too many questions or tries to be your friend. Sure, people are going to ask some basic questions about how to sim and all, but when someone is asking too many oddball questions about the club - be careful. In addition, the rank of captain and admiral is intimidating, and people online are naturally shy, so if a brand new cadet wants to become your friend 5 seconds after joining your ship, he or she is probably up to no good.

During the middle of May, LeaderFed began his attacks against TOL by attacking all the events we held in public chat rooms. This had the effect of driving all of our activities - such as trivia's and parties - into private rooms. From a military standpoint, it was as if he was attacking our lesser-protected outer settlements before going after the more central, and heavily defended sims held in private rooms. Despite this, I still tried to work for peace, and I made no plans to attack the FFSC.

Then came round 2 on May 20th - the forged E-mail that was sent by one of LeaderFed's hackers. The E-mail was forged to make it look like I sent it to a member in the FFSC threatening him and cursing him. The plan was to use it to get me in trouble with AOL, but everyone realized it was a forgery and the author of it was kicked off of AOL.

That personal attack on me still did not change my basic strategy, which was to do what we had always done through all of the problems with Ben, the Civil War and Uridien - to just keep on simming, to try to have fun and not worry about what will happen next, to just react

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<sup>38</sup> I was also hardening as a leader. I was beginning to not take these things as seriously as I had in the past, and I was having lots of fun screwing with these people.

to it as best as we can when something happens. I made no plans for war or to attack. I saw no point in disrupting the lives of my simmers by making any defensive plans. I just reinforced to my captains all of the lessons we had learned from dealing with Ben and Uridien and how to respond to raids.

Even though his espionage operations were not going very well, by May 25, LeaderFed had gathered enough low life's and decided to push the war into high gear. The Indelphi sim was raided, and despite my attempts to teach my captains how to respond to a raid, Mike clearly was not paying attention, for the Indelphi sim was successfully disrupted.

On May 28, the Endeavor sim was raided, and again, it was successfully disrupted by the forces of the FFSC. I was starting to become a bit concerned. Did I have to attend all of my sims in case they were raided because I had been the only captain to date who had managed to recover from a raid and keep on simming?

The fact that the FFSC, despite its small size, had been able to muster two successful attacks against TOL in less than a week greatly concerned me. I figured if they kept it up for a few more weeks, it would probably cause a number of people to become fed up and quit Trek Online, wiping out all of the population gains we had achieved during April and pushing TOL once again to the brink of destruction.

After the Indelphi attack, I E-mailed the entire club and informed them about what was going on, and building on the success of the war against Uridien, in my E-mail I outlined the entire history of Trek Online, going right back to the early struggles against Ben. Even though I felt I had the FFSC spies in TOL pretty well under control, the history provided an insurance policy against anything they may have been planning to say or do in case they sprung into action. It also prevented rumors from swirling around the club about what was going on and why we were being attacked. Rumors and fear is never a good thing in a sim club. Just telling people how it is has always worked for me.

Once again the E-mail history and the attacks worked to unite the club. The waves of new cadets who had joined during April and May quickly became assimilated and felt a part of the club now that they had been called to help defend it. In addition, I received a tremendous outpouring of support and encouragement from members, saying that they were with me and would do what ever was necessary to keep on simming. But I still feared how long that sentiment would last if the attacks continued.

But I did not have to worry. After the Endeavor was raided, club members took matters in their own hands and began to attack LeaderFed. The names of those who took part in the raids and of FFSC council members became public knowledge in TOL. I'm sure they received many threatening E-mails and IMs from TOLers. I also started thinking about how I could build on this momentum - I did not want to stoop to the level of the FFSC and attack their sims, but I started to let it be known that I was pondering going to war. I figured it would add pressure on LeaderFed - he knew TOL members were upset - and he must have assumed if I pushed the trigger, they would attack his club, just as he had attacked TOL. Between my talk of war, LeaderFed's already existing paranoia about Trek Online, my playing up his

fears by letting him know I knew his plans, and TOL members bombarding LeaderFed and others with angry questions and statements, LeaderFed changed his tune and began to sue for peace. In addition, several of the raiders actually came forward and apologized to me and asked if they could become members of Trek Online instead! Of course, I did not let them join.

Nevertheless, it was only after several days of very long and strange conversation's with LeaderFed that lasted long into the night and verged into a tremendous amount of historical hyperbole that we finally reached a peace agreement, and the agreement was simple enough. Neither club would raid the other. Both clubs would stop spying on each other. Our members would leave each other alone, and TOL and the FFSC would work to build a Simming League to ensure a peaceful resolution to future conflicts. Maybe LeaderFed finally decided to sign the treaty after such torturous negotiations because I found out that it cost him extra to be online - long distance charges or something like that. As soon as I learned about that in late May I would try to talk to him to keep him online for as long as possible.

The people on the FFSC Council who were helping me out in secret quickly voiced their support for the agreement. Between their persuasive arguments in the Council and the threatening messages other council members were receiving, everyone but Ben and Uridien voted to accept the peace treaty.

For the first time, I truly felt that maybe peace was within reach, and maybe this time, the peace will last. For some reason, all of us in TOL felt like something was different this time, and all of us felt that we could let our guard down and celebrate.

On June 1, 1997, I wrote in my diary the following. "A new month and a new age? Well at least it was the first day of peace and relaxation we had in a long while around here. No longer having to worry about spies from the Fed, or raids and attacks. Its very peaceful. Of course Urid is mad about this new peace, but what is one to expect? Its been about a month of fighting... a month of war. A month of stupidity. Hopefully we can put it all behind us and go down the road we should."

## **Chapter 18: The Simming League**

*"I have a former crew member harassing me now, I have tossed him and wrote havran, who only said contact a guide.....oh well.....nice to have my crew and sim disrupted and havran wont do a thing. We need this league." - Hod Kadrea of the UKDA Sim Group, April 24, 1997, speaking before the Senate, arguing for the need for sim clubs to band together in a more comprehensive fashion to deal with trouble makers.*

The Simming League is simultaneously my proudest achievement and my greatest source of frustration.

The idea to create an United Nations type organization for the simming world is an extension of the Lost Generation's desire to create larger simming communities - in this case a community among leaders and all sim clubs. Even though the economics had changed,

the spirit of the lost generation still lingered on until mid 1997. But to some extent the desire to create a United Nations of simming was also the result of the harsh new realities facing simming as it moved into the world of unlimited usage. Club leaders soon began to realize they needed to reach out to each other and work together to find a way to end the chaos.

The movement to create the Simming League began in March of 1997 when FAMrIAnnie began to contact leaders of the sim clubs that had message boards at AOL's Non Affiliated Gaming Forum (NAGF), which was the largest private (meaning non SFOL) simming forum on AOL. The forum was created in the wake of SFOL's break up as an attempt by AOL to corral the private sim clubs by giving them message boards and encouraging their simmers to stay online beyond the 5 hour monthly limit. The forum was administered by volunteers, most of whom come from private sim clubs. Thus, a rivalry between the SFOL hosts at the SFOL forum, and the hosts from private sim clubs manning the NAGF developed. This rivalry carried over to the leaders of the private sim clubs as well. However, hosts in SFOL were just captains and did not have any real power. The higher ups in both SFOL and the NAGF got along quite well. The people at the NAGF, including their leader, OGF Havran, did their best to provide us what resources they could to private clubs, and sometimes Havran received support from high up SFOL types. However, at the level at which SFOL hosts and private sim clubs operated, the rivalry was intense, and as TOL's history demonstrates, most private clubs had to fend for themselves and did not receive much help from AOL. Luckily for TOL, Scott was an AOL host and could deal with some of the trouble makers we encountered.

However, most other clubs did not have someone like Scott to defend them. FAMrIAnnie was so fed up with SFOL people harassing her club and with AOL refusing to do anything about it that she decided it was time for the private sim clubs on AOL to band together to form a union of sorts against SFOL and AOL. While private clubs during 1995 got along peacefully enough with SFOL, now that the strains of unlimited usage were beginning to take their toll on both SFOL and the private clubs, animosity grew. Animosity was also directed at AOL in general, for all of the wars and raids sim clubs were experiencing was a very new phenomenon. With only 5 hours of online time, a person like Ben or Uridien could not afford to stay online to cause so much trouble, and if they did, they were easily confined to one sim. Now, many clubs, not just TOL, were experiencing massive problems with disruptive members, and AOL did little to help.

The focal point of the movement became a series of E-mail and chat meetings during March and April, first called the NAGF Senate, and later renamed the Sim Senate. At these meetings the leaders of a wide range of sim clubs - for the first time in simming history - began to communicate with each other, exchange stories about what difficulties their clubs were facing, and gave each other support and advise. At the meetings, Trekology, a well respected leader of the GAMM sim group, began to talk about some ideas very familiar in TOL history. He submitted resolutions for the Sim Senate clubs to vote on, calling for us to petition the NAGF and AOL to give us more aid, and even for a forum of our own. He wrote, "Personally, I feel that we should be able to have the access to the same features that SFOL does and while OGF Havran works hard at the NAGF, we should have our own forum."

Unfortunately, the NAGF told us that their hands were tied and they could do little to help us at the time. In the long term, however, the ideas presented to the NAGF did bring about some changes. From 1998 to 2000, the NAGF did construct little forums for every sim club that wanted one. The NAGF also became more active in monitoring the message boards and controlling disruptive posters. Ironically, after all that had happened, Ben's dream became a reality, even though he had no part in creating it. What he wanted was not so far fetched after all, he just went about it the wrong way in thinking that AOL would put him in charge of running a new forum.

In 1997, however, when the NAGF said that they could not do anything more for us - as was the case with Ben's forum protest in the summer of 1996 when AOL rejected his appeals - the movement began to fall apart. Even Admiral Annie herself began to become less active in it. But all was not lost, for several people, including myself, AdmrLOpp of the United Association of Colonies (UAC), RomiDax (a captain in the respected club TrekZ), CmdrJKyle - who ironically would later go on to become the leader of SFOL - and LeaderFed of all people, stepped forward articulating a new idea. If AOL would not or could not help us, we would just have to ban together and solve the problems facing simming on our own.

In May and June we began to expand on the idea of the Sim Senate into an alliance or league of some kind. Given my natural tendency to write guidebooks and the like, I ceased the moment and by early May (in the middle of the problems with the FFSC) wrote a mini creed for the League of Star Trek Sim Groups, and this creed, naturally, became the focal point of future discussions. The basic goals of the League were to maintain peace and security, to present a united front against aggressors, and to provide a forum where sim groups could exchange tips and ideas.

Unfortunately, in early June, LeaderFed began to present his own ideas to instead create an alliance called the Federation of United Clubs, which had the unfortunate abbreviation FUC. The main point of contention was over to what degree would member clubs be required to come to each others aid in times of war. After all, TOL, the FFSC and many other clubs were engaged in or had just ended a whole series of sim wars, so defense and security was on people's minds.

My Simming League plan only called for a defense pact, where attempts would first be made to peacefully resolve wars by the League via meetings and negotiations. LeaderFed's plan called for a military alliance - pure and simple - where you would have to fight to defend your fellow clubs.

I do not mind an honest debate, but LeaderFed threatened to resume his war with TOL if we did not join the FUC. What was going on here was that while the FFSC council had agreed to peace with TOL, LeaderFed had recruited a number of raiders, spies and secret police in April and May, and they were quite understandably upset that their war against TOL had been called off. They were pressuring LeaderFed to resume the war against TOL, and LeaderFed was looking for any excuse he could find.

In fact, the new demands from LeaderFed came a day after we signed the peace treaty. So I - in turn - quickly pressured SamScottB, FFSC's Vice President and simmer in Trek Online, saying that I would have to kick him out of TOL if the war resumed. He enjoyed TOL and wanted to remain a member of both clubs, so he worked to ensure that LeaderFed did not resume the war.

In addition, those involved in the discussions with the Simming League did not take kindly to LeaderFed's threats. Some of them - such as Admiral Jeff Sorenson (known simply as JDS) of Member Focused Simulations (MFS) - attempted to negotiate to reduce the growing tensions between the FFSC and TOL. JDS was a great help to Trek Online during May. I met Jeff actually when he contacted me in May asking if all of the horrible things he had heard about TOL were true. Needless to say, Ben, Uridien and LeaderFed had done wonders to destroy our reputation. When I quickly proved to Jeff that TOL was not a threat or evil club, we quickly became friends and he became involved in the League movement. He also offered his services during the war with the FFSC as a negotiator. On many occasions, he was the one who personally delivered my peace appeals to the FFSC council, which helped to convince several of those brave council members to secretly aid Trek Online.

Other less diplomatically minded leaders simply told LeaderFed that he should be ashamed of himself for threatening war against TOL to promote his vision for simming peace.

LeaderFed backed off of his threats and the peace between TOL and the FFSC remained intact. However, this caused LeaderFed to reap what he had sowed in the spring, for sometime around the middle of June, the raiders and other low lifes LeaderFed had recruited to fight TOL revolted and created their own group called the Maquis and vowed to destroy the FFSC.

Distracted by the Maquis, LeaderFed stopped paying much attention to the League. Work on a refined creed for the League, now renamed the Simming League, went ahead, and it was approved on June 30, 1997. Six clubs joined that first Simming League, with many more, including MFS, supporting it - but waiting to see how things went before they officially became a member. Unfortunately, as soon as the League started to get up and running, everyone seemed to run into problems in their own sim clubs and thus were unable to give much time to the League. On top of that, the NAGF - perhaps fearful that we were still plotting to unionize against them - took away our message boards. As a result, the League drifted apart and by September it had all but fizzled. However, the idea for a Simming League was not forgotten.

Even though it had fizzled after a few months, what the first Simming League did was very important. By bringing the leaders of many different sim clubs together for the first time, the first League affirmed and created some basic principles, which are still followed to this day. For starters, there was the idea that private sim clubs could come together to make a common community and help each other out. The notion of creating a forum where leaders could meet, get to know each other, work out problems and exchange ideas served as the foundation of the Simming League when it was brought back to life several months later. The Sim Senate, created by FAMrIAnnie, continued to be a vital part of the League for

years. The engine of the Senate - given to us by Trekology - was the ability of sim club leaders to present to the Senate resolutions and bills for the entire simming community to discuss, vote on, and follow as guiding principles.

Even more importantly, the community of leaders - through their condemnation of LeaderFed's threats to resume the war against Trek Online - rejected the notion of simming wars and proposed the idea of negotiations and hearings in the League to settle the differences between clubs. In addition, sim clubs are now armed with more effective tools in dealing with people who want to disrupt a club or go to war so that today's simmers and leaders are blessed by wondering how and why could a sim war ever happen. But tools simply were not enough. Even though for all time people realized that sim wars were dumb, a few people with no lives could enjoy causing trouble and waging wars because they could hide in the shadows. When the entire simming community came together in the League, people were shamed to have to fight in such a disgraceful and petty manor in front of so many people.

And, of course, the most important thing of all. People simply coming together - before there were ever any problems - has a tremendous ability to diffuse situations. Just imagine what would have occurred had I attended Leaderfed's inauguration, or if there was a League at the time and both TOL and the FFSC were in it. We would have gotten off on a totally different foot.

But what is even more amazing to me is that at the exact same time, club leaders on Prodigy began to contact myself and each other with calls to somehow band together to deal with the challenges of the new reality facing simming on Prodigy. The leader of this movement was Admiral Dailey, who was in charge of starting up a division of CompuServe's Fleet74 on Prodigy. While his Allied Clubs League (ACL) did not get as far as the first Simming League on AOL did - it fizzled after only a few March and April Sim Senate style meetings - it once again illustrates how powerful economic forces are in shaping the simming world, and how as a result of similar economic forces, the same cultural and historic movements can appear in vastly separate places.

In any event, the ACL did bring me into contact with Admiral Dailey, and as a result, a new chapter in TOLs history was soon to be born on CompuServe.

For years Fleet 74 had been THE sim club, and often the only sim club on CompuServe. By 1997, however, it was in serious trouble. CompuServe refused to switch to unlimited service at the same time AOL and Prodigy had. So, as a result, in 1997, thousands of people were leaving CompuServe every day for AOL, and the ranks of Fleet 74 were decimated as many of their simmers switched to other online services. In desperation, Fleet 74 - for the first time in its history - branched out to other online services in an attempt to start up simming divisions there.

A long time Fleet 74 leader, Admiral Dailey, was put in charge of Fleet 74's venture to start up a version of the club on Prodigy. However, by 1997, Prodigy was also a dying online service. While the USS Orion was one of the few chat sims that somehow managed to thrive in the largely deserted chat rooms of Prodigy, by the spring of 1997 Julie had given up on

her several attempts to get the USS Sierra up and simming and decided to retire. While she did hold a few sims, they were sporadic and lightly attended at best.

There were a few other chat sims that popped up from time to time, including a classic era sim which did survive for about half a year, but the spring and summer of 1997 proved to largely be a desolate one. It was a far cry from the summer of 1996 in which every chat room in the science fiction area seemed to be swarming with simmers. So many had left for AOL.

Regardless, Prodigy was always an escape for me from the problems of AOL. On Prodigy, I could sim and run the club over there in peace. The few simmers and chatters who frequented the Trek rooms on Prodigy were all very close, and my Orion crew was full of wonderful characters who were great simmers and very good friends. Morgan, Jedifire, Sels, Bo, Shane, Alec, Sean, they were all great people and we all had a tremendous amount of fun.

Amazingly, despite the fact that Prodigy was dying, I never found it difficult to keep the USS Orion simming. The core group of simmers was very tight nit and could always be relied upon, and the reputation of the Orion was very strong, even some Bulletin Board simmers respected us. As a result, there were always people who would show up for a week or two to sim with us when they had some free time.

However, Daily found it very difficult to start new sims and a Fleet 74 division on Prodigy. There just were not enough people to go around. He also did not receive much support from the Fleet 74 management on CompuServe and was burdened by their rules which did not apply to Prodigy, so in frustration, Daily left Fleet 74, took the one ship on Prodigy he had managed to start up, the USS Gateway, and tried to build up his own club around it. However, when that failed, and when his simmers started to drift over to the Orion, he came to me with the idea to start up a TOL division on CompuServe.

I immediately approved the idea and Daily got to work. I gave him free reign over CompuServe. All he had to do was report back to me and promote TOLs simming ideals of having fun sims and a friendly simming community which felt like an extended family.

Using his old connections and friends on CompuServe as a starting point, Daily was able to secure advertising space for Trek Online on CompuServe and the club quickly took off. Apparently many people were interested in joining a club that promised a fresh start in a simming world dominated by one old club. By July, there were two sections to TOL-CIS, the US division and the European division. There were 2 ships in the US division and 3 in the European division. Sadly, however, the flame of TOL-CIS burnt just as fast as it burned brightly. By September, with school restarting, many of the simmers and most of the captains were forced to retire. With that, the CompuServe division was devastated, and several attempts to restart it failed, mainly because CompuServe was a dying online service and few new recruits could be found. Even more tragically, Fleet 74 followed TOL-CIS to the grave. With it, CompuServe's rich simming tradition also died.



However, TOL's CompuServe division was the club's first experimentation with republican government. On CompuServe Dailey ran a council which gave the leadership of the club a direct say and vote in affairs in TOL-CIS. Between Dailey urging me to adopt something similar for the club on AOL and Prodigy, LeaderFed's occasional propagandizing of how his club was working to become a simming republic, and memories of the debates I had with Scott over government and constitutions, I started to think more and more about the future of Trek Online and that maybe, as the threat of destruction was passing, was TOL approaching the time when it would be ready for a republic?

Yet, before that time arrived, there was still one last battle to fight.

## Chapter 19: LeaderFed's Downfall

*"That is the ultimate revenge, taking his club from him using the rules he setup." - Uridien, IM with me, July 30, 1997, as we decided how we would get rid of LeaderFed.*

During the first few days of June 1997, Ben and Uridien engaged in an intense private debate with LeaderFed and the other members of the FFSC Council about war and peace with TOL, and about the Simming League. Ben, for some unknown reason - perhaps he was shamed after reading the TOL History I had sent out after the FFSC attack on the Indelphi (by early June it was starting to circulate in the FFSC) - suddenly wanted to start cooperating with TOL and wanted peace. Ben made it secretly known to Scott and myself that he wanted to redeem himself and someday rejoin TOL. To achieve that, Ben started to provide us with additional inside information about the FFSC. Ben's sudden change of heart infuriated Uridien, and the two of them had a very public falling out on June 5. Believing that the key to future peace for Trek Online was keeping the two of them at odds, I started to drop hints in public that Ben was sorry and wanted peace with TOL and was trying to redeem himself to get back into the club, and that if Ben was successful at this, I would let him return when his suspension ended in February of 1998. When Uridien found this out, he became only more frustrated and angry with Ben.

However, Uridien was also very angry at LeaderFed for ending the war with TOL. Yet he was smart enough to realize that he could not take TOL without Ben. Deciding to cut his losses, Uridien focused his efforts on LeaderFed instead. On June 10, perhaps in an attempt to gain my support, Uridien told me that he would not attack TOL if he took over the FFSC. I simply ignored him.

A few days later, either at Uridien's design, or far more likely just by a stroke of good luck and timing, LeaderFed's raiders revolted and formed the Maquis. With this, the FFSC was plunged into a civil war even more bitter and destructive than the one fought by TOL.

While Uridien and the Maquis had the same stated goals - the destruction of LeaderFed - I never received any reports of them working together. In addition, LeaderFed would immediately kick any person out of the FFSC who he thought was supporting the Maquis, and Uridien remained in the club through out the entire war against the Maquis. What, perhaps is amazing is that Ben and Uridien did not run off to join the Maquis, take control of them,

and redirect them on their original path to attack Trek Online. The fact that Ben and Uridien had split, and that I kept pressure on them during the entire summer to keep them apart, testifies to how successful keeping them apart was to maintaining peace in TOL.

The war against the Maquis lasted about as long as the TOL Civil War - only a few short weeks. While I do not know how it was done, LeaderFed managed to defeat them by the end of June. On July 2, 1997, the FFSC held victory day celebrations. The celebrating was to be short lived, however.

The war against the Maquis only contributed to LeaderFed's paranoia. Even though the FFSC was founded to be a republic - and it did have a council and constitution - LeaderFed had turned into a tyrant, kicking out anyone he had the slightest doubts about. This caused DataBev and others, mostly the original FFSC types who founded the club and secretly aided TOL during May, to quit the club shortly after the end of the Maquis war - some time around July 7 - and start their own sim club. Those who remained in the FFSC did not care for LeaderFed and wanted him removed. Sensing the threat to his power, LeaderFed continued with the persecutions.

For the second half of June and into the first weeks of July, LeaderFed did not contact me all that much. On July 11, however, he contacted me, and continued to contact me, asking if I could be interviewed for his clubs newsletter. I said I would think about it. At the same time, several of my old informants contacted me and told me that LeaderFed was hoping that in the interview I would talk about the war the FFSC fought against TOL and say something nasty about the FFSC which LeaderFed would then publicize to either use as an excuse to redeclare war on TOL or say that TOL was still against the FFSC thus justifying his extreme security measures. I do not know if the accusations were true or not, but at the time I believed them.

A few days later DataBev, Turalyon3, DAN SILVA3, and Uridien sprung into action and launched a revolution in the FFSC that toppled LeaderFed and brought DataBev back as the new president. However, on July 18, LeaderFed somehow managed to find some supporters and launched a counter attack by convincing enough people in the FFSC that he deserved a trial before he was kicked out. The trial was complete chaos and in the nasty campaign that followed LeaderFed, amazingly, managed to restore himself as the president of the FFSC.

I had stayed out of internal FFSC matters up to this point in time because I figured LeaderFed was close to falling and there was no reason to get involved. However, now that he had returned, and given the war he had fought against TOL, his threats to renew the war over the Simming League, and the latest news I had received about him wanting to revive the war over a newsletter interview, I felt it was time to get involved and get rid of LeaderFed once and for all. My decision to instruct Scott and Ben to work together to eliminate LeaderFed, and my decision to inform people like DataBev that I would aid them in their struggle against LeaderFed became very easy to make when on July 29, many TOL members began to receive threatening and harassing E-mails from ForumAlly@hotmail.com.

Our initial evidence - even though it was circumstantial - pointed to LeaderFed as the one behind the hotmail E-mails. For example, the only TOL members contacted were the ones who had been at Mike's trial, and LeaderFed attended that trial (more on that in a moment). The demands ForumAlly@hotmail was making were identical to the surrender demands that LeaderFed had made to TOL in May, and the E-mails were not as refined as Uridien's Forum Ally had been. They instead resembled LeaderFed's typing patterns and the style he had used when he made the ForumsAlly screen name in early May.

Within a matter of days, the simmering world totally turned on its head. Uridien replied saying that he was not sending the E-mails and wanted to work with me and Scott to bring LeaderFed to justice for stealing his alter ego. (Yes, Uridien finally admitted to being Forum Ally on AOL.) But the simmering world turning on its head was not a result of converging interests or someone posing as Forum Ally. It happened because on June 19, Mike - perhaps still feeling betrayed that Uridien had violated his trust in April when he was allowed on the Indelphi - decided to get even. Mike reported to Scott that Uridien had stolen his password. Scott immediately used his AOL connections to report Uridien, only to have Mike a few hours later admit that he lied and made up the entire thing. Things moved quickly from there. A trial was held on June 23 and Mike was found guilty of several crimes. In light of his service to the club, he was not kicked out of TOL - he was only demoted to the rank of Captain and suspended from TOL for 2 weeks. He also gave a public apology to the club, Scott and Uridien. This, however, was enough for Uridien. It convinced him that I really was not a bad guy after all. In the end, I was on the side of justice and I would punish one of my own admirals for breaking the law to go after TOL's biggest, most hated enemy, Uridien. Now, a few weeks after the trial, Uridien had admitted his own guilt and was willing to work with TOL to get rid of LeaderFed. And even more amazingly, Uridien's efforts to get rid of LeaderFed were legal. He did not revert to his old tricks and plotting and psychological games. He worked within the legal system of the FFSC to get rid of LeaderFed - if only because he told me "That is the ultimate revenge, taking his club from him using the rules he setup."

In addition, Ben and Uridien, even though they now hated each other, once again united, this time to get rid of LeaderFed. When these efforts gained enough momentum to bring LeaderFed to a new trial in the FFSC, LeaderFed - in an insane plot to divert attention off of him - charged Ben with treason. I immediately rushed in to defend Ben in the FFSC courts, and the FFSC once again descended into civil war. The various attempts to hold trials were raided by opposing factions. It was an insane mess, no one had any control, but I was doing my best to exploit the various connections I had with in the FFSC to try to find as many votes as possible to impeach LeaderFed and kick him out of the club. Somewhere during all of this, Ben even apologized for attacking the Freedom sim and said he was the one behind it and that Uridien had nothing to do with it.

Whereas in May and June I had refused to allow people from the FFSC to join TOL when they wanted to, now in the end of July and early August, I opened the gates of TOL and allowed refugees from the FFSC to join TOL. One of them, TorresEng, enjoyed a very long and distinguished career as a simmer in Trek Online.

On August 1, however, the dynamics of everything suddenly changed. Upon my request, Ben forwarded me all of the E-mails he had received from LeaderFed over the past month. In those days, AOL saved your old E-mail for a month. Not only did the E-mails provide valuable intelligence, but they also revealed that as part of the victory day celebrations on July 2, LeaderFed had E-mailed his entire club a pirated copy of Photoshop. Scott was quickly informed and he passed the info up AOL's chain of command, and LeaderFed went bye bye. Since he had only forwarded the E-mail, and did not start the E-mail chain or personally pirate the program, he was only suspended from AOL for about two months, but it was enough. It, however, took a few days for the E-mail to work its way up the ranks of AOL. LeaderFed used this time to pretend that he was gracefully stepping aside as the President to end the fighting. Everyone was so tired that no one cared and we gave him this one last moment to be delusional.

By the end of August, what was left of the FFSC held Presidential elections, and, believe it or not, Uridien, with my help, won. Yes, Uridien became the president of a sim club. With the rift between Ben and Uridien still alive and well, Ben quit the FFSC, and many followed him. However, Uridien did manage to, through a number of wars, headaches and hard work, right the FFSC and turn it into a nice little sim club which enjoyed a good run before fizzling out. I suppose there is such a thing as karma after all.

I continued to help Uridien by becoming his unofficial advisor, and several of our talks discussed if Uridien should keep the FFSC a republic. These made me wonder even more about the future of Trek Online's government. During our talks, we both recognized the irony that Uridien's ultimate punishment for all he did to Trek Online was to have to become the president of a sim club, heal it after a devastating civil war, and at the same time deal with wave after wave of disgruntled former club members who were out to destroy him.

LeaderFed did return for Uridien's inauguration ceremonies on a friend's account and tried to cause some trouble. And, when he returned to AOL after his suspension was lifted LeaderFed tried to claim that he should still be the president of the FFSC and Uridien's club was not the real FFSC, but no one listened to him and LeaderFed rapidly faded away.

However, after LeaderFed's downfall, we began to realize that another person, Susan066, was responsible for the ForumAlly@hotmail E-mails. When we confronted her, she confessed and in a plea bargain she agreed to leave TOL. No one is really sure why she posed as ForumAlly. She was a member of the FFSC and a supporter of LeaderFed - so she could have been sending them on an order from LeaderFed. However, she was also a member of Trek Online - of the USS Independence.

In the middle of all of the problems with LeaderFed and the FFSC, I had finally gotten around to dealing with Scott for all of the great grief and harm he had caused TOL (and this is another reason why Uridien changed his act). Scott had become a friend and had fought valiantly against Uridien and the FFSC in an attempt to clean up the mess he had created for TOL, but that did not change the fact he pretty much caused most of the wars TOL had to fight. By July, his sim was starting to slip attendance wise, so I ceased the

opportunity and canceled it. Scott really didn't care, however. I think after all of the fighting his heart just was no longer into simming. He did stay on till August to help defeat LeaderFed, but after that he slowly drifted away from TOL. I could have, and in reflection, should have gotten rid of Scott after the Civil War. It would have saved me all kinds of problems. But, for starters, it would have been wrong. Only Uridien was against Scott - the rest of the Independence crew supported him. They did not want him to be the President, but than again, no one liked the radical ideas he had proposed as President. Also, after the Civil War, all of us wanted to keep the club together. We wanted to make a club wide community. Had I cast Scott out, the Independence and Freedom would have left, and that would have defeated the entire reason why we fought the Civil War to try to find a way to make the club work. Lastly, had the Independence left, Mike would have probably left the club. With out Mike, there would never have been the Indelphi, which gave the club new life, and there never would have been W. Weasel who recruited 30 people into TOL when we needed them the most.

But by July, the Freedom had already been retired, the Independence was declining, and the club had expanded beyond the Independence Group and had grown into a united community with a life of its own.

On July 19, the final Independence sim was held. Unfortunately, because I moved so quickly to cancel the Independence and move Scott into retirement, many of its crewmembers were only notified after the fact. One of these people was Susan066, and she was quiet upset about it. Thus, it is very possible that, being upset and knowing TOL history, she pulled one of the greatest ironies in simming history by using the name Forum Ally to attack me for canceling Scott's sim.

This of course raises the question, if a large part of my decision to get involved in overthrowing LeaderFed was due to the fact that I believed he was behind the hotmail E-mails, was what I did wrong because there is a possibility that he was not behind the E-mails?

Well, I suppose, but I do not see it that way. Lets just take his entire history - he had attacked TOL in May, and threatened war all during June and July. He needed to be dealt with.

Plus, how did I go about removing LeaderFed? Where possible, I tried to do it with in the confines of his legal system - by bringing him to trial and by working with Ben and Uridien and others to find council members who were willing to impeach him. While there were plenty of raids and counter raids, I never approved of the violence or used any violent methods to go after LeaderFed. In retrospect, it actually is amazing that the TOL Civil War did not descend into as much violence as occurred in the FFSC. All of our fighting was confined to E-mails, IMs and after the sims. In the FFSC, everything was disrupted, and people were not above using viruses and punting tools to eliminate opponents. How Uridien managed to restore peace is beyond me. I suspect that with LeaderFed gone, most of the extreme raiders - who employed such devices as viruses and punting tools - felt that they had their fun and went elsewhere to cause problems.

The violence and civil war existed in the FFSC long before I got involved, and the court cases and impeachment hearings I wished to bring against LeaderFed had not yet reached fruition when I discovered he had distributed a pirated copy of Photoshop. However, at the time, everyone could see that as soon enough order could be brought to the situation to hold a trial or impeachment hearing against LeaderFed he was done for. It is very possible that LeaderFed encouraged the many of the attacks and violence in the FFSC to delay his fate for as long as possible.

In addition, his own club members clearly did not want him to be their president. They had tried to revolt against him in mid July, and LeaderFed clearly had corrupted their dreams to make a simming republic. LeaderFed was a tyrant - who even though he had a council and wrote a constitution for the FFSC - kicked people out of his club left and right for the slightest infraction, rewarded people for turning in traitors and spies instead of for good sim performances, and turned the FFSC into a military force that attempted to destroy TOL. He was someone who needed to be eliminated. (This begs the question did the FFSC actually ever sim? Yes, they did.)

When I found out that he had distributed a pirated copy of a several hundred dollar program, I had to notify AOL. Things simply were out of my hands at that point in time. The fact that LeaderFed was suspended from AOL quickly solved everyone's problems. TOL no longer had to worry about the FFSC being a threat because LeaderFed was gone, and the people in the FFSC were now able to freely sim in peace. On top of it all, Uridien was not going to attack TOL because I had punished Mike and finally got rid of Scott. Plus, because Uridien was now experiencing first hand everything I had experienced as the President of Trek Online, he apologized for all he had ever done and changed his ways. Ben was not going to attack TOL because he was now on a quest to behave himself and regain membership.

As TOL moved into September of 1997, we celebrated our one-year anniversary. After a year of immense struggle, we finally were confident that we had peace. In private chats, Chip and I agreed that our sense of impending doom had finally disappeared - that things really were for the better this time. In September of 1997, Trek Online truly celebrated for the first time in its history. Somehow, through the very dark days and constant fighting, we had managed to survive, and now, Trek Online was thriving. Despite everything, we were approaching a hundred members and several new sims were starting up.

I think we just were lucky, and we were able to survive because at key times the club banded together. We helped each other out, gave each other support and encouragement, and always, no matter how hard things became, always tried to focus on simming and having a good time. While Chip, Scott and myself had always been looking to make a true club wide simming family and community, more than anything else, the wars brought the club together and forged a tremendous sense of unity and purpose - if people hated us so much, we must be special. In addition, the struggles gave us a sense of purpose - that Trek Online must always work to ensure that no club would ever experience anything like the wars and fighting TOL experienced in 1997.

Hope carried us through the dark days of 1997. We all had dreams about what Trek Online and simming should look like, dreams that were created in the early days of the club, dreams that we wanted to see become a reality, dreams which no one wanted to give up on. During the dark days, as we huddled together, waiting for and fending off one attack after the next, we encouraged each other and hoped that someday our dreams would become a reality.

Looking back, the struggles were worth it. They helped to shape the club, made us stronger, made us unique. Despite all of the bickering the dreams of Chip, Scott and myself found a way to complement each other and become a reality.

Also looking back, it is amazing how - while at the time we all knew we wanted to make a new kind of sim club, and we all had different ideas about how to go about it, and we all had a sense that we could make a break with the old order of things and take advantage of first 20 hours and then unlimited - everything seemed back then to be complete chaos and one random, violent event after another. However, in history, everything appears to be smooth and orderly, as if it was guided by some unseen hand.

## Chapter 20: Scott's Story

*"I'm not sure about you either, but since you got this thing started, you must have some good traits." - Scott to Chas, sometime during the Civil War when the two attempted to work together.*

In September of 1997, with LeaderFed defeated, Ben and Uridien apologetic and attempting to make amends for their past transgressions, Trek Online held wild celebrations for its one year anniversary. Somehow, we had made it, we had survived and now, we could all enjoy a bright future of wacky simulated adventures. Most of the sims had special anniversary celebrations which brought together simmers from AOL and Prodigy. Special chat parties, filled with jelly bean fights, pools of spam, and smiting galore were held. To mark the occasion, I published the first version of My Simming Memoirs so that future generations would never forget the struggles and bravery of Trek Online during its first year. As part of my first simming memoirs, I included a chapter written by Scott, and here it is, reprinted in its entirety. I hope it gives everyone a different and interesting perspective from one of TOL's other founding leaders.

"I have not been good at dates or exactness and so I am unable to convey them to you, but the living experience that TOL, USG, UFP/SF went to are all there, waiting to be relived again. Some times I feel we need to learn of everything to make sure it does not happen again or how to deal with it when it does happen. To know the future, one must have mastered the past.

What was life like with Charlie and myself back in the early days? Well we did not know each other, nor in the beginning each other's personalities (We would find them out, in a most unfortunate manner).

We stayed our separate ways for the most part. I was the Executive Officer of the USS Independence-A, and our Captain was CaptPLynch. Patrick and I talked frequently on the phone with each other and become good friends. Many have asked me how in the world did we meet, well strangely enough in a similar manner as Chip and Charlie :)

I logged onto my eWorld account, Sdbuch and while not believing the news and talks of Apple really shutting it down and our club, I planned to get on E-mail my fellow crew members and say I told you so. I never got that opportunity, but instead a long text file loaded up explaining what happened. eWorld merged with AOL and wanted us to transfer over there, we got 20 free hours for it and the software (v2.5) was right there. I did it. Once I downloaded the software I just sat there in my chair looking at my Performa 6200CD just thinking of all the friends I have lost, and my crew members. I was a Lt. Commander in a popular sim group, just enjoyed Star Trek and Mac Addicts <g>.

The next day I signed onto AOL and got out my Master Card to get an account, I had no idea what name to choose, than I thought why not choose Sdbuch again so that if by miracle a friend of mine can locate me, Sdbuch@aol.com instead of Sdbuch@eworld.com, it'd be logical to other E-World Members. Well I found out the next month, no indeed they were forever lost with time.

With my time online I discovered Keyword: Trek, and yes of course the Bridge. I did not have friends online, nor was I in a Sim Group, I just used it for work and enjoyment. On this day I did go to the Bridge were as usual someone was advertising a sim group, well this was usual and I did not have the interest nor will in it anymore. Than unlike any other time he IMed me, a CaptPLynch. He told me he had a sim group already and needed a Executive Officer, and the only reason I even remotely thought about it was the fact that he IMed me, it was more personal. I told him I would think about it and E-mail him later today. I thought about the pros and cons, and than remembered the great times I had simming with my Mac Crew Members. Than I had my answer. I sent him an E-mail and said my decision will be based on how you answer this question Captain, are you on a Macintosh PowerPC, 68k, or Windows 3.1? He answered a Macintosh PowerPC. I told him that yes I would be his Executive Officer if he still needed me and that I was a Mac person also and was from eWorld :)

Of course he accepted me :P He brought me a ton of E-mail to absorb, which I did. He wanted to ease me into it, so he brought me to my first sim in 2 1/3 months. It was a fantastic crew, you could not believe how kind everyone was to me, someone so new. As I recall an ensign, StarFox25, I know she was on a PC, but it really didn't matter I guess. I did become good friends with her as she lived in Wisconsin, in fact not far from me at all, and what was ironic is that I visited her hometown frequently as my Aunt lived up there, I would drive up periodically to say hi to my Aunt and think of Anissa (Fox).

Down the road I joined the Vindicator. I cannot recall clearly how I met one CaptChasSF, but I believe he was the one to IM me. I did enjoy the Vindicator also, nice crew although I must say I was new to the Game Master idea or as Charlie called it, Sim Master (SM).



Around December all hell broke loose. CaptPLynch left us and his account was not active. He called me to tell me he was done and threw in the towel, but it was on my answering machine and I could not call him back as I did not have HIS phone number. I did decide finally to break this news to the crew, it was a miracle they let me survive after hearing it <g>. But I could tell at that point things would be forever changed and the touch that was there would be lost. I did nominate Fox as my Executive Officer as I was left in Command of an entire club. I did change it to one ship as I did not want to command a club, remember the highest rank I held on eWorld was Lt Commander, and I was not prepared for such a leap.

In the process of commanding a ship, I realized quickly I had to report to know one, I was the one that others came to me. Ever wonder where the ones that give help and are in charge go for help? So do I! LOL. I had to basically reteach myself everything as I went along. I did tell my CO, CaptChasSF who transformed into AdmChasUSG the situation. I also became active in the Vindicator's sims and was promoted to Lt.

My guiding light and inspiration quickly came to be Anissa, or Fox. She as a excellent Command and First Officer, there just was no one better than her. Our crew held together for a bit of time, unfortunately there were those out to just get ME of all people. In their eyes they felt I killed of Patrick or made him leave, when in fact he was TOSed out of AOL and did not want to tell me. Forum Ally later appeared and at a Chat with my XOs soon-to-be-husband Anissa, Anissa, and Uridien. I found out Uridien was Forum Ally with his chat. Before this Uridien was a great guy, I was not really involved with him much, and nor was he. But I know he was a funny guy in my sims, and I remember clearly some fantastic sims with Uridien and DEfissel, such as the classic episode of Dan and Uri getting drunk at Quark's. Oh the entire crew had a great time with this sim, I know one of the clobbered me over the head with a chair and knocked me out, than when I came to I found a drunk Klingon (My XO Anissa) standing above me who also whacked me good for another unconscious time just lying there, I believe she did it by accident, I stood up and said wha... just as she threw a chair at Quark :) Quark ducked, and I... well I took a nap. But back to the story. Uridien was Forum Ally in my mind and as we would later find out he hated me for what happened to Plynch and blamed me fully and than of course he admitted it, than denied it again, ack!

It became a horrible situation and drove a lot of my crew away, later I talked with Charlie on the USS Independence-A joining USG/FP. Finally we did and went through some turbulent times.

Jumping to a time -- the dark age as it came to be. The new club Charlie made was just dumped down. I did talk to Charlie immediately in Peace Talks - a PR. I was being left President of the club as Chip was resigning and Charlie said he was too. I convinced Charlie not to leave and how to create a new constitution with a democracy. At the time I had many many members come up to me saying how to save the club and what they wanted, I carried out on that.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Chas' note: In these few previous paragraphs Scott has clearly burred the events of December and January and confused the order of some of the events.

Finally later on Charlie gave his last proposal to me. It met all of what the members wanted except he was the sole power and could veto or over turn anything made by the CO and XO Council. In other words, it served no good use if we still have that one main person. While we need the symbolic leader of a President and one top leader such as what we have in the US, we could not have what he proposed. So I disagreed after much thought.

When he resigned I knew what he was doing, he had it all planned out from his Military background and personality. I knew that all hope for the right way was lost, yet still sent out my planned E-mail from the other day as we planned together. I knew and would not expect anything less than the USS Vindicator crew to follow him, along with the USS Endeavor as the talk behind my back all centered around Josh replacing me. One thing I did not count on was Chip leaving also, once he left I knew that what I was doing could not be right and was wrong. At that moment I just sat down and just felt bad. I knew I had been betrayed and that he had managed to route everything past myself. I could not compete with such as Militant Leader and my ideals on discipline were not there from previous months or years, but in recent action of one Uridien, Forum Ally, Ben, and DEFissel. But Charlie centered around the discipline plans I had as they were not wanted by the general membership.<sup>40</sup>

I gave up and resigned from all hope and left the thing that was left. I of course remained with the USS Independence-A and USS Freedom. Which later I gave command to the Freedom to my XO, Anissa, which she deserved unlike anyone and she loved it!! VgerMom soon became her Executive Officer whom was a Vulcan. VgerMom was a 36 year old mom of two who really enjoyed Star Trek.. so just how did she meet up with the Independence? Well back in the day I was one for Tech Live Auditorium, I would go into a unstaffed row and give better tech support than any other AOLTech <g> VgerMom was one of those who received my tech support and it worked, I also told her some tips for helping her computer, she loved it so much she stayed in contact with me from then on! Eventually she joined our ship and LOVED it :) Unfortunately a flood came to her house and everything was lost, we regained contact with her 62 days from that point and to this day are unable to reach her. She was one of the first members of TOL on AOL to receive a medal.

Back to the story at hand. Chip, Josh, Chas, and someone else all meet for a private meeting for the new club. Leaving me out of the light once again and going behind my back for the 9th time (but who's counting, hey? <g>). After the meeting, I squeezed Charlie out of a Chat Log. I then talked to him about it all and told him I would not be joining that club again. Finally after still talking to him for greater lengths, I agreed to run the new Academy and my ship. I would no longer be in any Command areas. Only on that condition would I join back and forget the betrayals and hope to make a new friendship. *(This paragraph refers to a meeting I held with Chip and Josh on January 31 in which they pledged their support to me after I resigned.)*

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<sup>40</sup> Chas' note: Scott probably means that he felt he lost the debate and the club revolted against him because I successfully cast the debate against his discipline plan, and he failed to cast me as a militant leader.

We eventually got everything worked out and more problems followed us with LeaderFed, they were taken care of again. Charlie and I become very good friends in the following months. Anissa retired from the Freedom and of course that sim went out with a blast, literally. That is about all from my perspective in the TOL Realm. It had its ups and downs, but its been my home :)"

# My Simming Memoirs

## Part 4: Reality



The clubs banner in 1998 (top image), and the menu we adopted for our website in late 1998 (bottom image). By Captain Sergei.

### Chapter 21: Peace At Hand

*"One year. Never would of though we would make it this far." - Chip Rollins, in an IM with me, September 27, 1997.*

Building on the success of the short histories used against Ben, Uridien, and LeaderFed, I wrote the first version of *My Simming Memoirs* during the summer of 1997. The primary purpose of the Memoirs was to celebrate the club's first anniversary, but they also provided a full rebuttal to the rumors Ben circulated about TOL. And they worked. Ben was embarrassed by the full retelling of his exploits and started to behave. Club members read the memoirs and felt a sense of pride - people became more involved in TOL and the sense of community and friendship among us grew tighter.

Writing the Memoirs allowed me to step back and see the big picture of how the club evolved, and to discover our strengths and weaknesses. From this I came to realize three important things that would drive me, and I suppose haunt me, for the rest of my days as President of Trek Online. First, Trek Online was a delicate compromise. Second, our judicial system was a failure. Third, the time had come for Scott's dream.

My 1997 Memoirs (edited and expanded over time) are retained in Parts 1 to 3 today. That's why Parts 2 and 3 are a blow by blow recount. Parts 4 to 7 were not written until 2003 and 2004, after my career had ended and TOL faded from the annals of history. As a result, you will notice that this and the subsequent parts of the Memoirs are more reflective in nature. This isn't to say that there weren't important things happening in the club on a daily basis from 1997 to 2002, but being so many years removed from the events, I feel there is more value in reflection than in a blow by blow narrative concerning everything that happened after 1997.

The summer of 1997 brought peace to Trek Online. While I realized the downfall of LeaderFed was a significant event, I didn't have a sense of its importance at the time. Chip and I commented that this peace seemed different, that it might last, but we were not sure, things were nebulous at best. No one knew what would happen with the FFSC, the raiders, Ben, and Uridien. But I think that is how it is with history. There were very few moments when I knew for sure that things had changed forever.

Nevertheless, I ceased the moment.

Trek Online had undergone astounding changes during the summer. In February we had been a club of 25 members at each other's throats. By August our unique simming style, focus on community, and aggressive recruiting contests caused TOL to take off and become a thriving club of nearly 100. To accommodate this growth, new sims were added.

In April the USS Avenger, under the command of I. Relayer, began. In June, Josh - the original captain of the Endeavor - returned from retirement and organized the USS Wrightstown as his gift to Trek Online. With my permission, Josh took it upon himself to recruit the crew, train the captain - Lt. Commander Oden from the Vindicator - and take care of all of the initial preparation that goes into a successful sim.

In July, TOL organized the USS Stonewall (named after the general and TOL battle) and I placed Lt. Clodo, from Mike's sim, in command. In August, Viper Flight - an independent sim ran by a TOL member named Alex Kracken - was brought into TOL. In September, as the

club continued to grow, the IKS Dark Falcon - with Vorahk, a Lieutenant from the USS Generation in command - was established. Finally, in December, the ISS Vorta was organized, with Robin, a Lieutenant from the USS Vindicator, in command.

In addition we ran weekly Star Trek Trivia and Chat sessions, a Trek Trivia E-mail string, and message board based activities. Plus, lets not forget about the Orion simming away on Prodigy and our other sims on AOL - the Generation, Vindicator, Endeavor, and Frontier Station (Mike had destroyed the Indelphi during one of his sims and replaced it with a space station). All of this would constitute TOL's core for the remainder of my presidency. The club would later expand into E-mail and message board sims, and add a new chat sim here and there - but the core had been set by January 1998.

The growth, however, brought about its own challenges, and combined with the reflections generated by my Memoirs, made me realize that Trek Online was a delicate compromise.

By their very nature sim clubs are fragile. With only words on a screen generating your reality, there isn't anything real to back up your hard work. This realization on one level or another has driven all sorts of obsessive behavior in simming leaders - from dictatorships, to Admiral Rick trying to control everyone's characters, to all of my crazy ideas for how to run a club.

I, at least, was able to compromise on my objection to outside of the box sims (other obsessions remained, however). Aside from the USS Stonewall, all of the new sims launched during the remainder of 1997 were non traditional (meaning not Federation starships from the TNG/DS9/Voyager era). It would have made the selection of sims in TOL too stale if we had keep everything as a generic starship; and by the summer of 1997, club members were clamoring for more diversity. As a result, the Dark Falcon was a Klingon sim, the Vorta was a Romulan sim, and the Wrightstown was a Classic Era sim. Nevertheless, they were firmly grounded in Trek and thus were easy for anyone to follow. The Avenger was set in the 25th century - in a universe where the Federation was dying. I made sure to remind IR time and time again that he should keep the sim as general as possible - and fight his tendencies to give the sim an epic movie plot. Viper Flight was a runabout squadron battling the Maquis, which was unique, but still had enough of a general background that anyone could jump into. As a result, club members got a diverse array of sims, but all of the sims held to TOL's central belief that the best sims are ones everyone can take part in. I still maintain to this day that elaborate plots that could make a good movie do not make for good sims because they just become way too confusing.

The organization of the club was another grand compromise compared to my original vision. Captains had creative control over their sims, but I was a strong President. Yet, I couldn't keep my eye on all of my captains. For whatever reason I found that it's very difficult to directly manage more than 5 or 6 sims. Why this is the case I'm not quite sure - perhaps it has something to do with the limitations of communication and management via a computer. But the 5 or 6 sim rule is plainly visible in the simming world. When clubs expand beyond this size they run into trouble and usually divide into fleets - where an admiral manages 5 or 6 captains and the president oversees the admirals. But the purpose of Trek Online was to be

an open community, free of artificial barriers and the accompanying bureaucracy and military hierarchy. We wanted everyone to follow the same set of rules, to enjoy the same style of simming. Besides, we had fought long and hard to keep the club as one entity, so we stuck to the system of all the captains reporting directly to me. Yet, there had to be compromises made in the face of reality. On AOL, all of the sims reported directly to me. However, due to the limitations of the era, there remained a CompuServe division, a Prodigy division, and later an Internet Division. As the web made it easier to bring people together, however, all of TOL came under the direct supervision of the president. Outside of the sims though, for my own sanity, I did spin other things off - for example, I created an activities bureau to manage the club's trivia and chat sessions, an academy bureau to handle training, etc, and placed a captain or admiral in charge of each.

Despite personally overseeing more than 5 or 6 captains at once, I was able to avoid any serious complications because I was blessed with wonderful captains. I only had to focus on a few captains at a time - and it was never anything bad; even the best have to be prodded or reminded of things they forgot to do. In addition, over the summer of 1997, I wrote a command bible. It basically was a guidebook for the captains that detailed club operations and management - all of the stuff that no one thinks about but is critical for a successful sim. The command bible was not in of itself authoritative. I allowed captains great leeway in how they managed their own sim, but the command bible did get all of the captains on the same page. It got them to think about items they wouldn't have necessarily thought of, provided them with a check list of things to do for their sim, and mandated paperwork and reports that insured behind the scenes uniformity in the club - all of which helped me immensely.

Parallel to the TOL Times, I published a monthly command newsletter just for the captains, which provided important news and info for them. In each newsletter I also went through each sim saying what I liked and what I felt needed improvement. I made it a point to IM and talk to every captain at least once a week and there were plenty of E-mails to all of the captains during the course of the month about important topics of the day.

Working with the captains I established a promotion point system for TOL. During the summer of 1997 promotions and ranks were starting to become a point of contention, threatening the rank compromise. On some sims the captain was very strict with promotions, but on others the captain would give out promotions every few weeks. To clear up this problem the uniform point system was established.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Our rank system was a byzantine compromise. During our first year, promotion points would be issued for attending a sim, recruiting a new member, or performing some sort of service to the club, and while there were guidelines in theory, they were not followed. Some captains followed the point system, others didn't give points, some were strict with their promotions, others were not. From the summer of 1997 on, we, more or less, followed a uniform system - all be very complex. A person would have a rank for each sim, and that rank was the rank their character played within that sim. Typically, individuals would start in a sim as a cadet or ensign, and move their way up the longer they remained with the sim - although with permission of the sim's captain, individuals could start at a higher rank based on previous experience in TOL or elsewhere. However, to be promoted, an individual would have

But most important to our success in late 1997, I figured out how to be a good leader. I discovered my limits, who I could trust, how to spot talent, how to handle problems before they grew out of control, and what work is necessary to run a club. Plus, I had gained everyone's respect. Every new leader is probed and challenged to see how he or she will react. I had been tested, and I proved my metal. The club was now willing to follow me, and those who thought about causing problems feared me and decided it was in their best interests to behave.

Yet, I, and the other captains at the time realized that our new set up would not support an ever-larger club. We realized that Trek Online had come full circle. Our founding dreams had survived and were now becoming a reality - but our very success was threatening to overwhelm our dreams. So we reached another compromise - growth of the club was capped. This ensured that Trek Online remained small enough to retain a sense of community, but large enough to offer a diverse collection of sims and activities to all members. We, in other words, decided to focus on quality, not quantity.

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to accumulate a certain amount of promotion points, and attend a minimum number of sims on their ship. Promotion points were given for attending a sim (with bonus given by the captain for how involved they were in the particular sim), for taking part in club activities, for providing a service to the club, for recruiting a new member, etc. Points could also be taken away for disciplinary infractions. These points were tied to the individual, not the sim or rank - your points would be accredited to you wherever you went in the club, but to be promoted within a sim, you had to earn a set number of points during your time at that rank with that sim. To be promoted from ensign to ltjg, an individual needed to attend at least 7 sims with their ship and accumulate 200 promotion points while at the ensign level on that sim. To be promoted from ltjg to lt a person would need to attend 12 sims and accumulate 250 promotion points while at the ltjg level on that sim. There were also thresholds established for promotion to ltcmdr and cmdr, and people who remained with a sim for a long while would be promoted to these levels in time. However, a number of people would also be jumped - a captain may pick a person of a lower rank to be their first officer, making that person a ltcmdr or cmdr in the sim right off the bat. The only set criteria to become a captain was to gain my approval - and later that of the Assembly - and as noted, I would pick people who I felt capable of commanding a sim regardless of their rank, and as a result, bumped lts and ltcmdrs up to captain. In addition to all of this, people would have a club rank, which was the highest rank they ever obtained in a sim. The club rank was the way they were formally recognized for club business, and also people could create screen names with their club rank, say CmdrBobTOL. The net result of all of this is you could have Bob, who served as a first officer and obtained the rank of Commander as the highest rank he served in Trek Online. Due to his length of service with TOL, he could also have 2000 promotion points to his name. At the present time though, he was serving on the Endeavor as a ltjg. He would be promoted to lt on the Endeavor after attending 12 Endeavor sims and obtaining 250 promotion points while serving at the ltjg level on the Endeavor. During that time, Bob started on the Vindicator as an ensign, and would have to attend 7 Vindicator sims and accumulate 200 promotion points while at the ensign level on the Vindicator. Bob could also have joined the Stonewall during the same period - and because the Stonewall had an opening for a chief engineer, and because Bob is an experienced simmer, Clodo could have made Bob a ltcmdr right off the bat on the Stonewall.



## Chapter 22: Republic

*"I have noticed something about all the Admirals, they always write long letters and they always have them well written and with good grammar, so I have been wondering why do admirals do that?"*

*"I really don't know... I guess some admiral way back when decided that is how admirals should be and then another admiral copied him, then another, and another, and it just spread on till all admirals did it."*

*- Midshipman Jacen Solo and Admiral Chas Hammer, in an E-mail exchange, November 14, 1997. A good metaphor. Why do all Admirals set up military dictatorships? Because everyone else has always done so...*

The largest flaw I noticed when writing my Memoirs in 1997 was the spectacular failure of our court system. Failed trials had allowed Ben and Uridien to escape justice for months and had contributed to the civil war. I felt the problem was that the court system was not defined on paper. Everyone had a different sense of how the discipline system worked in TOL. As I saw it, trials are only used when things get very out of hand, and during such times everyone should have the same understanding about how to resolve the matter - the issues in the trial may be contentious, but the process of having a trial shouldn't be. But because the trial system was not defined, the club had suffered tremendously.<sup>42</sup>

So, in September of 1997, I began to talk to the captains and first officers to discover their views of the club's legal system. From there, I worked with them to draft a Members Rights Document that put into writing a basic judicial framework and set of laws for the club. The Document enshrined the precedents and unwritten rules that had accumulated in TOL, and established a court system where a trial could be conducted by the president and 2 captains serving as judicial magistrates, or by the president serving as the judge and 9 club members as jurors. The defendant would choose which method he or she wanted. However, both methods were allowed by the Document as a compromise because opinion was split in the club as to which one was the better system.

The process that created the Document was just as important as its content. The Document was drafted by the captains and first officers of TOL, and was approved by a vote of the same people. I was actively working with my captains and first officers because I realized that if the club ever ended up in another contentious situation like the civil war, I would have to be able to say, "Look, you voted for this, so stop complaining and follow these rules that will allow us to work through this problem and solve it."

The Members Rights Document was ratified by the captains and first officers on October 7, 1997. A week later, Bo Duke, a club member who had a lot of talent, but also had problems controlling himself, acted up at a USS Stonewall sim. Following the rules in the

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<sup>42</sup> It's always contentious, and no matter what I've tried, I still know of no good way to handle serious disciplinary situations in simming.

Members Rights Document, a trial was held without incident, Bo Duke was demoted, and that was that. Because we had written procedures in place everyone acted very professionally, and Bo Duke felt like he had been treated fairly (which he was), he followed his punishment without complaining. Furthermore, through the trial process, he felt the weight of the community upon him, so he reformed himself and served the club with distinction from that day forward.

In November there was a second trial. Mike, the CO of the USS Indelphi, felt that two people at his sim were acting up, so he issued demotions. The crew felt the punishment was unfair and appealed. A trial was held and the demotions were overruled. In a situation like this things could have become nasty - captain vs crew is never a good state for a sim. Mike threatened to resign, but when I reminded him that he had voted for the Members Rights Document and the very trial system that had overruled his decision to discipline members of his crew, he backed down, and the club benefited from his continued presence for years to come.

In other words, the Members Rights Document quickly proved to be a great success, so it was only logical for me to build upon it. By writing my first memoirs, I had rediscovered Scott's arguments for a republic. At the time, in January and February, I had dismissed his ideas because they would not have worked. The club was too fragile and would have died had they been introduced, and I still feel that way to this day. After all, colonists did not show up in Virginia in 1610 and establish a republic. It took almost two centuries before the United States was created. The same is true in simming, but on much smaller time scales. You just do not start up a sim club and make it a republic. But now, in the fall of 1997, even though Scott had retired from the club and was no longer around advocating for a republic, and even though no one in the club was calling for a republic, I was beginning to think that the time had arrived for a republic in TOL. The positive experience I had with the Members Rights Document, the fact the club was now strong, and my earlier promise that I would establish a republic when the club was strong, made me decide it was time to build upon the Members Rights Document and turn TOL into a republic.

So, on November 21, 1997, I E-mailed all of the captains. I told them that I was thinking about holding presidential elections, expanding the Members Rights Document by writing a constitution, and turning the club into a republic. To me, it made sense to hold elections before work on a republic began, because it would be hypocritical and dangerous for me to turn TOL into a republic without ever having been voted into the presidency.

The reaction from the captains was positive. No one was against the idea and everyone could see the benefits - from encouraging more member involvement, to promoting new ideas in the club, to providing a forum that would air tensions - but the overall level of enthusiasm was mixed. Some captains worried it would result in more work, and Robin especially became caught up in the metaphorical qualities of the words republic and constitution. She wondered if the terms and concepts were too over the top (but for me the terms were important - club members wouldn't want to get involved with a leadership council or care about the by-laws).

It was Chip, however, who was the most influential in shaping my and the captains views of the republic. Chip was one of the few people I allowed to hold a veto power over me. I highly valued his advice because he had been the President, and if he was dead set against something I would not proceed. When it came to the idea of the republic, he was naturally hesitant. I was starting to sound like Scott, and he jokingly reminded me that was not a good thing.

Chip didn't view a republic as a practical way to run the day-to-day government of the club. But he did see value in having captains and members have a say in the fate of their club. He also knew that as the club matured over the years we would need a new system, and he was open to the idea that it be a republic. But the main question in Chip's mind was how to deal with my retirement. I wasn't planning to retire anytime soon, but he was embarrassed by the way the club had handled his stepping down from the Presidency, and he didn't want to see that repeated.

Over the course of several chats we discussed how I would retire. We considered everything from my disbanding the club upon my retirement, to picking a successor, to holding an election at the time of my retirement, to just letting the club once again fight it out. But in the end we kept on coming back to the realization that the only way we could insure a successful transfer of power was through a republic or some kind of democratic means.<sup>43</sup>

Holding an election where everyone in the club voted for one of the commanding officers to be the President was seen by Chip and myself as the best way to determine succession. Such a system would prevent jealousy among the other captains that could have occurred if I picked a successor. Such a system would put the decision into the hands of the club, and who they picked would have the backing of the club and thus would be in a far stronger position to lead and manage the captains. The president's power would be based on making the people happy, not on winning the support of the captains.

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<sup>43</sup> Keep in mind, at the time, the barriers to creating and leaving a sim were very low. People simply had to agree to meet in a chat room at the same time every week. To form a club, people simply had to agree to sim together. They could just easily decide to stop listening to the leaders and form their own club. To keep the club together, buy in was extremely important, and we felt a republic was the best way to ensure everyone in the club felt they had an equitable stake - that their voice was heard - and also that a republic was the best way to leave everyone satisfied with the decision at the end of the day, even if they didn't get their exact way. Today, clubs require a much more serious investment of time and money to create and maintain websites. While it remains important to get buy in of members, the real life monetary and legal issues associated with a website now require a serious business approach in managing a sim club. A pure republican system in a sim club today would be extremely reckless.

But holding an election a few years down the road when I retired could have opened the club up to all kinds of problems and questioning of the vote. There would have to be a series of regular elections before I retired so that precedents and traditions could build up.

We could have chosen to elect a president on a regular basis, and leave it at that, but such a system wouldn't have guaranteed regular elections. The president could simply decide to do away with them. So, the elections needed to be part of a larger system that gave the members a voice in the club - a republic. In addition, there would be no recourse against the elected dictator (aside from voting him out of office, but we all know incumbents hardly ever get voted out of office.) There had to be checks and balances built into the system to give the captains and club members a voice and ability to influence the president. And, beyond that, a republic gave the club a number of other benefits. First and foremost, Trek Online was about being a community, and a republic allowed everyone to shape their community and to have a club that reflected their collective desires. A republic generated interest and involvement in the club, and it insured a fresh influx of new ideas and new blood into the highest ranks of TOL.

Perhaps most importantly, I realized that debate was not a bad thing. Leaders in the simming world are naturally fearful of debate because whenever a debate occurs in a club it quickly becomes discord and sometimes destroys clubs. However this happens because there are no channels for debate in a club, so things just boil under the surface until they explode.<sup>44</sup>

But in a republic, with elections, a constitution, and a legislative body, debate was encouraged and given a controlled channel that prevented it from becoming discord. The republic allowed problems to be aired before they built up and become un-resolvable. It allowed many people to think about problems, and many heads are better than one. Plus, we got the added bonus of creating a system where people were free to think and make decisions, so they actually did. The republic empowered my captains and made it so they didn't have to come to me for every decision.

So, with both Chip and myself in agreement that a republic was the best way to go, we decided to forge ahead. But the question was, how would we make it and what shape would it take? We would hold an election to find out.

### **Chapter 23: The Simming League Reborn**

*"I can't debate on the folders Chas." - Senator Bromb, from MFS, debating against my proposal to have message board meetings in the League, May 1, 1998.*

There were three candidates for TOLs first Presidential election. Myself (naturally), Mike and Bo Duke. I find it interesting that the two people who decided to run against me were the two who had just appeared before the court. Unknown to me, they could have been

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<sup>44</sup> After I left the Presidency, Trek Online became fearful of debate; without having regular discussions, when the debate came, it was too late, it exploded and consumed the club.

simmering under the surface - and who knows what they may have done in the future - but the election gave them a constructive way to make their voices heard.

The election wasn't just about picking a leader. It also was about picking an idea for the future of the club. The idea I advocated was to turn TOL into a constitutional republic. Mike's idea was to establish a triumvirate system - something similar to what we had tried in the USG - where there would be three leaders elected by the club members. One of the leaders would be designated as the top leader, but any 2 of the 3 could veto an action. Bo Duke - who had redeemed himself by working hard and was re-promoted to Commander and became a First Officer, making him eligible to run in the election - proposed a few small items that he felt would improve the club, but his overall plan was to keep things as they were.

After a series of civil chat and message board debates, the club went to the polls and overwhelmingly reelected me as the President. I received 81% of the vote, Mike 13%, Bo Duke 6%.

The election results were announced on January 19, 1998, in the private chat room Stonewall. The symbolism wasn't lost on anyone. One year after the civil war, TOL re-gathered in the same room, this time to witness the peaceful selection of the club's leader.

A number of dignitaries from other clubs, including Jeff Hafley, president of the United Simulations Organization (USO), attended the election celebrations. Jeff IMed me and told me about an emerging threat in the simming world - a person named Griffin and his club, the Federation of Alien Species (FAS). Griffin was one of those people who took everything way too seriously and who allowed simming to fill his ego.<sup>45</sup> He had been a captain in a sim club called Federation Online Simulations (FOS), but had a falling out with the leaders in early January 1998 and left the club, causing a split in the ranks of the FOS. While many people stayed loyal to the FOS, a few followed Griffin, and he started up his own club, the FAS. Words were continuously exchanged between members of the FAS and FOS, and the situation was rapidly deteriorating towards war. The FOS was a friendly and peaceful club, and had signed a series of alliances with other clubs, including the USO. Had war broke out, Jeff feared that many clubs, including the USO, would be dragged into the fighting.

Jeff had heard of the Simming League and asked if there was anything they could do to help. I, sadly, had to inform Jeff that the League disbanded over the summer. However, I quickly saw this as a perfect opportunity to reestablish the League. After all, I found the idea of the League to be a wonderful thing and I didn't want to see it disappear forever. So, I contacted the FOS and their allies and told them that I was willing to offer my services as a negotiator, and I told them about the Simming League. I explained that I had been the last President of the Sim Senate, and thus, technically, I still had the authority of the League behind me. I stated that after the negotiations were concluded I would like to have

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<sup>45</sup> He also claimed to be an F-14 pilot stationed on an aircraft carrier. How he expected anyone to believe that is beyond me.

their support in rebuilding the League. They agreed. (I think it was a nice piece of maneuvering on my part.)

All of this did two things for me. First, when I contacted Griffin, it gave me real power because I had all of the allied clubs behind me and we were speaking as one voice. It also - by acting in the name of the League - gave me symbolic power, causing Griffin to think I had major authority. So, when I contacted Griffin a few days later, I was able to convince him to enter into negotiations.

The negotiations were an episode almost as bizarre as what I experienced with LeaderFed in May of 1997. Griffin constantly made bombastic statements and veered off into historic hyperbole. However, I engaged in his debates in order to calm him down and see if I could win a few points by out debating him. I did my best to convince him about the stupidity of engaging in a simulated war, and I somehow managed to keep the allies from becoming fed up and walking away. After a week of tense negotiations and my daily back and forth meetings with the FAS, FOS, and allied clubs, Griffin agreed not to attack, and a treaty was worked out.

The treaty was straightforward - the FOS would recognize that that Griffin had left the club and would not harass the members who had left for the FAS or try to get them to return. Griffin would not attack the FOS, would leave the club alone, and would not try to convince more people to leave the FOS. The Simming League would monitor to make sure the treaty was followed. It was a huge diplomatic victory and propelled myself and TOL forward as a leader of the simming community on AOL.

During February, momentum for the Simming League gathered. I contacted clubs that I knew, Jeff and the allies contacted clubs they knew, and soon, over a dozen clubs were assembled and working together to reestablish the League.

Discussions about the League went smoothly. Everyone agreed to the ideas of the First League - to have an organization that would bring clubs together, foster the exchange of ideas, and provide a political outlet to let clubs resolve problems facing the entire simming world. Everyone also agreed to establish a judicial system that would resolve conflicts and disputes between clubs.

Quickly Jeff, myself, and Bromb - who was representing Members Focused Simulations (MFS) - became the principle people who drafted the League's constitution. Jeff and myself worked to rewrite the first constitution - basically updating it, giving it more details, and removing the few compromises (such as the defense pact) that LeaderFed had demanded. Jeff also created an expanded Trustee Council - a body that was designed to help new clubs get onto their feet. However, Bromb wanted the League to be more than a forum, political and judicial body. He wanted the League to work to advance the simming world. To this end, he came up with the idea that the League should be able to establish bureaus to run activities and organize efforts. Everyone liked the idea and it was added to the constitution.

By the end of February, a draft was produced and sent to all interested clubs. 11 clubs decided to ratify it and join the League, including TOL, FAS, FOS, and MFS.

With the League Constitution set, League Presidential elections were called for. The two candidates were, quite naturally, myself - with Jeff as my running mate - and Bromb. What emerged during the election - and would grow over the next few months - was a fundamental difference between Bromb and myself over the nature of the League.

Bromb, having seen the success of the FAS/FOS negotiations and the constitution drafting process, wanted to use the power and resources possessed by the assembled clubs to actively engage the simming world - to resolving disputes, to exchanging ideas, to set standards for the simming world, and to provide activities and services for simmers and clubs.

I, on the other hand, have never looked at the League and said, "Wow, look at all of these clubs, imagine what we could do if we got everyone working together." Clubs are in the League for select reasons, and I've always felt that if the League were to force clubs in some direction it would break the League apart. The reason the League was able to attract a large number of clubs was because clubs felt un-threatened by it. They knew the League would not do anything drastic.

I won the election, receiving all but 2 votes. I, naturally, felt vindicated and felt that Bromb's position had been defeated. I pressed ahead and began to build up the League along my lines - nominating court justices, proposing laws, holding meetings, and working to settle disputes that came before the League - but all in a passive way, we did not go out into the world as missionaries, as Bromb wanted. I felt secure in my position because there was a great fear among the member clubs that the League would become a super government, so if anything I would have been stopped if I tried to flex any muscles the League may have possessed.

However, this fear of the League becoming a super club had also worked its way in the constitution. The bureaus had so many checks and balances that they were completely ineffective. So much power was given to the Senate as a body - and so many rules of procedure were put into place to ensure no club gained power over others - that every little decision had to be debated for hours on end.

On paper, when I drafted the constitution, the system looked to be very well balanced. But we all soon found that the many checks and procedures created a highly political atmosphere that made the League very slow and ineffective.

To make matters worse, all Senate meetings were held in chat rooms. It proved difficult to find a common time when all Senators could attend, and the chat meetings would often grind on for hours, and sometimes descend into mud slinging contests that involved Griffin assailing the FOS, or Bromb venting his frustrations that I was not doing much of anything with the League. I asked Bromb to put forward ideas and people to run bureaus and activities, but he never did. My focus was on organizing and building up the League's main

areas of justice, policy, and law. I relied on him to build up his pet project - the bureaus - but he didn't.

However, the real problem wasn't mud slinging, it was that meetings were boring and futile. By June, it was becoming difficult to round up enough Senators to meet the minimum attendance requirements necessary to hold a meeting, and it was becoming clear that the League needed to be retooled. A series of amendments were proposed during July by both Bromb and I - some were passed, and some didn't get very far. But by that point in time it was too late. Bromb didn't have much trust in me, and, in frustration he quit the League in August of 1998 and convinced MFS to withdraw from the League. The League didn't split apart as I feared, but Bromb's leaving was a major psychological blow, and it caused everyone to conclude that the constitution needed to be scrapped and completely rewritten.

I had made a series of mistakes with the Second League. I'd written into the constitution too many procedural items - such as specific details about how to run Senate meetings. A law would have been a better place to address those items, for as we found what worked and what didn't, the law could have been more easily changed. I didn't start working with Bromb until it was too late. At first I simply viewed him as a defeated candidate and that I had overwhelming support to carry on as I saw fit. Feeling isolated, Bromb lashed out in several meetings and constantly tried to organize shifting coalitions that only caused unnecessary bickering within the League. I should have worked with him and showed him more respect.

However, it was a learning process. No one knew how to organize or run a League, and at least we were slowly getting better at it. By the end of the summer of 1998, the League was still in existence and was working on major reforms. In contrast, the First League, by the end of the summer of 1997, was already dead. Persistence has always been my friend. I've have made many mistakes during my journey in the simming world - but I just keep at it, learn from them, worked hard, and somehow, it always worked out in the end.

## Chapter 24: Constitution<sup>46</sup>

*"It reads, 'I still have supreme power to do what I want'" - I Relayer, in an IM with me on March 20, 1998, critizing my early plans for the Assembly.*

To draft a constitution for Trek Online, I set out after my election to establish an Assembly comprised of every captain in the club along with one qualified crew member from

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<sup>46</sup> I've kept my ramblings intact in this chapter as they represent my thoughts that went into the TOL Constitution. No one, however, should use them as a guide today for governing a sim club. It was all well on good on AOL to wax grandly on politics - all you had to do in those days to sim was pick a time and a chat room to meet, and all you had to do to leave the club was to stop listening to its leadership. Given such a fragile system, it was vital to establish a political system that everyone supported and gave everyone a voice. However, simming today requires significant web resources and money to build a successful club. Today's leaders need to be mindful of the thoughts of their members and hosts, but they also have to safeguard their property. Looking to business, not politics, for guidance on how to manage a sim club today will be far more fruitful.



every sim in the club. Luckily, my efforts to find crew members from every ship who understood government caused a delay in seating the Assembly, and it wasn't until March when the Assembly was in place. This gave me all of February to focus my efforts on drafting the League Constitution, and to learn from the League.

I first wanted the Assembly to discuss and agree on broad governing principles for TOL before drafting specific text. Thus, during March, April, and May, the Assembly met via E-mail, message boards, and occasionally in chat rooms, to set out a framework for the future of Trek Online. The fact we had as much time as needed reduced all kind of pressures and resulted in a low key, multi month discussion in the club about the nature of sim government, republics, and TOL.

Because the constitution we drafted in 1998 was eventually replaced by new constitutions in 2000 and 2003, I won't focus on the specific details of the 1998 constitution. Rather, I will speak in broad terms about the debates we had, and how we reached the conclusions about the kind of government we wanted in TOL - conclusions that survived in different constitutions over many years.

The first question was what powers should the republic have? There was a general feeling in the club that things were running pretty smoothly, and we didn't want to fix what wasn't broke. In other words, as Chip was fond of saying, "You don't have to hold a vote in order to sim." Thus, TOL's republic was not going to be completely revolutionary, and that accounts for a great deal of its success. All of the underlying structure that had been established over the previous year would remain in place. What the republic would do, in essence, was take some powers away from the President, and make the unofficial powers that the captains and club had accumulated - such as voting rights and the Members Rights Document - formal. It would basically give the community a way to make its own decisions, but it wouldn't radically rearrange the entire community.

Everyone pretty much agreed that the best place to put voting power and removed Presidential powers was into an Assembly and not into a bureaucracy or Co-Presidents. TOL needed one leader to answer questions, deal with pressing problems, and set a direction for the club, and aside from Mike, no one really wanted to go back to the Co-President system the USG unofficially employed.

TOL wasn't the first club to establish a republic. There were a few others before us, such as Members Focused Simulations (MFS), and of course, the FFSC. We studied the FFSC closely as an example of a republic gone very wrong. Basically, we determined that they didn't have things very well defined on paper, and that they were a prime example of what happens when you try to introduce democracy to a young club. We decided that our constitution needed to be specific (which also made it somewhat long.)

The MFS had a very strong council, but after studying it, and watching what happened in the Simming League, we saw that having a council that was too strong and had too many broad powers would stagnate the club. In MFS, it was common for the council to have to debate and vote on trivial matters - such as the promotions of junior officers - and would as

a body answer questions that in TOL and other clubs was common for the President to answer. As a result of these problems, the early versions that I outlined for the Assembly was for it to be a weak body that pretty much only had the power to veto the President.

But clearly, the Assembly had to have real power, a real role, and the ability to be an independent forum that promoted debate and discussion in the club. There was no sense in having one if it didn't have any power. It also could have been dangerous. If you say the club was a republic, but it was only a sham, someone would have revolted and demanded more power for the members. And, just about everyone (aside from Robin) wanted a republic and an Assembly that had power. (As discussed in Chapter 22, Robin didn't want a republic, and found the idea of a republic in a sim club to be silly. But she didn't understand the value in having people get involved in the club and calling it a republic. No one would get involved or care if we were writing the by-laws that would require people to show up to a board meeting every month.)

Here, I Relayer, the captain of the USS Avenger, was instrumental. I called IR the philosopher of TOL. Generally IR stayed out of the political fray and I turned to Chip for day to day decisions and advise, but whenever I had a deeper organizational or moral question, I would always consult IR. His solution to the Assembly question was elegant and at the same time simple. Let the popular will of the club - as expressed in the Assembly - set the overall, long term course of the club, and have the President be the day to day manager of the club.

When combined with my desire for the Assembly to be a place that fostered debate about important issues in the club, but channeled it in a constructive way as to prevent it from becoming discord, the Assembly had a powerful role - but one that was limited so that the day to day operations of the club would remain efficient and un-political. Thus, it was decided that the Assembly would set the long-term course of the club, and would debate and discuss matters important to the club.<sup>47</sup>

But what exactly did that mean? Well, basically, the Assembly would vote to establish new sims, cancel existing sims, promote people to the rank of captain and admiral, approve presidential appointments, define organizational framework, and set rules for the club. All of these decisions by the Assembly would help to shape the long-term path of the club, and these weren't minor matters either. Debates and decisions about key policy, such as promotion point systems and new sim types, reflected what type of club people wanted.

The Assembly also had power to pass any laws it felt necessary. This was a very powerful catchall in the event there was a major problem and no clear way to solve it. The Assembly would meet and vote on a solution. Many times in club history the Assembly would debate a pressing matter and pass a bill that decided the matter.

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<sup>47</sup> This all assumed a president who could manage the day to day affairs of the club, which was we later learned, was a misplaced assumption.

There was then the question of who would become an Assembly member. Here we had sources from club history to draw upon, such as TOL CompuServe and the February Constitution. CompuServe - like the FFSC - had given captains and heads of bureaucratic administrations seats on their council. This we rejected because we didn't want the bureaucracy to become a voting force. We wanted the club to reflect its simmers, not a removed class of Admirals.

The February Constitution basically stated that whoever showed up to a meeting would vote, but in a club that now had 100 members, this would have created logistical nightmares and could have caused debates to spin out of control into discord. However, we liked the basic idea behind the February Constitution of allowing regular club members to have a vote. Thus, it was decided that every captain, along with one simmer from every ship who was elected by their crew mates, would be an Assembly Representative. Plus, I didn't want the Assembly to just be captains. I sensed that overtime such a body would turn into a class of nobles who would enjoy ganging up on me. The experience of other clubs who established a limited republic by creating a body of just captains has since proven this. Plus, having a President who was dependent on the captains alone would have undermined the entire TOL system and lead to a decentralized club.

With time, the requirement of one elected representative from each ship was removed because it proved difficult to administer the elections. Also, considering how TOL was an open club and people simmed on several ships, it was a meaningless distinction about what ship one represented. So, it was eventually replaced in 2000 by a system that allowed any qualified simmer who wanted to be a representative to become one if there was an open seat. In the short run this worked fine, but in the long run it proved impossible to get rid of any dead wood, and in 2002 and 2003, turned out to be a disaster for TOL. People who had stopped actively simming in the club years prior still were Assembly members - leading to a stagnate voting block of the old captains and admirals, the very scenario I tried so desperately to avoid during my entire career. Things would have been better had we maintained Assembly elections.

At any rate, with the Assembly decided, the debate turned its attention to the Court.

Here the judgment of history is that I got it right with the Members Rights Document and I should have left well enough alone. Under the Members Rights Document, if there was a troublemaker the person would first be punished by a captain in accordance with the rules, and a trial would be held to deal with the matter if necessary. As far as disputes and constitutional questions in the new republic, they could have been settled by the Assembly or a special tribunal set up for the purpose. However, I got a little carried away with my own government experiment and wanted there to be a strong, independent judiciary.

The problem with the Court system I proposed was - as Robin argued at the time - that the Court didn't do much of anything most of the time, and when it was needed, instead of helping, it would simply become a pressure cooker and magnify the problem, causing even more headaches. In both TOL and the League, Court cases caused major headaches, severely wounding both organizations. But at the time I figured if we were going to have a

republic, it made sense to have an independent judiciary like there is in the United States. I envisioned the Court to not only be a body that dealt with troublemakers, but also to be the body of last resort. If law and order broke down in the club, if the republic got very out of whack as it had done in FFSC, the Court, with its independent and highly respected Justices, would be there to whack things back into shape and restore calm and order.

But, as it turned out, people are quite capable of looking at a crime and determining if a person is guilty or innocent - and as serious matters tend to be things that put the club into most jeopardy, it's best to have the Assembly decide, as they represent the will of the club. The problem, however, was that it's impossible to have a Court manned by people with no legal background and expect them to do everything demanded of them by the constitution.

No one listened to Robin at the time (mostly because she didn't know how to pick her battles and opposed everything, so people tuned her out after a while), and my Court plans were unfortunately chosen.

Last on the plate were the President and the Captains. Here, everything stayed the same. There was no desire to change the relationship between the captains and the president, and no desire to change the underlying system in TOL that was working so well. As a result, the constitution enshrined all of the founding principles of TOL - that the captains would be responsible for their sims and their creative content, that the president would manage them and keep them on the same page, and would oversee the entire club and make the day to day decisions. But the constitution did establish the requirement that the President must be a commanding officer. I didn't want some admiral who was out of touch with the club to be the President. I wanted someone who was in command of a sim, who was there simming each week in the club he or she ran.

The constitution also provided ways for the President and Assembly to set up some of that evil bureaucracy to help manage the affairs of the club, and during my Presidency I did organize various bureaus to help run the club - such as the Sim Support Bureau, the Academy, the Activities Bureau, and the Internet Bureau. It was a necessary evil. I simply reached the point where I couldn't run everything my self. However, not liking bureaucracy, I made sure they were all staffed by simmers and ran by one of my captains, and I tried to keep them as small and out of the way as possible. They simply helped me to carry out my job and provided necessary support functions for the club. They never got in the way of the day to day simming or made decisions that impacted the sims - in large part because those powers were given to the Assembly, President, and Captain. In clubs without a constitution or Assembly, the bureaucracy picks up a lot of those powers by default.

The last consideration was the term of office. At first, it was decided that the Presidential term to be 1 year. The reason for this was that it had been one year between the battle of Stonewall and the first election, so we just continued that tradition. However, in 2000, we decided to change the term of office to 6 months. The reason for this change was two fold. First, it was felt one year was too long of a time to ask a person to dedicate to running the club. Secondly, most people did not stay in the club for a year, so having the election every

6 months would better reflect the will of the club and give each generation of club members a chance to vote.

The one major problem with the Presidency, however, was that being the President involved a lot of work, and if the President slacked, the club suffered. No club has ever found an adequate way to solve this problem. Not more or less bureaucracy, not more or less power to the captains has resolve it. Every club has to find their own way and just hope that the President is honest, hard working, capable, and intelligent.

Now, don't get me wrong. I point out these various problems to help you learn from TOLs experience and understand the mistakes we made so you can try to avoid them. I surly do not want to make it seem that I somehow feel the constitution and republic was a failure. It was not. Trek Online, given our open community and strong captains, was always on the verge of flying apart. The republic served TOL for many years, allowed us to overcome numerous obstacles, and proved to be a source of great strength. On several occasions, the republic saved TOL and kept small problems from growing out of hand. The main reason TOL died was because it abandoned its republic in 2003. However, Trek Online's republic was an experiment, and it is necessary to be honest and evaluate our strengths and weaknesses if the experiment is to have any value.

With the basic framework agreed to, the drafting of the specific language went very smoothly during the end of June and into July. For the constitution to go into effect, all of the captains had to vote yes to it, and that was done on July 21, 1998. TOL had become a constitutional republic.

## Chapter 25: Recession

*"The entire simming world is in danger. We are not threatened by some common enemy who is working to destroy us, we are not threatened by AOL as some people contend. We are threatened by each other and simple mathematical facts." - From "All of Simming is in Danger" a resolution pased by the Simming League Senate and circulated widly on AOL - October, 1998.*

If you recall, after huge growth during the summer and fall of 1997, TOL decided to cap its size at about a hundred members in order to insure a focus on quality and not quantity. We felt that a hundred members was large enough to allow the club to offer a diverse range of sims and activities, but small enough to maintain our close nit community. We never turned away recruits, and we did not stop growth outright, but at the same time - during an age when clubs were actively recruiting, adding new sims, merging with other clubs to become ever larger - TOL did none of that. We simply maintained a recruiting level that keep our sims full. In fact, it would have been dangerous to expand the club while we were establishing a republic. We needed a stable population during 1998. Adding new people to the mix would have made it impossible to reach a consensus on the constitution. When you have a constitutional convention, you have a set number of people - you don't invite new people halfway through.

In addition, we were lucky that the overall forces of simming were very beneficial to TOL. 1997 was filled with mass chaos as the simming world realigned itself to the new underlying realities. By the start of 1998, the chaos was finally beginning to end, but unlimited usage had generated a secondary effect. With unlimited, a ton of people decided to try to run their own sim and club.

How many people actually attempted to run their own club in 1998 is unknown, but the effects were quite visible and wide known. To run a sim, you need 1 captain and about 10 crew members. If even 1 of those crew members decides to venture out on their own, you now have 2 captains and 5 crew members on both sims. This math is an oversimplification, of course, but it helps to illustrate the basic point. During 1998 there were too many chiefs and not enough Indians. Simming descended into a recession.

The term recession naturally has a lot of negativity to it, and one probably pictures a simming world with depressed sims and failing clubs. And while many upstart clubs failed, the recession really wasn't much of a problem for TOL. However, the recession came at a perfect time for us. It reduced the massive influx of simmers just at the time when the club needed to settle down and focus on internal matters of building up the club and republic. Had the recession not occurred, people probably would have continued to flood into TOL. Even if we had attempted to cap membership at 100, the club probably would have grown to 200 members, and that would have caused TOL to become a very different community and establish a very different kind of government. Or, if we had really worked to cap membership at 100, we would have had to turn away members. TOL would have to give up its uniqueness as a club open to all, and we would have become a very elite place.

Yet, just as importantly, the war with the FFSC ended when it did. This allowed TOL to take advantage of the boom and large amount of simmers milling around in the summer and fall of 1997. Had the war lasted for a little longer, or had we not gotten our act together when we did, TOL would have missed out on the opportunity to replenish our population and expand. STS, for example, finally started to get its act together in 1998. The leadership gave up their idea of rule by Starfleet military decree. They picked capable junior simmers - people like Moses - and gave them command ahead of more senior officers (they also offered me a command in STS, but I turned it down because I was busy enough in TOL). STS allowed creative sims that did not conform to the previous desire to accurately recreate Star Trek. They also experimented with government and held several Assembly like meetings.

However, sadly, it came too late for STS. The recession was already beginning to settle, and as a result, STS was unable to recruit many new members, and the club began its march to extinction. By 1999, when the recession in simming ended, STS was a broken and demoralized place, unable to recover.

But why was it so easy for TOL to recruit during the end of 1997, and for that matter to recruit in 1999 when the recession ended? And what made it possible for all of those upstart clubs to advertise and gather enough simmers to have a real effect? Well, all during this period, the simming infrastructure of the past remained intact.

The Non Affiliated Gaming Forum on AOL, along with the Star Trek forum and numerous popular Star Trek chat and simming rooms on AOL were very active during those years. Almost every simmer visited those places. To recruit, all one had to do was post messages at the NAGF, or go into one of the chat rooms and ask if anyone wanted to join a sim.

These efforts were aided by Admiral Andy B. Clements, leader of the United Space Federation (USF). To his infinite credit (for which someone should build a statue in his honor), Andy joined the staff of the NAGF, and worked his way up the ranks to run the forum. Quite naturally, he used the forum to promote his club, but he also did much to strengthen the NAGF, to defend the interests of the forum and private sim clubs against SFOL, and to, amazingly enough, get resources from AOL to give the largest and most respected clubs of the day - TOL included - our own forum.

That's right, in the end, Ben's dream became a reality - the club got its own forum, accessible through the NAGF. At it we posted our schedule, application, and info about TOL. We had several message boards and linked our website. How Andy was able to convince AOL to give resources like this to private clubs is beyond me. But it was his work at the NAGF that greatly strengthened simming on AOL during this period.

However, as the recession of 1998 lingered, it did begin to cause some problems for TOL. At times, I worried that our membership and attendance was falling, and as a result, I launched recruiting drives and gave out special awards and promotions for recruiting. The club, because people had a vested interest in the community, responded and recruited.

And, the recession helped the Simming League in a strange way. During the fall of 1998, at the time when the Second League had fallen apart and we were in the process of reworking the League - and things were still very much up in the air - the Senate passed a resolution addressing the recession. Entitled *All of Simming is in Danger*, it was posted at the NAGF and became a widely circulated essay about how there were too many clubs, and how clubs needed to band together in the League to work to solve common problems.

It lead to a meeting on November 21, 1998, attended by a number of the major clubs on AOL, in the chat room "The Seven Realms." I remember the admirals at STS talking about the essay and thinking about going to the meeting, but in the end they decided against attending, as did the USF. However, the other major clubs of the day were in attendance. At first the meeting was just a general discussion, but when things started to drift out of hand, I launched into a discussion about the post, and about the benefits of the League.

As a result of the meeting, a number of new clubs - including the FSF, OSA, ISO, and ASG - were attracted to the League. These clubs gave the League new blood, infused it with new ideas, and become the foundation of the League in 1999.

Now, while the post clearly helped the League, I don't know if it made a difference in terms of the recession. It surly generated a lot of discussion - and it's possible that it caused some people to rethink what they were doing, for soon after the post the recession began to end. But it's far more likely that competition had done its job by weeding out the clubs

and captains that weren't very good. This, combined with school restarting in the fall (causing many captains and admirals to no longer have time to sim), probably caused the recession to end.

And with the recession ended, with all of the infrastructure in place on AOL, with simmers still milling about the forums on AOL, with AOL at the height of its popularity, with simming having adjusted itself to the new realities unleashed by unlimited usage, with the dot com bubble in full swing, and, following TOLs lead, with simming now focused on experimentation and creativity, simming was about to enter a golden year. But before we get to that, there are still some events in 1998 to discuss.

## Chapter 26: Viper Flight

*"Ugh, do I always have to watch you? I give you the benefit of the doubt for once and I end up with captains leaving the sim left and right." - Myself to Ben in an IM, October 4, 1998.*

Ben was suspended from TOL for one year in February of 1997. After an uncooperative spring, Ben began to behave himself during the fall of 1997, and he became eager to prove his worth and rejoin TOL. So eager, in fact, that he snuck into TOL in January of 1998 under an assumed name. I quickly found him, kicked him out, and extended his suspension. But by the spring of 1998, there had been no new problems with Ben, and I figured I had to let him into the club sooner or later. He had been behaving himself because I held out the promise that he could one day return, and I feared that if I changed my mind and kept him banned from TOL, he would begin to act up. He had lived up to his end of the bargain by behaving, so now I had to live up to my half of the deal. As a result, Ben was allowed to rejoin TOL.

At first Ben drifted. He didn't join any crew. He just showed up and simmed when he felt like it - with no problems or incidents. However, in June he came across Viper Flight and obviously liked the sim because he joined the crew. I think Ben enjoyed the sim because he, like everyone else in the sim, was able to command their own runabout and battle the Maquis.

The captain of Viper Flight at the time was Tracy (Alex, the original captain had already retired by the time Ben joined). However, she - for reasons that she never conveyed to me - resigned her command in late July. Of course, this did not raise much suspicion on my part for captains always retire sooner or later. I figured she was too busy in real life or didn't like simming anymore or whatever.

I promoted the highest-ranking officer, Jonathan Edwards, to command. However, Ed wasn't all that cut out for command and gave it up after a month. Thus, in late August, I made a crew member named Birkoff the captain. Birkoff had tremendous potential as a captain, and it was unfortunate that at this point in time Ben began to revert to his old self.



Noticing a pattern on Viper Flight of captains leaving and the next most senior officer being promoted to command, and suddenly realizing that after Birkoff, he was the next most senior officer on Viper Flight, Ben did everything he could to make command a lousy thing for Birkoff. It was by no means as direct and deliberate as had occurred on the Vindicator, but still, it was Ben being Ben - complaining, refusing to sim, causing major headaches, and just being a pain.

Unfortunately, Birkoff never told me what was going on, and I don't know why he didn't come to me. Perhaps he somehow felt that Ben was protected because he had acted up in the past and still was let back into TOL.

I did hear reports from crew members on Viper Flight that Ben, and another crew member named Mart, were having a clash of personalities that was causing difficulties in the sim, but nothing beyond that. Only in early October when Birkoff suddenly resigned and vented to me everything that Ben had been doing did I learn what was going on.

It was a wake up call to me. I was starting to drift and lose focus. Of course, perhaps I'm being harsh on myself. Someone like me, who was busy running the League, TOL, the division on Prodigy, my own ships, etc, in a club as large as TOL had no way of knowing everything that was going on. But still, I was the leader and I should have been aware that Ben was bugging a captain out of command.

I had worked hard during 1997 and the first half of 1998 to save and build up the club. But with the constitution on the books and things going well, I did start to become a little lax during the summer and fall of 1998. However, this incident made me realize that I couldn't just set things up and then sit back and let the club run itself as I had envisioned all the way back in 96. I had to stay on top of things or else something, somewhere, would start to fly out of whack and lead to serious problems down the road. So, I redoubled my efforts and worked hard during 1999, to the great benefit of TOL.

As far as the Viper Flight situation went, Ben was found guilty of disrupting the sim and was barred from ever commanding a sim in TOL. It would have been nice had the Court just kicked him out of the club, but oh well. I brought Matt, the former captain of the Endeavor and future TOL President, in to command Viper Flight, but at this point in time, Matt was burnt out. His mind wasn't into simming, so Viper Flight faltered, and Matt tried to placate Ben by making him the XO. It didn't work. Ben, sensing weakness on Matt's part, tried to get the sim to leave TOL so that he and Tracy could take command of it. Why Tracy decided to work with Ben, I have no idea. But one day Tracy E-mailed me and said that as a former captain, Viper Flight was hers, not the clubs. (I also have no idea why they thought this line of logic would work.) With this turn of events, I finally had enough.

First, I asked the Court to rule on the constitutional question of if captains own sims. The Court determined that captains and former captains don't own sims, that they belong to the club, and as a result Tracy wasn't entitled to Viper Flight. I then brought Ben up on charges of mutiny, but he left the club before the trial could begin. If I was ever going to punish and stop Ben, I would have to do it at a level beyond TOL...

## Chapter 27: The Orion

*Lady Lilyan: I can't figure out for the life of me....what happened*

*AdmMarsTOL: No beacons, no ships, no bases*

*Lady Lilyan: no nothing....just...space*

*jedifire: ::launches 12 special probes, made to detect messed up temporal time space type stuff::*

*jedifire: Scanning for subspace and Whoa... sir...Were in another dimension.....Chronometric readings confirm..this ISN'T our subspace domain...*

*-From the USS Orion sim, July 15, 1997, note Jedifire's fine use of technobabble and silliness.*

In 1998, TOL had become an open, fun, but professional community with about a dozen sims and a hundred members. We had transformed the club into a republic, and we even had our own forum. All of the dreams for the club had become a reality. But that is only for the club on AOL. What about Prodigy, where TOL began?

During 1998, as had been the case in 1997, Prodigy consisted of the USS Orion and the Orion simmed away quite happily. It was my quiet country refuge from the chaos and demands of the club on AOL. I am convinced that if I did not have Prodigy as an escape in 1997 - as a place to just sim and see how it should have been on AOL - I probably would have quit. But by having Prodigy, by knowing that without the attacks and pressures, I could run a nice little sim and I could enjoy simming, I knew that one day I would be able to do the same on AOL. And, when that day on AOL finally became a reality, Prodigy gradually faded away.

Technically, TOL on Prodigy and AOL were one joint club. Several members of the Orion crew had AOL and they joined the club on AOL - Bo Duke was one of them. On rare occasions, people from AOL signed up for Prodigy just to take part in the Orion sim. In February of 1997, Scott subscribed to Prodigy. I think his joining Prodigy had a major influence on his decision to cut me some slack. It helped him to see that simming on Prodigy was not vastly different from AOL, and it helped to prevent any new flare up of resistance to my imposing Prodigy systems on the club on AOL.

Members on Prodigy and AOL, (and CompuServe when that division existed for the short time in 1997), received the same guidebook, newsletter, and took part in the same club wide E-mail Trek trivia string. However, politically, Prodigy was never integrated into the republic. The republic was just for AOL, and Prodigy was a division off on its own. Of course, there really was no practical point to include Prodigy in the republic... it was just the Orion and it was on a separate online service. Plus, by the time the Constitution was being worked on, it was clear that Prodigy's days were numbered and soon the club would just

consist of AOL. Prodigy was an old, slow, text based service with blocky graphics. It could not compete with AOL.

After the flurry of simming activity on Prodigy during the early part of 1996, most simming died down as people returned to school in the fall of 1996, and as many more left for AOL. By 1997, Prodigy was a dying online service. Indeed, during most of 1997, the Orion was the only organized Trek chat sim on all of Prodigy - which is staggering when you think about it. There were plenty of BB sims - since message boards were what most of Prodigy consisted of - but chat never caught on. On occasion, people would organize their own chat sims, and for a few months a small Classic Trek chat sim club was organized on Prodigy, but it did not last. This left the Orion simming away by itself.

During 1997 and 1998, the small dedicated crew of the Orion, aided by people who wandered into the sim room for the night, or who joined the crew for a few weeks, had a great time. I loved that ship, it produced the best sims I have ever taken part in.

Over the summer of 1997 (because it was summer) there was a slight pick up in the number of people available to sim. As a result, I was able to organize a second sim, the USS Nebulon. However, the Nebulon only simmed for a short while and most of its crew left when school restarted in the fall of 1997.

By 1998, Prodigy was back to just the Orion and it was clear that Prodigy as an online service was finished. The Orion continued to sim during the spring and summer, but by fall another round of people returning to school, combined with the fact that Prodigy and the Orion had lost so many people to AOL, finished us off. There simply were not enough chatters left on Prodigy to sim. In fact, Prodigy had hundreds of chat rooms, but by 1998, most of them were completely empty.

I loved Prodigy. It was a great little service, and my crew was wonderful, but I had no choice. It was futile to continue, so I decided to disband the Orion and TOL Prodigy in October of 1998. A year later, Classic Prodigy as an online service was shut down.

There really is not much to say about Prodigy in the way of history. We had no major problems or fights. We just simmed, and so, let me talk of simming and my wonderful crew.

A man named Michaels was my first XO. During the touch and go days in 1996 when it was unclear if the Orion would get off the ground he was always there at the sims. He worked to get people into the chat room and recruited the early crew that made the Orion possible. He, unfortunately, was unable to stay on with the sim for very long, but he made the Orion possible, and for that, he was the first recipient of the TOL Cross.

Selsor, or Sels, became the next First Officer. He too was a great simmer and great help to the Orion, but like Michaels, he left Prodigy after a few months. So in June of 1997 I made Morgan aka Lady Lilyan - one of the most devoted science and medical officers I have ever encountered - the First Officer. She stayed as the Orion's XO till the very end of TOL Prodigy. But what is even more amazing is that she lived only about a mile away from me. It

was only after we had simmed together for almost 6 months and I had made her my XO that we discovered how close we lived. What a small world indeed!

And then there was Jedifire. He was a fine simmer. Always full of ideas, he gave so much the Orion. He commanded the USS Monitor, an escort class starship like the USS Defiant on DS9. The Orion was a specially modified Galaxy class ship that had a docking ring on the bottom to carry the Monitor. With the Monitor, the Orion was able to take part in unique fleet action sims where the Monitor performed scouting missions, gave us additional firepower, or just come to our rescue.

There was also Bo Duke, Sean Tripoli, Alec Daeleon, and later Cosari Shane. All of them were very good simmers and helped form the core of the Orion. They could be counted on to be there each week.

Because our sim took place in public chat rooms, they were supplemented by people who wandered in and simmed for the night, or who wandered in and joined the crew for a little while. This never cause us any problems because everyone on Prodigy was very nice to each other, and because everyone seemed to have role playing experience outside of simming people were able to easily get into the flow of things.

Now, here are some sim logs to give everyone a flavor of the Orion:

#### *Admirals Log*

*Stardate 19701.21*

*We received a distress call from the USS Hawking, a scientific research ship doing some studies in a nebula and asteroid belt near Maquis space. Since the asteroid field was too dense for the Orion to safely navigate, and because there could have been booby traps in the asteroid, a shuttle craft was sent in to find the Hawking. The ship was eventually located in the nebula, and the shuttle successfully docked. The 3 crew members on the shuttle, LtCmdr Sels, CmdrAbe, and VtrCharile, boarded the Hawking. Meanwhile, back on the Orion, several Maquis ships approached the area, but quickly fled for Maquis space when they saw the Orion. The 3 crew members on the Hawking came under phaser fire, and after a quick exchange, it was determined that it was Star Fleet officers from the Hawking crew firing on the boarding team. The Hawking was attacked and boarded by the Maquis, and after a fierce hand to hand battle on the ship, the Hawking was raided of all medical and most engineering supplies. The crew set up skirmishing lines to attack anyone who boarded the ship, since they figured the Maquis would return. Fortunately when these skirmishers opened fire on the 3 Orion crew members, no one was seriously hurt. The surviving crew of the Hawking was rescued and the Orion has continued its patrol along the Maquis border.*

#### *Admirals Log*

*Stardate 19704.22*

*The Orion crew is currently trapped on this Alien ship, which we now believe to be some massive holodeck. Whenever we think of something, it takes place. For example a giant Ice cream cone appeared on the bridge, and the crew ended up in the middle of a Medieval competition and than a Civil War battle.*

*Lt Lilyan, who is a Vulcan, is working to use her powers to mind meld with us to give stability to our minds, which are quickly succumbing to this holodecks power.*

*These next series of logs cover a massive story arc that the Orion engaged in during the summer of 1997.*

#### *Orion Log #26*

*Stardate 19707.15*

#### *Adm Mars Recording*

*While heading to Star Base 117 for repairs and refit, the ships engines and systems mysteriously went offline. At the same time, a bright light was seen across the ship, sensors spiked off the scale and than were shorted out.*

*After making repairs, we were able to get several systems back online, including engines and weapons. We juryrigged the system, and used the sensors on the Monitor to see what was around us. There was nothing - no ships, Federation beacons, etc. Nothing. We headed to where the starbase was located, however it was not there. All we found were some remains of a station, which appeared to have been blown up about 5 years earlier. Several Romulan ships decloked, and we fought our way out of the area. We figured somehow we had ended up in a parallel universe where the Federation was taken over by the Romulans, and communications picked up several strange back ground messages, which were being carried along the Romulan frequencies. We believe them to be from what ever resistance forces may be out there, so I ordered my First Officer, Lady Lilyan, to try to decipher them and find out where they were coming from.*

*Meanwhile I set course for where I figured the resistance may be hiding - a near by nebula. Lily determined that most of messages were just standard traffic and issuing of orders, but they were coming from Earth - Oxford, England to be exact. The Orion entered the nebula...and there before us were hundreds of Federation runabouts, shuttles and other various starships. We sent out a signal, and Captain Riker of the Enterprise D responded. Riker explained to us that after Wolf 359, the Romulans used the Federation's weakness to their advantage and became more hostile. When Captain Picard and Data went to Romulus to track down Spock (TNG episode Unification Pt 1 and 2), they were all captured and executed for spying.*

*Romulan forces attacked and conquered Vulcan, than several days later, without warning, launched a massive, all out attack on the Federation. Earth was captured about a year later,*

*and last month, the final Federation territory, Bajor, was lost after the USS Orion native to this parallel universe was destroyed.*

*On a side note, everyone should know that in this universe, the wormhole was never found, and therefore, until DS9 was destroyed in the battle last month, it was in orbit of Bajor the entire time. Since there was no dispute over Federation/Cardassian border due to the wormhole, the Maquis were never formed. And since there was never any Maquis, Star Fleet never built any ships to fight the Maquis, therefore no Voyager. However, the Defiant, with Dax, O'Brien, Kira and Bashir did escape from DS9, but Sisko and the others were killed. Also since it is a different history, Star Trek Generations never took place, therefore the Enterprise D was never destroyed, nor did Worf ever leave the ship for DS9, nor was the Enterprise E ever commissioned. However one ship like the Enterprise E was built, the USS Sovereign.*

*Orion Log*

*Stardate 19707.22*

*Adm Mars Recording*

*We have not been able to find a way out of this parallel universe, so until we can get out, we have decided to join up with the resistance and help them fight the Romulan occupation of Federation space. We have already started to outfit their ships with our technology.*

*The fleet planned to ambush a Romulan convoy that would be passing the nebula, but as the convoy fell back when we attacked it, many more Romulan ships, including super Warbirds, decloaked and trapped our fleet. The Orion was able to fight its way back to the nebula, but one of our crew members, Cdt Mavric1 was beamed through our shields onto a Romulan ship, than some time later, beamed back to the Orion.*

*We have also lost contact with the Monitor, we believe that she is on her way to contact the Dominion and bring them in on our side.*

*USS Orion Log #28*

*Stardate 19707.29*

*Admiral Mars Recording*

*The Orion has been able to return to our own universe, however, the USS Monitor was left behind. With the resistance cell devastated from the Romulan ambush, we received orders to join up with the resistance cell at the Eagle Nebula. However, before we got there, we were attacked. A battle ensued, but we were able to escape and set up a jump matrix to get back home. However the USS Monitor decided to stay behind and fight with the resistance. We can only hope that they will come home.*

*Admirals Log*

*Stardate 19708.19*

*Adm Mars recording.*

*The Orion responded to the distress call at the Drakia 4 colony. When we got there, we found their central environmental dome had collapsed as result of an explosion. Medical and engineering teams responded, and we found many of the colonists experiencing hallucinations, and they even injected several away team members with the drugs.*

*It was found that the colonists, who were part of a religious cult, were being injected those drugs - which not only controlled their minds, but made them see religious type apparitions.*

*Orion Log #32*

*Stardate 19708.26*

*Adm Mars recording.*

*The away teams that were sorting through the wreckage of the collapsed environmental dome came across an old man who was dancing around. He approached the away team, and unable to control him, the team fired a phaser at him on stun, but that did not stop him. The man was taken up to the ship and he is apparently is the leader of the colony. On the ship, the doctor and the sick bay staff were drugged with a mind control device, and he and his followers soon took control of the bridge. I was thrown in the brig, but the people didn't know how to work the forcefields, so I was able to escape and make my way to engineering.*

*The old man and his followers have apparently set a course for Romulan space, and there they plan to hand the ship over to the Romulans as a gift.*

*Orion Log 33*

*Stardate 19709.02*

*Adm Mars Recording*

*We have retaken the ship... unfortunately the First Officer and the Romulan terrorists have escaped to a near by planet, which appears to be similar to medieval Europe - Kings and Vikings and the such. We must go down there, capture the team and try to stop any cultural contamination.*

## *Orion Log*

*Stardate 19709.09*

### *Adm Mars Recording*

*Our quest to recover the Romulans and our First Officer was a success. The Romulans are now at Starbase 711 awaiting trial and the XO is in sickbay recovering from her mental control and brainwashing of sorts. We beamed down to the planet and came across a medieval type of village that had already been influenced by some of the technology taken from the crashed shuttle. A few people had phasers, tricorders, etc. One man even built an airship and went flying around dropping wreckage from the shuttle on everyone's head.*

*When the old man who lead the Romulans entered the town, being worshipped by the masses as a god, Sean Tripoli used his abilities to hover, managed to get the crowd to warship him, and then sent them into a sleepy trance. As a result, when they woke up, everything would appeared to have been a dream - if they remembered at all. After that, I and jiShifterXij made our way to the crashed shuttle, where we destroyed it, beamed the Romulans and such back up to the ship, and than we beamed back to the Orion to await our next mission.*

### *Admirals Log*

*Stardate 19709.16*

### *Admiral Mars recording.*

*The Orion has returned to the alternate universe where the Federation has been over run by the Romulans. As we jumped in, several Romulan ships decloked and opened fire on us, however the Monitor quickly came to our rescue and drove off the Romulans.*

*Jedi beamed onboard the Orion, and we discussed the situation at hand. After the Orion left, and the Monitor stayed behind. Jedi worked with Riker and his resistance cell to help to retake the Federation, and they were successful in destroying a huge chunk of the overstretched Romulan fleet, and managed to retake Earth shortly before the Orion arrived. However, for some unexplained reason, Admiral Riker became increasingly hostile towards Jedi, eventually kicking him out of the resistance cell.*

*The Orion came under attack by one of Riker's ships, which the Monitor promptly destroyed, so we decided to head for Earth and take the matter up with Riker.*

*Upon arriving at Earth, a huge fleet greeted us, so we decided to turn away, and headed back out into space... planning our next move.<sup>48</sup>*

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<sup>48</sup> After several battles, the Romulans were defeated. The Orion and Monitor returned to our normal universe. As I am sure you have noticed, these sims are typical TOL fair - playful with bits of silliness,



### *Admirals Log*

*Stardate 19711.11*

### *Admiral Mars Recording*

*I was quite excited that Star Fleet engineers were able to put the Orion back together and update our systems in such a short amount of time. However, we soon found out why it didn't take that long - for nothing worked. Our sensors were malfunctioning and the computers were out in la la land. This caused the Orion to go off course and wonder into some explored space where we came across a secrete Starfleet group called the Elite. They repaired our ship and than began to tell us about their mission and history... as it turned out, they have been watching me for several years and brought the Orion to them.*

### *Admirals Log*

*Stardate 19711.18*

### *Adm Mars Recording*

*With the assistance of the Elite, the Orion was repaired and made it safely back to Federation Space. It did get rather interesting when the computer went crazy and began to blast over the loud speakers Dixie Land and the 1812 Overture, and at the same time, blow out the holodeck when the computer attempted to stage a full reenactment of the Battle of Waterloo.*

*But all of those problems were fixed, and we headed back to the Federation. We were attacked by some enemy force of the Elite, but the Elite covered us and we made it home...<sup>49 50</sup>*

### *Admirals Log*

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but overall professional and very well executed. Of course, sometimes things become a little jumpy and as a result the sims would not hold up as a movie or book, but such is the nature of simming. A detailed, well thought out plot in which everything is coherent and logical do not make for good sims.

<sup>49</sup> The Elite became part of the story of Viper Flight. After Ben tried to take the sim out of TOL, I removed Matt from command and decided to take command myself. By that time - February of 1999 - the Orion had been shut down, and several of its crew members, including Shane and Morgan, had made their way over to AOL and joined Viper Flight. There, the sim became about the adventures of Charles Mars before he gained command of the Orion, and over time the story of the Elite was slowly introduced (how the Elite had been watching Mars while he was with Viper Flight) and Viper Flight - in the tradition of the story arcs we undertook on the Orion - became TOLs grand epic sim.

<sup>50</sup> The winter of 1998 was a bad time for the Orion. We had low attendance and did not sim for several weeks because of it. However, by March attendance improved and a few more people joined the crew. We were able to put together one last grand story arcs of the Orion. It lasted for 2 months which involved Romulan and Maquis intrigue at a Federation Colony (as you can tell, I am big fans of the Romulans and Maquis. I wish Trek had done more with the Maquis in their episodes).

*Stardate 19803.06*

*Our first mission since our little vacation there is coming along nicely. We picked up a distress call and responded. Arriving at a colony our sensors indicated that the colony was heavily damaged. An away team beamed down, but only to find that the colony was in perfect shape. When the away team beamed into the governors office to ask what was going on, they found him talking to several Romulans and Maquis, who quickly beamed back to their ship or base.*

*The governor asked to be beamed up to the Orion and speak with me, however, Romulan troops beamed back down and killed the governor. One Romulan was killed by the away team, another was stunned. Both of them - along with the Lt. governor and the governors secretary were beamed back to the Orion for questioning (and one autopsy).*

*A sensor scan of the planet showed a hidden base 10km north of the colony... the mission continues.<sup>51</sup>*

*USS Orion<sup>52</sup>*

*Report filed by AdmMarsTOL, CO of the Orion*

*The USS Orion has had a very good month. Our current mission has taken many twists and turns. The Orion was sent to find Arcon, a wanted and highly dangerous criminal suspected of stealing classified items from several Federation bases. We found him and his ship heading towards a nebula, but we were not able to reach and engage him until we entered the nebula. After a battle, where we took some damage, we were able to cripple his ship and beam Arcon onboard to a holding cell. His ship was brought onboard, where engineering teams found it composed of a mish mesh of parts and stolen technology.*

*The doctor began to treat Arcon in his cell for injuries sustained. However he took the doctor hostage, used her to escape the cell and than, using some kind of sonic devise, incapacitated the security in the cell block and made his escape. He knocked out sensors and made his way to his ship, only to find it stripped apart. He quickly beamed to a runabout and began to launch. There, Viper began to fire his phaser at the runabout, hitting its engines, causing the runabout to crash and causing extensive damage to the bay in the process.*

*However medical teams could not find any trace of Arcon in the wreckage, and security reported that there was no way Viper could have destroyed the runabout that quickly.*

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<sup>51</sup> Over time, we found that the governor had sold out to the Romulans and a group of Maquis who were allied with the Romulans. They had established a base on the planet and were using it to funnel supplies and weapons to the Maquis. After a series of sims we tracked the flow of goods. The Monitor flew out to destroy the convoys and attack the involved Maquis while the Orion shut down the base on the planet and arrested those involved.

<sup>52</sup> During the summer of 1998, the Orion continued to hold more wonderful sims, even as our attendance was slowly declining. During the month of June, we had the following sim as reported in the TOL Times...

*These facts, combined with mysterious power and system outages on the ship caused the Orion to be placed on a full security alert. After the alert began, and security teams began patrolling all decks and securing all vital areas, the system outages stopped. However Admiral Mars did not report to duty the next day, and security did not find him in his quarters, despite the fact that the computer said he was there. A little while there after, most of the systems on the ship, including main power and sensors overloaded, knocking most of them offline. When the sensors did return, they showed a small ship moving away at high warp. The Orion followed, only to find that the warp engines of the small ship had overloaded, causing its destruction.*

*At that point, Admiral Mars walked onto the bridge, sat down and asked for a status report. First Officer Bond pulled a phaser and demanded to know what was going on...*

*And that's where we now stand...*

Sadly, this storyline was never finished. The key people involved in the sim never showed up together on the same week, and we unable to continue.

In July of 1998 we had two memorable sims. One involved a cruise ship that had come under Jeh'madar attack, a la The 5th Element. However, the much more interesting sim that month involved several crew members being unknowingly trapped on a holodeck - beamed there as some part of an advanced program left behind when a criminal was killed. The crew on the holodeck was put through a maze before the program finally closed in on them. However I was rescued from the holodeck by crew members on the outside working to free us, but the program beamed me back in. Yet, by know knowing that it was a program, I was able to reach the other crew members and inform them of what was going on, at what time all they had to do was say, "Computer, end program" which freed each one of them from its grasp.

In August, we revisited Shane's Elite plot, and this would be the last adventure of the Orion. As I reported... We received a communication from Starfleet that they had lost communications with an outlying colony, and we were sent to investigate. When we arrived we found none other than the Borg. Several Borg cubes engaged us, and after an extensive fire fight, we were able to destroy one cube, but the Orion took heavy damage her self. Warp nacelles blown off, several hull breaches, power failing. Just than, several worm holes opened up and out poured several craft, who engaged the Borg, and quickly destroyed them. We found that the people who came to our aid were the Elite, a former Federation special ops group whose mission was to collect advanced technology. As they grew in power, Starfeet tried to destroy them. The Elite escaped and now operate on their own.

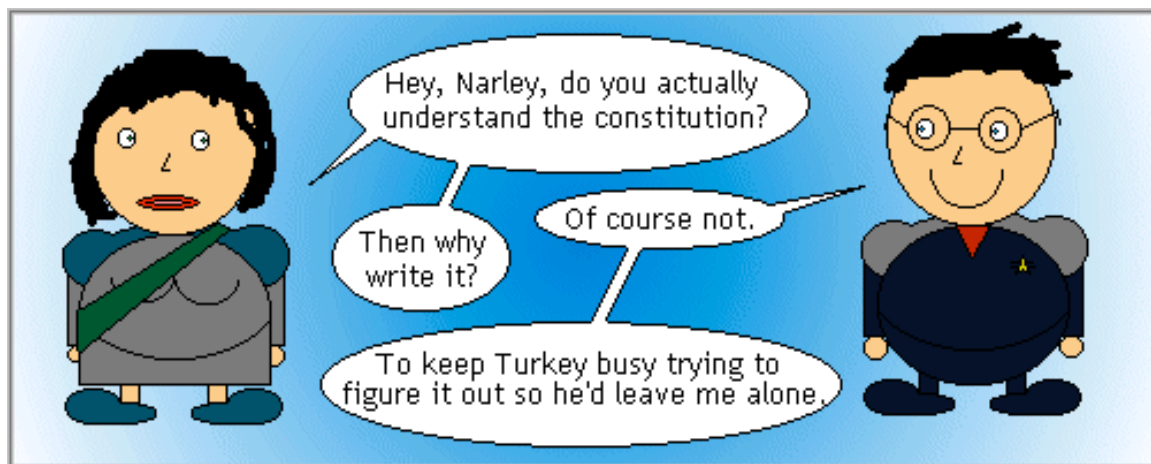
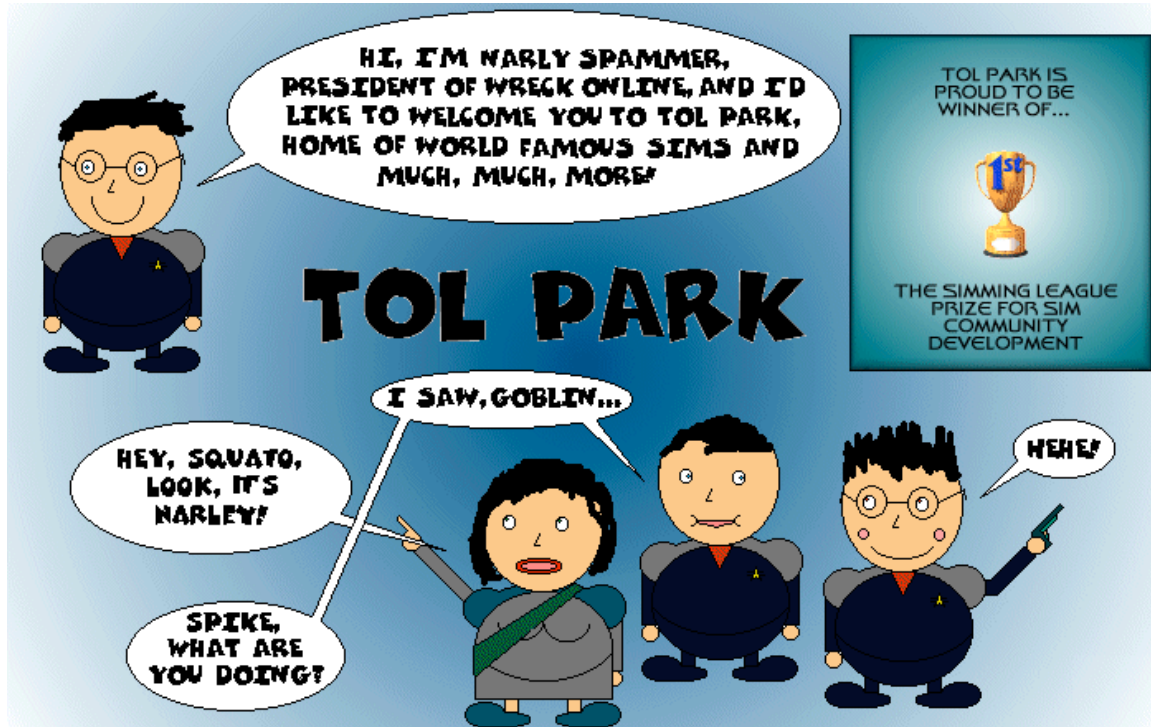
Sadly, in September, our attendance disappeared. The core of my crew had been active in the sim right up to the end, but after almost 2 years they were busy with other things and were not attending every week. Thus, only one of two of them would show up on any given night. We needed random people to come along and sim for the night or join the crew for a

few weeks, but there were none of them online anymore. Prodigy's chat rooms were completely empty. So, on October 13, 1998, I decided to cancel the Orion sim and shut down TOL Prodigy to focus my attention on AOL. It was a hard decision to make, but we did not have one sim during September, and despite my attempts to recruit, there was no one around to recruit. I had no other choice. Classic Prodigy itself would be shut down and cease to exist as an online service a year later.

But, the Orion - as you can tell from the logs - was a great sim. I had a wonderful time and I miss it.

# My Simming Memoirs

## Part 5: Golden Era



A scene from the TOL Park Comic Strip, by Robin Knight, 1999.

## Chapter 28: My New Team

*"If this doesn't work, don't smite me, and if this does work, keep me in mind when writing DHR :)" - Sergei 'Aaron' Muronovich, in an IM with me, October 28, 1998.*

Every simmer should experience a year like 1999. With a hundred lively and dedicated members, 15 sims, and activities ranging from trivia sessions to sim master guilds, Trek Online reached its peak. And boy, what a fun time we had! It was a great club filled with craziness and silliness, but it was worked into the sims in subtle ways. People would take technobabble to new extremes, try to avoid the good doctor with ever more complex excuses, and hide jelly bean machines under their station. They were little things to lighten the sim, but overall the sims were always professional, intellectual, and involving.

Outside the sims is where the club shined. We became a true online community. Many friendships were made, and every time enough TOLers gathered, our wacky imaginations came into full force, giving life to an imaginary realm called Trekonlina. Successive people added to Chip's smite buttons, giving rise to intrigue, romance, and pools filled with pudding.

In 1999, peace and plenty returned to the simming world after 2 difficult years. The clubs that survived 1997 and 1998 - Trek Online, United Federation of Populated Planets, Member Focused Simulations, Star Fleet Elite Force, the Intergalactic Simulation Organization, Federation Sim Fleet, and the United Space Federation, among others - were strong and thriving. The weak had been swept aside, so everywhere you looked there were good sims and good clubs. Because we had finally become adjusted to unlimited usage, and because AOL still had the simming forums, message boards, and chat rooms in place, it was easy to recruit.

But just because the forces line up doesn't mean things will be successful. That's where leadership and a bit of luck comes into play. Leaders have to understand the forces and to put them to good use, and the leaders of 1999 did their job. In the Simming League, the leaders of most of the major clubs on AOL joined together to tackle the problems of the day. Through the League, we were able to maintain a peace that allowed 1999 to continue uninterrupted by war or disaster. With many clubs and simmers knowing that the League was out there, and as a result not having to worry about spying, wars, and trouble makers, clubs were able to focus their time and energy on simming.

Through the League, events like the SciWorld Convention and the Tournament of Simulations brought the whole simming community together. Through the League, TOL was able to spread its ideas and culture, for TOL was considered to be the best club of 1999. Leaders of many clubs came to study TOL and learn from our government and sims. Some people, like Gillis (who you will hear more about later) mimicked TOLs culture in their own club. Others, like OBhoy from the United Federation of Populated Planets and Maki from the Online Simulations Association, copied our constitution and government.

I still find it remarkable that TOL managed to survive through 1996 and 97, let alone become one of the leading clubs of the simming world. I made plenty of mistakes, but I had a goal and I was determined. I reflected and learned from my mistakes, and I was blessed to have many hard workers around me. That made up for the shortcomings and saw us through.

By the end of 1998, many of those hard workers and old time advisors - such as Chip - were beginning to retire. But new voices were rising to make their mark on TOL. Among them were Clodo, Mike, Robin, Aaron, and IR.

From the outset, I was impressed by Clodo. He possessed raw talent and a limitless imagination. At the trial of Uridien, where Clodo served as a member of the jury, his seriousness, dedication, and thoughtfulness proved he was ready to be a leader. Three months later, I promoted him to captain. He made his sim - the USS Stonewall - one of the best in TOL, and I regard him as the best captain the club ever had.

After I promoted him to captain, it took me a few more months to trust him on a political level. But after getting to know him better and testing him to see how he responded in various situations, it was clear that he was loyal to TOL and that he had no burning ambition to run the club.

After my experience with Scott, I was hesitant to name a new Vice President. All during 1997, I went without a Vice President because I didn't want anyone to be in a position to rise up against me as Scott had done. I also was hesitant to restart the simming academy. I always liked the idea of having a simming academy, but I came to realize the power it gave to whoever ran it. That person would get to know all of the cadets who joined the club and would enjoy a popularity and level of connections within the club equal to mine. As a result, during 1997 and into 1998, the academy existed in theory. I would process the applications of all new club members, and if someone really needed training, I would train them myself, but most cadets I passed by saying, "due to your skill (or experience or whatever), you do not have to attend the academy."

However, by 1998, I trusted Clodo, so I worked with him to rebuild the academy and I made him the Academy Commandant. As with everything else he did, Clodo poured himself into the work and did an excellent job. He recruited and trained teachers and a staff, processed and personally welcomed every new member into TOL, and established a system that trained new simmers and made everyone feel welcome. It was his efforts in the academy that allowed TOL to retain many of the precious few who joined TOL during the recession of 1998.

After seeing what a wonderful job he did with the academy, I made Clodo my new Vice President on July 1, 1998. Clodo was exactly what I needed in a Vice President. He was a capable administrator. I could assign large tasks vital to the club to him - running the academy, maintaining the website, and overseeing the activities - and they would get done. He did not seek power and he didn't like the limelight. If he had a problem with me, he would disagree with me in private, but he always supported me in public.

Clodo's personality was also a good balance to mine. In public, I've always been distant and aloof, and because I was the big imposing boss, many people who didn't know me were afraid to approach me. Clodo, on the other hand, was very approachable and non-threatening. People could talk to him. I'm sure he smoothed out a number of problems I never knew about, and brought other problems to my attention that I had not been aware of. This greatly contributed to the peace and prosperity that TOL enjoyed during 1998 and 1999.

However, Clodo wasn't going to be my successor as President. If he wanted the job I would have given it to him, no question about it. However, I knew he didn't want the job. There were others - Robin, Aaron, and Mike, who wanted to be President - and as a result they could never have been my Vice President. I was just too paranoid after Scott to give someone who wanted to be President that much trust and authority.

Mike was never an advisor. He was a friend, a wonderful captain, and a force of nature to be reckoned with for sure, but never an advisor, mainly because he wasn't interested in it. TOL was very lucky to have him on our side (most of the time). He infused as much energy and wackiness into the club as Chip - and when you have to bring the club to life each day through words on the screen - its good to have people like Mike around to instill those words with energy.

Robin never set out to be my advisor. She wanted to be a critic, and during the Constitutional debates she became my leading critic. Robin thought I was going too far in certain areas - especially when it came to the Court. She felt that courts had no business in simming and that it would just be a pressure cooker that made things worse.<sup>53</sup>

After the constitutional debates she continued to oppose me - in private and in public in the Assembly - on all number of issues. Other sim clubs would have viewed such opposition as a serious problem, and open debate as a dangerous development, but because it was channeled into a political system and into the Assembly, what could have become another Scott situation instead became very constructive. She would debate, I would debate, others would debate, agreements were reached, votes were held to solve impasses, and it all worked very well.

I have a strong personality, and I like to surround myself with people who will stand up to me. Clodo stood up to me, all be it in private. Robin sure stood up to me, but at first I was put off by her because she seemed to be opposing me just for the sake of opposing me. However, after a while I realized that Robin wasn't grandstanding. She loved TOL and wanted the best for it. After a while she too realized I wasn't on an ego trip, and that I didn't take the business of republic and constitution as seriously as she thought. I just used those terms because I realized the symbolic value they possessed and that they caused more people to get involved in the club at all levels because people felt ownership in the club. (No one would care about bylaws and a leadership council.) As a result, during 1999, she slowly transformed from an advisory into an advisor, and finally into my anointed successor.

In many ways Aaron was Robin's opposite and he became my enforcer - both jokingly at parties where he and his MiBs (Men in Blue because Men in Black was already taken) would smite and reeducate those who attempted to throw me into a vat of spam or pool of pudding - and in a very real sense as TOLs Chief Justice and the person who kept Ben and other trouble makers under control. But like Robin, Aaron had his own strong opinions and was not afraid to speak his mind to me, or to Robin for that matter. I had to manage their personalities to keep them from killing each other, but somehow I pulled it off.

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<sup>53</sup> She was right!



On a cultural level, Aaron was Chip's successor. In May of 1998, Chip retired from command of the Generation - and the club sent him off with an epic battle where Chip went out a hero against the Jeh'madar. Command of the Generation passed to the first officer, Wormella. She had been with the ship since 1996, but she lived in Wales. Her dedication was such that she would sign on very early every Saturday morning her time to sim. However, by the time she took command her interest in simming was begin to decline, she was growing tired of simming in the early morning, and she saw being promoted to captain as the culmination of her career. After a few months, she stepped aside and Aaron became the captain of the Generation.

Aaron was every bit as good of a captain as Chip, and their approach to simming was similar. Both loved to combine action with silliness, and were always able to pull it off. But beyond that, as Chip slowly faded away and quietly exited the club scene in 1999 (an exit befitting the true gentleman he was), Aaron stepped forward as TOLs cultural leader. Aaron added to Chip's culture of smite buttons by inventing the MiBs and other TOL cultural oddities. How he came up with this, I have no idea, but the MiBs were a hit, appearing in cartoons and after sim parties filled with extreme wackiness.

And, of course, there was IR - the club's philosopher. He liked to stay in the background and kept to himself, but his quiet nature belayed his awareness and insight. Whenever I was confronted with a deep issue or serious problem, I made sure to seek him out.

These five people - Clodo, Mike, Robin, Aaron, and IR, became the team that drove TOL during 1999.

## **Chapter 29: Internet Ventures**

*"I wanted to do something for the club, something that all the club could enjoy, build upon, and be proud of. This club's done so much for me(really, it has...its nice to be able to talk to someone that you don't see and will probably never see in your life about things in your life and share common interests) that I really wanted to do something special for it. I didn't even have to think...the answer was all too obvious...all I had to do was actually do it." - I. Relayer, in an E-mail to the club explaining why he gave TOL a tremendous gift. June 21, 1999.*

After witnessing how badly Chip's final days in office had gone in 1997, the issue of my retirement long weighed on my mind. By 1999, I was beginning to feel that it would be my last year in office. I was at the top of my game, and I was watching all of my dreams and more achieve fruition, but under the surface I could feel that I was growing tired. In January it wasn't much, but I knew myself and I knew by the end of the year I probably would be ready for retirement. I, of course, didn't tell anyone, because a lot could have changed in a year, and I didn't want to make myself a lame duck.

However, I did begin to test possible successors. Clodo, as I said, would have gotten the job if he wanted it, but he indicated quite plainly that he didn't. So my first choice was Mike. Yes, Mike. He had his problems, but he had learned from them and grown as a leader, and I

respected that. He was a good captain, and he was dedicated to the club, so I gave him a bigger challenge - a mini club - to run.

During the end of 1998, Chip, Mike, and IR approached me about expanding TOL onto the internet by establishing a website (aside from the few sad web pages I stuck up on my AOL members site), launching internet relay chat sims, and other assorted things. I agreed and TOLi (the Trek Online Internet Division) was born.

Things proceeded quickly. IR worked to acquire a domain name for TOL, and Mike programmed a MUSH - a virtual text based roleplaying environment - for the club. In the MUSH, people could explore the city of Trekonlina, stumble across hidden MIB weapon labs and reeducation centers, run amuck in my house, and visit Scott in his apple orchard (he's a big Mac fan). Mike also convinced an irc sim, the USS *Genesis*, to join TOL. The *Genesis* had been part of the New Federation Sim Group (NFSG) - a member club in the 1998 Simming League. But the NFSG died, leaving the *Genesis* on its own.

Had I been smart, I would have allowed the *Genesis* to join TOL as a regular sim. But because it was off of AOL and there was precedent with the Prodigy and CIS sims being separate, and because I wanted to test Mike, I turned TOLi from a loose collection of special projects into a true division on par with Trek Online Prodigy and I put Mike in command of it.

At the same time, Robin signed up with the new Prodigy Internet service (the successor to the old Classic Prodigy service). I decided to charge her with reviving the TOL Prodigy division (which died at the end of 1998 with the demise of Classic Prodigy). Thus I was able to test both Mike and Robin (my second choice for President) at the same time.

However, taking these actions opened up a whole can of worms that hadn't been considered when we drafted of the constitution. Questions were raised over what was a division? Did Mike and Robin have as much power as I? Did the *Genesis* have a seat in the Assembly? TOL had been able to avoid these questions because when the Constitution was written TOL Prodigy was pretty much dead. There was only the club on AOL at the time.

In preparing for TOLi, I pushed a constitutional amendment through the Assembly that made TOLi a separate division, but I as the President would have the power to appoint and remove its director. My reasoning for this was as follows - in 1999 the internet was divided. AIM didn't exist, so in order to IM a person, they had to be on AOL. Internet message boards weren't reliable, so the Assembly met at our AOL message boards. This made it impossible for someone from the internet to take part in the Assembly. As a result of these physical barriers, any internet sims would be isolated from the sims on AOL - just as the club on Prodigy had been isolated. As a result it made no sense for TOLi or Prodigy to be integrated into the constitution and politics of the club on AOL. However, I wanted to keep TOL united as one club. I wanted everyone to follow the same rules and be a part of the same community, so everything had to be linked somehow - hence TOLi was placed under the defacto command of the club on AOL and was required to follow the same rules and

procedures so that if someone from AOL went to the *Genesis* and vice versa, they would recognize it as a TOL sim.

On paper it seemed great, but it didn't work in reality. Robin saw ahead to the day when the internet would be integrated and found the divisions to be silly. Mike wanted more independence and power as the head of TOLi because the *Genesis* had its own rules and style from the NFSG that didn't fit into TOL. After a while, Breon, the captain of the *Genesis*, started to speak up, and brought things to a head.

Perhaps had Mike been successful in expanding TOLi by adding new sims, it would have been a different story. But by the spring of 1999, the *Genesis* was still the only sim. It didn't make sense to Breon to have a whole layer of pointless bureaucracy over him (ie Mike), and he didn't like having rules and simming styles from TOL being imposed on him.

In April, Breon come to me and vented his frustrations about being treated as a colony. In response, I decided to do away with the divisions and bring the *Genesis* into the club as a full member, with a seat in the Assembly and all. At first, Breon was fine with this, and it made sense to everyone else. TOLi only had the *Genesis*, and Prodigy hadn't managed to launch any new sims on the Prodigy Internet Service, although Robin did list her sim as part of the Prodigy division even though it wasn't on Prodigy (probably out of protest to the idea of having divisions in the first place).

But than, something very strange happened - Breon freaked. I'm not sure why. I think the days of deliberation and politicking with Mike, Breon, Robin, and the Assembly to reach a consensus on the issue in April scared him. After all, TOLs way of doing things was alien to most of the simming world. In addition, Admiral Bromb from the MFS - my old antagonist from the 1998 Simming League - was a crew member on the *Genesis*, and I'm sure he was busy talking Breon out of becoming a full TOL member. But the matter was sealed when Aaron, being the enforcer, went to Breon to remind him that he had agreed to this new arrangement and it wasn't very honorable to try to back out a few days later. Words were exchanged, Breon pulled the *Genesis* out of the club and restarted NFSG. It took a while for me to smooth things over, but when it was all said and done, there weren't any hard feelings between us. NFSG grew and prospered, rejoined the Simming League, and worked closely with TOL.

Thus ended TOLi.

Luckily, because the *Genesis* was isolated from the rest of the club, its leaving TOL had no impact - aside from Aaron becoming upset and cursing out Breon. All of the *Genesis* crew members were contained on the *Genesis* and TOL continued to prosper after it left. In retrospect, regardless of what I did, the *Genesis* probably would have left sooner or later. It was set in the 25th Century and had a very intense story line supported by ranks, rules, and styles that didn't mesh with TOLs system.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> I should have taken it as another warning against mergers, but I didn't...

But the Genesis was a critical test for the club. It would have been easy to allow the Genesis to be on its own in TOL, and to start up a NFSG fleet in TOL. The club could have become another simming group filled with internal barriers and divisions. But I stuck to my desire to have one open and united community that, despite the online service barriers of the day, followed the same rules and styles. We tried to make it work within the confines of the technology of the day and the Genesis' unique history, but in the end the Genesis just couldn't fit into TOL, so it left.

TOLi put Mike out of the running to be the President, but it wasn't because Breon left. During the few months he ran the division he didn't take any initiative. He always came to me for orders and didn't do anything unless I told him to. Robin, on the other hand, impressed me. The Prodigy division didn't go anywhere because it turned out that the new Prodigy Internet Service was just a collection of websites, not a self contained online service like AOL or the old Classic Prodigy, but she took initiative by moving her ship to an internet chat room (which she placed under her Prodigy division, not Mike's TOLi division), and by starting up new E-mail and Bulletin Board sims for the club.

However, there is a better ending to the TOLi story. There had been the occasional talk of creating a proper website for TOL and replacing my few amateur webpages devoted to the club on my AOL members page. Unknown to me, Mike, Clodo, Robin, and IR had been working behind the scenes. IR purchased the domain name trekonline.com, and surprised everyone when he E-mailed the club to tell us the news. As he explained, it was his gift back to TOL. "I wanted to do something for the club, something that all the club could enjoy, build upon, and be proud of. This club's done so much for me (really, it has...its nice to be able to talk to someone that you don't see and will probably never see in your life about things in your life and share common interests) that I really wanted to do something special for it. I didn't even have to think...the answer was all too obvious...all I had to do was actually do it."

### Chapter 30: A day in the life

*"And somebody spoke and I went into a dream." - Paul McCartney*

*"Ahhh. Uhaah. Ahhaahhhhhhhhaahhh..." - John Lennon*

Too often when writing history, one is carried away by the big events that shape the story - epic battles, political debates, and stories of intrigue, triumph and failure. The day to day events are lost.

1999 was a good year for TOL. Everything came together. There weren't any epic struggles or disasters, it was just one day after another where we enjoyed simming and each other's friendship. So please allow me to recount a typical day in my life as the President of TOL. The day presented here is not a factual day, but is based on historical records and my memory of what a day in 1999 was like...

I return home around 5:30pm and after getting settled, I sign on and find several E-mails in my box. The first three are for the Trekinnest Trek Trivia in Trek Online E-mail string. "How did she know the answer?" I ask myself.

Next is a log from the Stonewall, I quickly read it and scroll down to the attendance info. "Very good turn out," I think to myself, "Clodo always does a good job." As I save the log to the Stonewall folder on my computer, a thought crosses my mind. "I had to ask him something." I open the TOL notebook next to my computer and flip to the most recent page. "Ahh yes, I need to check up on that new cadet. Has he been sent to the Endeavor yet?" The cadet also signed up to attend the Dark Falcon, and they could use a new cadet. If its not too late, I want to send him to the DF instead.

"Well that answers that" I mumble as I read the next E-mail - the official welcome letter from Clodo to the new cadet posting them to the Endeavor. I make a note in my book to get someone new to the DF as soon as possible. Following the official welcome letter is Clodo's typical reminder E-mail to everyone. Amy, welcome the person onboard your ship. Chas, send him the guidebook. LadyJ, he wants to take part in the trivia, so add him to the string. I do my bit by E-mailing the guidebook to the new cadet.

Robin IMs me to say "Hello." After I reply with "Hi," she follows with a completely random question, "If God can do anything, can he create a math problem he can't solve?" I sigh, knowing this only a distraction and her way of softening me for unpleasant news, but I play along anyway. "Yes, its called life," I respond.

Wanting to see how she breaks whatever news it is to me, I try to get her off onto another subject. "So we're going to have the Genesis join TOL outright."

"Wow, they get to become a part of TOLs messed up bureaucracy."

"Bah ::smites you::" I type "TOL doesn't have bureaucracy... there is a difference between that and political institutions."

Robin quickly snaps back, "It's all the same around here... the Assembly, the Courts. Mainly the courts, because they don't do anything and thus by definition are a bureaucracy. They are unnecessary. They are just a pressure-cooker."

"They do their job when needed, thankfully which isn't very much. Look at their folder, there are only 17 posts. But when the court is needed, they are there to resolve problems, like with Ben and Bo. They both were problems for TOL, so they were dealt with. Besides, in addition to helping us with day to day stuff, the constitution, courts, assembly, is all there so that when I'm no longer President, and if the club ever collapses again, there will be institutions in place to help save the club, and institutions are far better at that than having to rely on the will of a potentially flawed leader."

"Umm... no. Ben and Bo were annoyances to you," Robin retorts, not wanting to be dragged off topic and into a larger debate.

"They were more than just an annoyance to me."

After a long pause, Robin comments. "Yes, well, I could whine about my problems with people too. But if they don't bother you, you probably wouldn't do anything."

"Who do you have problems with?" I ask, trying to get the chat back to what I suspect is Robin's original point.

"At the moment, Aaron. Look at his new website for the *Generation*, he is using copyrighted materials. I tried to get him to contact the author, because there was an e-mail address to contact the webmaster where he could have gotten the author's permission. But he wouldn't do that and I am quite frustrated, what can you do about it?"

At that moment Aaron signs on and IMs me. "Hi, don't listen to Robin. She is going to say I stole copyrighted material."

"Speak of the devil" Robin IMs me.

Aaron continues, "I did not steal any copyrighted material. First of all, its not copyrighted, and second I gave thanks on the site anyway, so big whoppy. Anyway, I have the hugest headache. Hugest or biggest? Which one is grammatically correct? ;P."

"Biggest, I believe," I reply to Aaron, "But don't go by me, you have seen my writing, heh."

I turn my attention back to Robin and write her, "So Aaron just IMed me, and I'm looking at his website now. He did thank the author and link the site, and as far as I know that's all he needs to do."

She responds, "::::smites you:::: See, you never listen to me."

"Bah, fine. I'll make him E-mail the author too. Now, do you want to see a bureaucracy? (Link to the ASG organizational flow chart). That is a bureaucracy."

As Robin takes a few minutes to look over the ASG site, and as I tell Aaron to e-mail the author just to be on the safe side, an ensign IMs me asking a few questions. After the ensign is de-confused, I return to checking my E-mail and see a new trivia question. I quickly reply, "Dreadnought Class." I know I got it right. It's just a matter of the person who asked the question to write back, saying I got it right, and handing the floor over to me to ask the next question.

Robin finally replies, "I guess it does make me feel kind of lucky not to be one of 50 commodores in a club, and wow, the ASG sure does have a lot of Fox Mulders."

"I think it's the same person." I respond.

"Err... umm... unspiffy."

With the tension between us now relieved, I type, "Anyway, I need to get some food, I'll be back later."

With that, I sign off and eat dinner.

Three or so hours later I sign back on and pop into the end of a sim to check how it's doing. As the crew sims away in the background, I check the message boards and see that in Mike's latest post he parked his shuttle right outside my window and is waving at me. I also visit the Orion House - my White House - and see that Clodo is lost in the Vice Presidential sub sub sub basement. After waving back at Mike and dispatching some MiBs to rescue Clodo, I check the Assembly to see how the vote on my bill is coming along. "Voting is a little slow." I say to myself, "People seem to be waiting."

After the sim ends I chat with the crew, my favorite part of the job. Sure enough, because everyone lingers to talk to me, an after sim chat party brakes out. Someone apparently threw a jelly bean. It missed the target and bounced off Carrie's head. She is looking for the perpetrator with the intention of dunking them into a vat of spam while Mike is running around claiming he just saw the moon explode. (These parties allowed everyone's imaginations to run unfettered by the rules of simming and the Trek universe, and the little inside jokes and games gave the club great unity.)

After giving up on trying to convince people about the moon, Mike attempts to eat someone - another inside joke. I quickly IM him, "I thought you said you aren't a cannibal?"

"Me?? No, no, I'm not."

"You could have fooled me."

"Good! I like fooling people. :::nods:::" Mike switches to the serious, "So I am going to talk to Bo tonight."

"All right", I reply, "sometimes he gets carried away, don't worry about him too much."

Clodo begins to IM me. So far it has been a pretty light night, I think to myself, normally I have 5 or 6 people IM me at once.

"Hi Chas. I disagree with the new bill."

"Oh?" I ask Clodo.

"I think Robin is right about this one. It's just going to make unnecessary work for everyone."

"All right, I'll pull the bill." Clodo was one of the few people who held a veto power over me because I trusted him that much. He didn't speak up against me often, but when he did, I would usually always listen.

"Thanks."

I return my attention to the chat party and see Carrie swimming around in a pool of chocolate pudding. I check my E-mail once again and find an apology from Robin to Aaron, and I see I got the trivia question right and that the newly waxed floor has been handed over to me to ask the next question. However, before I can think up a question, Maki, my VP in the Simming League, IMs me to find out about the preparations for an upcoming event. Shortly there after, Aaron IMs me to warn me that he fears a civil war will soon break out in club AB. I discuss the situation with Aaron and inform Maki.

"Yea, ever since Phil disappeared it hasn't been very good over there." Maki comments. "I always found it strange that he just disappeared like that."

"Ah well." I sigh, "We can have the Court try to resolve any disputes, and warn them in AB that they can be punished if a war breaks out."

"I know, but it is getting late" Maki replies, "I should go to sleep, we will talk about this tomorrow."

"Agreed, I'll talk to some Senators and see what they think. Good night Maki."

Soon there after, I wrap up my IMs, send out a trivia question, and sign off for the night. Another day as President completed. Tomorrow I'll have to write up my monthly update to all of the captains to let them know how I think they are doing and what I plan for the next month, and I look at my list and see that I never got a chance to talk to IR about sending out more logs.

One of the keys to Trek Online's success was that I hounded my captains, even the good ones. In a system where there were few rules on the individual simmers (thus helping to promote fun and creativity), it was up to the captains to keep their sims under control. As future presidents of Trek Online discovered, when you do not keep a close eye on your captains - when you do not make sure they take care of the paper work, make sure the sim starts and ends on time, set an example of professionalism, and keep the crew from dominating and letting the sims descend into slap stick battles - things quickly fall apart.

### **Chapter 31: SciWorld and the Tournament**

*"I got started in the simming business well over two years ago and have never looked back. While I am still considered a 'novice' simmer, as you will see, I don't lack spirit! You'll hear a lot about why I created SciWorld. There are many reasons:*

*Just for fun... how often do you get to do this much in one weekend?*

*For groups to promote themselves.*

*To promote peace between the groups and get them together for an event."*



*-Ender Maki, during his speech opening the first SciWorld Online Convention, March 18, 1999*

In 1999, the Simming League - for a few short months - rose beyond its normal day to day functioning as a political institution for simming leaders and became what Bromb wanted it to be - an organization that advanced simming when Ender Maki of the Online Simulation Association (OSA) and Troi of the Intergalactic Simulation Organization (ISO), stepped forward with two grand ideas - the SciWorld Online Convention and the Tournament of Simulations.

The *All of simming is in danger* essay had attracted new clubs and talent to the League. A new constitution was written that gave more power to the President and individuals to run League functions, thus removing the Senate and its politics from approving every last detail.

The first to step forward in the new League was Maki, and his sim club, the Online Simulations Association (OSA). The OSA was a radical experiment. Formed by the merger of 3 good-sized clubs in late 1998, it somehow managed to hold together for a year before fracturing apart along the lines of the clubs that had gone into the merger. After it formed, I was brought in as an advisor to several high-ranking members of the OSA, and TOLs style of government helped to influence the OSA, and especially Maki.

Shortly after the New Year - as the OSA was joining the League - Maki told me about an idea he had been working on with Tashak, a fellow OSA member. They were thinking about having the OSA put together an online simming convention - a week of sims, games, chats, and workshops about simming. A simple idea, but no one had ever done it before, because, as it turned out, it was very difficult to pull off.

I immediately liked the idea and suggested making the convention a League event - that way it could involve a dozen clubs and hundreds of simmers. Maki agreed and we began to get to work.

Our first approach was to put together a massive master schedule where we figured out all of the events we wanted and placed them into appropriate timeslots. It was a thing of beauty, let me tell you. The only problem was that as soon as we put out feelers to find people to host our events, there was little interest. People instead had ideas for their own events, so we quickly abandoned the top down approach and instead reached out to a lot of people, told them about the convention, and asked if they would be interested in running a sim or event.

It was a time consuming task - having to coordinate with people, get all of the scheduling to work, help people develop their events, and what not. Maki, Tashak, and myself spent three months - from January to March, putting together SciWorld. I didn't think we would meet our date and be ready to hold the convention as we had planned in mid March, but somehow, everything came together, and the SciWorld Online Convention was held from March 18 to the 22nd, 1999, and was a huge success.

Over the course of the 4 days, we had nearly 50 sims, games, trivia sessions, special chats, and simming workshops held in various AOL chat rooms open to the public. The most astounding feature of SciWorld was, in my opinion, that for the convention almost a dozen clubs opened up their normally closed sims to the public.

SciWorld was a prime example of what the League could accomplish if it worked towards a common goal. I don't know if the convention had any major impact on simming - if it caused people to join a new club, or if it aided in the spread of ideas, or opened new lines of communications - but I know that hundreds of people took part in convention and had fun. For almost a week, all of the artificial barriers and borders that the simming world had developed were lifted. It's one of my proudest simming moments.

The convention was such a huge success that even the NAGF forum on AOL stood up and took notice. It attempted to organize its own simming convention, but was unable to pull it off. That has always been a source of pride for me. The Simming League and three dedicated people were able to pull off an event that not even AOL - with all of its resources - was able to.

For our efforts, Maki, Tashak, and myself received the Simming League Prize for Peace for bringing the simming world together and demonstrating what was possible if people just realize this is a game and work together to promote fun.

Building on the success of SciWorld, Troi the leader of the Intergalactic Simulation Organization (ISO) and Senator to the Simming League, came forward with a second grand idea. She thought - clubs are always bragging about how they have the best sims, so why not organize a tournament to see who was right?

Thus, the Tournament of Simulations was born and organized by the Simming League. Many League member clubs, and some who weren't members, agreed to take part in the Tournament. During June and July, neutral judges roamed the simming world, witnessing the best sims of each club and keeping score. When it was all said and done, TOL secured its place as the best club of 1999 and a prime example of the era. Trek Online, and my ship, the USS Vindicator, was found to be the best overall sim, the most creative sim, and to have the best sim master. I came in third in the best captain category - but hey, you can't win them all.

To see all of the struggle and hard work by myself and others pay off... to see my club and my crew receive the recognition they deserved was absolutely amazing.

## **Chapter 32: Summer Fun**

*Clodo: "Anyone want to marry me?"*

*Anne: "Sorry, No Clodo."*

*Robin: "No Clodo."*

*Malu: "Sorry Clodo."*

*-Poor Clodo, at my wedding, July 26, 1999.*

By the summer of 1999 I was sure I would retire when my term ended in January. The club was thriving and I had achieved all of my dreams, but I was becoming busy in real life and had less time for the club. Plus, after three years of bring life to words on a screen I was beginning to burn out. It didn't affect my performance, as far as I could tell, but there was an attitude shift. For example, when I started TOL, I responded enthusiastically to questions from cadets. But by mid 1999, it was always the same questions. I still responded to them promptly and effectively, but I grew tired of doing it. I know of leaders who stay in power by delegating these tasks to others and building bureaucracies that isolate them from the day to day simming, but that wasn't TOL. I knew if I did that for my own personal benefit, it would destroy the unique community and openness of TOL.

But knowing that I was soon to retire, I loosened my collar and began to do things that I wouldn't have dreamed of doing in earlier periods. For starters, I got married.

Amy, the captain of the Endeavor, is a good friend of mine, and for many months our two sim characters were engaged in playful flirtation. It started at a Vindicator shore leave sim, and Amy happened to be there enjoying a vacation from her duties on the Endeavor. My reputation as a great warrior and dashing hero had proceeded me, and as a half Klingon, Amy became intrigued with my quiet aloofness... Klingon's don't know many quiet warriors. She began to peruse me in sims we both attended and at after sim parties, and I would politely rebuff her. We both got a kick out of turning heads and spreading rumors that frosty old Chas may be loosening up, so we kept at it.

This mysterious playfulness is more reflective of my real life personality, but sadly I never had many opportunities for it to come across online. As the leader I learned that I had to stay distant and aloof. It's hard to command someone and be friends with them at the same time.

After a little while, we decided it would be interesting if TOL had a first lady, and that a relationship would be a fun way to develop and explore our sim characters. So, Amy slowly won over Chas, and we put together a few sims to explore our character's relationship.

Finally, on July 26, our two characters got married at an Orion House ceremony. Clodo performed the ceremony, Mike was the best man, Carrie was the maid of honor, and Robin ended up with the bouquet. Lots of bloodwine and much silliness followed at the banquet.

After the marriage, Amy threw herself into the role of First Lady and took control of the MiBs when Aaron retired (I think she had a little too much fun controlling the MiBs). We continued to hold sims that explored our character's relationship, but we were careful not to have too many because it was hard to involve others in them. The one sim that stands out the most in my mind is where Amy's body had been taken over by an alien critter. She had gone to engineering, put up forcefields, ceased control of the systems, and taken people

hostage. The only person she, or the alien controlling her would talk to and allow into engineering was me. We determined that the only way to get the alien out of her was to kill her, and than hopefully revive her.

I slowly made my way to engineering, trembling and numb. I started to talk to her and got her to come down closer to me. When she did, I pulled out a phaser and did my duty. The alien critter left her body and I vaporized it. I quickly rushed over to the controls, lowered the forecefields, regained control of the ship and beamed us to sickbay.

As I stood watching her turn white as the doctors worked on her, I collapsed to the floor crying. Luckily, after a few tense minutes, as is always the case in simming, she was revived. She smacked me and than we embraced as the sim ended. Afterwards, one of the crew members IMed us and said the sim had made her cry. What a moment...

In addition to getting married, I spent 1999 returning to my simming roots. In the fall of 1998, outside of TOL, Moses (my old academy pal and long time compatriot) and I launched an experimental sim called the USS Darkflame. The premise was simple. We had no set crew, just a pool of interested people who would receive updates about the sim. There was no captain and no set ship per say, although we always called it the Darkflame. Every week would be something new and different depending on who showed up, just like it was in the early days of simming. We both had a great time at the sim, and we wanted to keep it separate from TOL to let this unique idea develop on its own.

The Darkflame was successful, and we decided to expand it to make a new club over the summer of 1999, named Trek Theater or Outer Realm Sims (we never did decide). But after a few weeks we gave up on the club idea because I was too busy with TOL and Moses was busy serving as a captain in what was left of STS. The Darkflame continued to sim into the fall, but eventually many of the key crew members joined TOL and the sim fizzled. Don't get me wrong, TOL was always my club, and I loved it, but I was always joining other clubs on the side and experimenting in order to keep my skills sharp and to broaden my prospective.

The Darkflame had inspired me to start up a new sim in TOL called New Horizons. It was the same concept, open to all, and every week it would be something new. It attracted a small following in TOL, but because it was run as a bulletin board sim at the time in TOL, it really didn't catch on.

But Moses and I weren't the only ones who were experimenting with the fundamentals of simming. During the Tournament of Simming, I was introduced to an independent ship called the USS Dark Angel (no relation to the Darkflame). And while there was a set ship and captain, it was very much like the early days of simming on Prodigy. There was a pool of simming friends, and whenever enough of them were online, they would get together and sim. I watched some of their sims and was blown away by how dedicated and professional they were. And the judges of the Tournament apparently were impressed as well, for the Dark Angel blew away all of the big name sims and came in as the second best sim (behind the Vindicator).

Vid and a few members of his crew joined TOL, and we began to talk. Eventually, the idea of the Dark Angel joining TOL arose. I know Vid didn't like having to do all of the administrative work of a club for just a sim... of having to recruit, train cadets, take care of paperwork, write a newsletter, and deal with other clubs. I was hesitant, given my experience with the Independence and the Genesis, but I saw that the Dark Angel would be a good addition to the club. I proceeded carefully, I talked to all of the crew members of the Dark Angel and educated them about TOL. Vid and I reached an agreement that the Dark Angel would become a provisional member for 3 to 5 months, during which time both sides would see how it worked out. If at the end of that time the Dark Angel wanted to stay in TOL, and TOL still wanted the Dark Angel, the DA (Dark Angel) would become a full ship in TOL and would get a seat in the Assembly.

A vote was held, and both the crew of the Dark Angel and the Assembly approved the plan. As it turned out, there was no need for hesitation. The Dark Angel fit into TOL nicely. The simming style was similar, the rules and procedures were similar, and everyone on both sides got along. Soon the Dark Angel was adding its own inside jokes and wackiness to TOL's culture.<sup>55</sup>

### Chapter 33: Ben's Punishment

*"Chas I am very sorry about that. I heard from Ben about VF being dead and I thought he was still in TOL." - Tracy, explaining to me why she joined up with Ben again, in an IM, August 14, 1999.*

The only major problem of 1999 was caused by the same guy who made trouble in 1996, 1997, and 1998. If you are getting tired of hearing about Ben and his exploits, you can imagine how thinly he was wearing on my patience by this time.

If you recall, Ben terrorized the Vindicator, destroyed the Freedom, and waged war against the club. However, he reformed (kind of) and helped me bring down LeaderFed, so he was allowed back in TOL in 1998, only to drive several Viper Flight captains into retirement as he tried to take control of the sim. After I stopped him from taking over the sim, Ben left the club and remained quiet during most of 1999, but in August he returned to make another play for Viper Flight and to cause trouble in the Simming League.

Matt had failed to revive Viper Flight and control Ben when I put him in command of the sim in late 1998. I would have removed Matt from command immediately, but he was running against me for the Presidency, and I didn't want there to be any appearance that I was removing him for political reasons. However, when the election was over and I was soundly reelected, I sacked Matt and took command of Viper Flight myself in February. I ran VF until August, when I put Cosair Shane, an old Orion crew member, in command. During the transition period, it looked as if VF had stopped simming, so Ben and Tracy, VF's old CO, immediately pounced and tried to lay claim to the sim once again and take it out of TOL.

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<sup>55</sup> And yet, Vid and the crew of the Dark Angel never forgot they had once been apart from TOL, and could be again...

At the same time, the Simming League was flying high, having enjoyed several months of peace and astounding successes with SciWorld and the Tournament. However, in August I announced my plans not to run for reelection as the League President when my term ended in September. Being a lame duck, Ben became more aggressive.

Gillis (remember, I promised you would hear more about him), was the head of a sim club called the New Federation League (NFL) and its Senator in the League. At the time Ben made his second play for Viper Flight, Ben was NFL's academy director and Gillis was very impressed with his work (he soon found out that Ben had stole it all from TOL). Gillis had attended a few TOL sims and enjoyed our unique style and culture - so much so that he created his own imaginary force, Men in Purple (or MiP) to fight the MiBs on our message boards in the wacky adventures we had there.

When Ben told Gillis that a sim in TOL - Viper Flight - was getting ready to leave the club and was looking for a new home, Gillis jumped at the opportunity and invited it into NFL. However, when Gillis learned from me the truth of the matter about Viper Flight, he became upset with Ben, and Ben retaliated by declaring war on TOL and attacking the NFL.

I had enough. I brought Ben up on charges of War Crimes and Crimes Against Simming before the League Court of Sim Justice, and I outlined Ben's entire history from 1996 to that moment, and argued that he was a menace who shouldn't be allowed to sim anywhere. Ben plead guilty the next day (August 13, 1999), and he was punished by being expelled from all League clubs, including NFL. Ben became the first person to be labeled a War Criminal by the League, and the case against him was the first time the League used its full judicial power. And all had gone smoothly enough. Ben was exposed, he had no friends, and no place to hide.

In desperation, Ben began to pose as LeaderFed. He restarted the FFSC and tried to gain League membership, but he was quickly exposed. Ben then returned to his old tricks by contacting people, fanning innocence, pleading that he had reformed, and seeing who would show him mercy.

Surprisingly enough, Gillis took pity upon Ben. Not knowing that Ben's academy materials were stolen from TOL, Gillis still thought highly of his skills as an administrator and allowed him to rejoin NFL.

Planning on retiring, I chose not to run for re-election as the Sim Senate President, and when my term ended on September 19, 1999, I stepped down. Shetz, the Senator from Ashes of the Rebellion, a Star Wars sim club, was elected the new President. I was confident that after three tries, the Simming League had finally found its footing and had a proud future ahead of it. The League was bringing clubs together, promoting communication between leaders and clubs in a way never seen before, maintaining peace in the simming world by negotiating settlements to disputes and punishing trouble makers, and was uniting the simming world through events like SciWorld and the Tournament. The League was respected and its authority was recognized.

Or so it would seem.

A week later, we found out that Gillis had allowed Ben back in his club, in direct violation of the Court order. If I still had been the President, I would have had a good talking with Gillis, and used the power of the League to make sure the Court's authority was upheld. But Shetz was new to the job and he was cautious (Don't get me wrong, I like Shetz, he's a great guy and we still keep in touch, but he just was too new to the job and didn't know how to respond). He dithered and started to make statements that maybe Ben should be allowed back in the League. At the same time, someone began to advance an argument that because the preamble of the League constitution said that clubs were sovereign, the Court had no authority to tell clubs who could be a member. Never mind the fact that the body of the Constitution stated otherwise.

Shetz called for an emergency chat meeting of the Senate, and as was usual with Senate chat meetings (which is why we abandoned them in 1998), it spun out of control. Someone needed to do something to restore order, so on September 26, as was my privilege as a Senator, I asked the Court to clear up the matter, but that only made things worse when Chief Justice Dodonna bought into the preamble argument and declared that it was unconstitutional and deplorable for the League to tell the NFL that Ben couldn't be a member. When I pointed out the next day what the Constitution actually said, the Court reversed itself.

The real turn came though when I discovered that Ben had stolen material from TOL and was using it in the NFL. When I informed Gillis, he kicked Ben out of the NFL, and calm quickly returned to the League. However, I still think had the President and Court looked at the facts, read the Constitution and done their jobs, none of it would have happened. Instead, they allowed Ben to get away with his old tricks and manipulate them. But at least in the end the punishment stood.

### **Chapter 34: Not Quite Retired**

*"Simming totally consumes, and I have been totally consumed by it." - Me, announcing my impending retirement to the club, November 14, 1999.*

On September 1, I E-mailed all of the captains and for the first time made it known to them that I was thinking about retiring. I explained that I had achieved all of my goals and it was time for me to move on, and that I was starting to grow tired of simming and having to spend every day bringing life and energy to words on the screen. I was worried that it would harm the club if I stayed on past my prime, and I commented that I felt out of touch. I was beginning to realize that simming was changing. It was moving onto the internet, and I really didn't know anything about webpages, irc, and the rest. I figured it was time for me to get out of the way and let someone who knew more about these things and who was fresh and had more energy to take over the job.

Robin had emerged as the person I wanted to be my successor, and although I never said anything officially on the subject, everyone knew my preference. While we hadn't

necessarily became friends, Robin and I learned to work together, and most importantly, trust each other. Robin took initiative. She was able to organize and start up new sims on her own, she had been able to defuse a potential conflict with another club that arose out of a misunderstanding with her sim, and she was beginning to learn discipline and poise. She was picking her fights and words more carefully. And, most importantly, she was overflowing with ideas and energy, and she wanted to be the President. I felt she was ready.

I spent my last 4 months in office preparing the club for the transition. Clodo was going to retire with me and disband his Stonewall sim when he left. However, most of the crew of the Stonewall wanted to stay. It was decided to start up a new sim with the Stonewall crew in the Stonewall's Monday night timeslot and put Penny in command of it. Penny's sim, the classic era Federation starship, USS Wrightstown, would be disbanded. It had a good run, but there no longer was much interest in the club for a classic era sim. Amy would also retire and Matt would return to command the Endeavor.

The Charleston under the command of Captain Malu would be disbanded when she retired too, and its crew would be combined with Mike's ship, the USS Amazon. In order to be President, Robin decided to cut back on her load, merging her Romulan sim, the ISS Vorta, into her Bulletin Board Sim, Dark Forge Station, and putting Karg in command of DFS, leaving Robin only with an E-mail sim, the USS Valkyrie.

I promised to keep the Vindicator simming for a few months, and I would see where the club was at after Robin took over before retiring completely.

In other words, the club was made a little smaller and more manageable for Robin, and the few sims that were past their prime - the Wrightstown, Charleston, and Vorta, were cut.

I also worked with Robin and the Assembly to write and pass a new constitution for TOL. It incorporated things that we had learned over the year with the first constitution, and made two major changes. First, it reduced the Presidential term of office from one year to 6 months because I felt that one year was way too long to ask a person to commit to running the club, and would cause serious problems if the club had to stick with a bad choice for one year. Secondly, it changed the Assembly from having an elected representative from every ship to just general representatives from the entire club who could get a seat as long as one was available. As I argue in Chapter 24, this ended up being a huge mistake in the long run because it caused the Assembly to become filled with reactionary old leaders and dead wood.

In the November 1999 TOL Times, I announced to the entire club that I was not going to seek reelection. At first I had worried that there would be a free for all Presidential election, but by November it was clear that wouldn't be the case. Aaron had retired in August, Mike was no longer interested in the job, and Penny, a popular captain, decided she didn't have a chance of beating Robin, so she stayed out. Kyle, captain of the Dark Falcon, was thinking about running, but Robin offered to make him the running mate, and he accepted. That left Robin and Matt as the only two candidates.



Matt's campaign never took off. Robin was full of ideas and energy, and although I think Matt was a more popular person in the club, he came across as burnt out, and his debate performance, where he said he had no clue if he or Robin would make a better President, didn't help. Robin won in a landslide - 75% to 25%.

On Monday, January 31, 2000, the Stonewall held its final sim. The ship became trapped in a gas giant and as it was being sucked deeper into the gravitational pull of the planet, Clodo sacrificed himself to save the crew. After the sim ended, the club gathered in the private room Stonewall to inaugurate a new president, Robin Knight. I felt I had gone out at the top of my game. The club was strong and at peace, and I made my farewell address, in which I reflected on my career (in a far more concise fashion than I do here), and touched upon all of the themes and dreams of my time in office. I finished by saying "When it is all said and done, I hope people simply say. "When Chas Hammer became president of the club on AOL, he found a small, crippled club about to die. A club that had ripped its self apart... a club filled with war, disorganization and anarchy. He was able to infuse it with new life and guided it through its darkest days. He worked to dedicate a presidential career born in war to one dedicated to peace and the advancement of simming. When he left the TOL presidency three years later, he had taken the dreams of Chip and Ben and Scott and made him shine. When he left the presidency, Trek Online was a peaceful and gentle super power, whose organization, sims and government had inspired countless other sim clubs and simmers across the online world. Through Trek Online, and through the Simming League, Chas was able to give simming new direction and new ideas that changed it for the better. He was able to touch many different clubs and many different lives and was able to bring a little joy and fun to them."

However, I wasn't quite finished.

After the debacle involving Ben, Shetz started to disappear from the League - he realized he didn't quite like the job of President, and he didn't have the time for it. He would go for days, even weeks, without posting at the League boards, so on November 17, 1999, he resigned the Presidency. He had made me his Vice President because he wanted me around just in case such an event occurred, so I once again found myself in charge of the League.

For a little while, it looked as if the League was going to be as strong in 2000 as it was in 1999. I spent November and December bringing new clubs in to the League, passing laws and constitutional amendments that addressed the problems that arose during Ben's trial and punishment, and worked with Maki to establish the Simming League News Network, which we hoped would provide news and info to the simming world. We discussed establishing a joint simming academy for all interested League clubs, and a simming bill of rights. I promoted the Hammer Treaty, in which signatory clubs would open up their best sims to the members of the other involved clubs, and each club would cross list the others sims on their schedule. I hoped that this would help to break down some of the barriers in the simming world and make a permanent SciWorld of sorts.

The energy and enthusiasm in the League was high, but it didn't last. We soon became embroiled in one problem after another, and I failed to get us out of them.

The first problem involved Gillis. Even before the situation with Ben, Gillis had been in a club called GFS, which was under the command of Admiral Wizo. However, Gills became fed up with what he thought was unfair treatment from Wizo and quit to start his own club, NFL. He was joined by his assistant, Eppy. However, Eppy wasn't interested in making a new club, she wanted to destroy Wizo and take over GFS. She attacked the GFS, and when Gillis found out, he kicked Eppy out of the NFL.

In December, Gillis left the Senate because he merged NFL into another club under the command of Praetor Ro, to create the Galactic Protectorate (GP)... quickly renamed the Interplanetary Federation of Simming (IFS) - just to confuse everyone I think. Gillis, however, stayed in the League by continuing to help run or RolePlayerUSA bureau.

Around the same time, Eppy convinced Wizo that she had changed, and Wizo let her return to the GFS. Eppy quickly turned on Wizo and launched a trial to try to kick Wizo out of command. Gillis threatened Eppy and got her to back down.

In January, the IFS joined the League, and Eppy struck again by starting up a new club called GFS 2000 and attacking both the GFS and beginning covert operations against the IFS - probably in hopes of promoting Gillis to fight back. Gillis, to his credit, stayed out of the fighting.

For several weeks, the League was consumed by the intrigue and war. Every day Senators debated the issue and started to take sides. Eppy was a charming speaker, and given Gillis previous problems with the League involving Ben, many were willing to believe and support Eppy, buying her story that Gillis was attacking her, not the other way around. I tried to negotiate a solution, but it was impossible, Gillis, Eppy and Wizo were too entrenched. I tried to maintain calm in the League but to no avail. So, taking a page from my old playbook, on January 20, I addressed the Senate, outlined the entire history of the matter and argued that Eppy was the criminal and that Gillis was the victim. As a result, I concluded, because all other efforts at peace had failed, Gillis should be allowed to defend himself and his club. After all, we always maintained that in blatant cases when all attempts at peaceful negotiation had failed, clubs should be allowed to defend themselves, and this was such a case.

Unfortunately, a few days later, someone named Josh Underwood stepped forward claiming to be one of Gillis spy's. He provided the League with evidence that Gillis really was at fault and that he was guilty of war crimes. I was furious. I had gone out on a limb for Gillis and now it seemed that I was wrong. I brought up a bill before the Senate to expel Gillis, and to make things fair, others brought suit in the Court to charge Eppy with war crimes.

As per League rules, the debate and vote on the expulsion of Gillis continued for one month on the Senate boards, and the atmosphere quickly became poisonous. People were consumed by the debate, was he guilty, or was the evidence faked as Gillis claimed? The interactions between clubs in the League changed forever, and for the worse. People outside the League watched us bicker and fight. We lost the moral high ground, and would never recover it.

After several weeks, and in order to avoid expulsion from the League, Gillis resigned from the Senate as part of a compromise. This made the Senators happy because they were able to get rid of the nasty issue, and even if Gillis didn't like it, he accepted it because it allowed him to stay in the League working behind the scenes with RolePlayerUSA - a website that I hoped would become the public face of the League offering news and info about simming... but it never worked out.

The trial against Eppy never went anywhere, and after Gillis left the Senate no one seemed to care much or have time to push it and collect evidence. In the end Wizo and Eppy just destroyed each other and we never heard anything from them again.

I lost a lot of credibility because of how I responded during those two months, and I don't think my reputation ever fully recovered. To make matters even worse, it was later conclusively revealed that Underwood was lying. He faked the evidence and Gillis was proven to be innocent. I really messed up, I bumbled the situation and it cost the League and me dearly. I should have taken a more careful look at the evidence Underwood presented, but I let my emotions get the better of me. In addition, even though Gillis was completely exonerated and later returned to the Senate, the taint of scandal and war crimes never left him. To this day people still think he is guilty and still view him with suspicion.

Despite the problems, the League was able to establish a joint simming academy, pass a simming bill of rights, and organize SciWorld 2000, but by March the energy was gone. The League was fractured and people didn't want to listen to me.

The second problem during those months involved the Federation Sim Fleet (FSF). Depending on how one looks at it, the matter can be viewed as sinister or just good business. Shuni, the President of the FSF, hit upon a new organizational model for clubs. Instead of fearing mergers, he embraced them, and began to gobble up whole clubs by simply making them fleets in the FSF. Soon, I began to notice that League clubs were disappearing - they were being merged into the FSF. And complaints from clubs outside the League began to trickle in that Shuni was a tough businessman and would go after clubs (in sometimes not pleasant ways) that had refused his offers. There were even rumors that Shuni's right hand man, Cal, ran a covert operations program to get clubs to join the FSF and punish those that refused - contrary to League rules against such things.

I don't know how much stock to put into all of those rumors, but I didn't like the FSF gobbling up member clubs and seemingly using the League as its personal recruiting grounds, and Shuni and Cal did always rub me the wrong way for some reason... Shuni was just a bit too aggressive in E-mailing me information about how great the FSF was and IMing me every time a new rumor surfaced to ask if I had heard about it and explain how it was wrong.<sup>56</sup> Had I not been distracted by the Eppy mess, I would have looked into the matter further, but it wasn't to be. After bumbling the entire situation with Eppy and Gillis my clout was

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<sup>56</sup> I'm sure he could say the same thing about me. In the end though, Shuni and I found a way to work together, and we went on to accomplish a great many things.

gone. On March 19, the Senate held Presidential elections, and, of all things, I was defeated by Shuni.

After all of that, I was finished and ready for retirement. I retired from the League, I ended the Vindicator, retired completely from TOL, and disappeared.

Two months later, Robin E-mailed me and said things weren't going well in TOL. She wasn't cut out to be the President, she no longer enjoyed simming as much as she once had, she didn't have the time to run the club, and the club was starting to get away from her and fall apart. To save TOL, I came out of my short retirement.

### Chapter 35: Robin's Story

*Robin: "You smite me constantly, you threw me in the brig for nothing once, you shot me as I hung onto a shuttle for dear life, you sicked the MIB on me many times, I've been thrown into more piles of spam than I can count, I've have scars from your high velocity jelly bean launcher... you've killed me countless times... shall I go on?"*

*Chas: "I didn't shoot at you on purpose, and I haven't killed you that many times."*

*-Robin tallying our ongoing feud in an IM, and me setting the record straight, January 23, 1999.*

After repeated smittings, I finally convinced Robin to write a chapter for MSM. We, as always has been the case, disagree on the value of the republic, and by default what caused the final destruction of TOL. I never liked her idea of a limited republic. As she recounts, I said a limited republic would cause a situation where the captains would gang up on the President. As I have seen time and time again in other sim clubs, a republic of the captains always causes trouble, and I'm glad we didn't try it in TOL.

As far as the death of Trek Online goes, Robin feels that it was due to the republic. I feel it was because people abandoned the republic.

At any rate, Robin is a far better writer then I, and her insights interject much needed balance into this narrative. Since we were always at odds, I'm sure reality exists somewhere in the middle. So, without further ado, here is Robin...

#### *A Short Note*

Although Charlie is quite probably the only person who will ever read this, he has asked and I have consented to write a brief memoir of my Trek Online experience. Unfortunately, to my chagrin, my hard drive fizzled the year before last, and all of my TOL records were subsequently lost. As such, much of the information in this addendum is by necessity derived from my own recollection or, in a small part, outside records. My memory is far from infallible, so please take note that the majority of data in this account, especially dates, are

subject to inconsistency and the subjective inner workings of my mind. That said, I hope this memoir may still be of some use or enjoyment to the reader.

It is not my intention in this addendum to provide a complete history of my experience in TOL (Charlie has done a much better job of that already than I could hope to). Rather, I seek to provide further insight into the motivations and reasoning behind my actions and my theories of the simming club in general. Thus, the reader should not be predisposed to think that absence of commentary on my part necessarily constitutes vindication or denial of other historical interpretations, as I have only selected a handful of topics on which I desire to offer some insight.

### *My Simming History*

Having quickly risen through the ranks of my prior simming club only to find it rather grossly mismanaged, I took it upon myself (and my torturously slow 9600 baud modem) to wander the Diaspora forums in search of a properly organized and active club. By chance, I came across the board of a certain "Trek Online," which was wonderfully organized and bustling with activity; deciding instantly that this TOL was the club for me, I put in an application that day. I officially joined Trek Online on July 19th, 1997, which by an odd coincidence, happens to be birthday to both Charles's and myself (and ergo, TOL's President's Day). Having prior experience, I was "not required to attend the academy" -- actually it was in suspension after Scott's resignation, though I was never told until recently. :^) I signed up for the Vindicator because it was convenient, and began simming immediately.

On October 7, the Vindicator crew received the following e-mail: "Unfortunately [sic], I will have to relinquish command of the Vindicator. I have a movie offer I just can't refuse. The New Captain will be revealed [sic] during the next sim session. I have enjoyed simming with all of you. Farewell!" from a certain AdmChsTOL. Actually, it was my idea of a practical joke at the time, and I confessed as soon as Charlie started making threats against the perpetrator. Needless to say, I don't think he was impressed by my little stab at humour, as evidenced by the warning placed on my account by Scott for impersonation. In any case, I offered my resignation, but Charlie indicated it was unnecessary, probably because he felt that he could keep a closer watch on me within the club than from without. However, I wasn't to be promoted to Lieutenant until January of next year.

I stayed on Vindicator for several years, and it was there that I had my first chance at being sim master, mercifully sending Charlie's ship careening into an ocean of orange ooze on an alien planet. I'd bombed Charlie's quarters, smitten hundreds of the galaxy's best and brightest, and even erased humanity from existence for a few seconds. Charlie got his revenge though; when I left Vindicator (and AOL) he gave my character a gruesome and unnecessary end at the tip of a shape-shifted blade ... a fitting end I suppose.

Towards the winter of 1997, I made an offhand suggestion to Charlie, who was still answering me with one-word sentences, that TOL would do well to have a Romulan sim. To my surprise, he was enthused by the idea, and suggested that I put together a crew. As I was

always rather inept at recruiting, it was comprised mostly of existing TOL members, with my Vindicator friend, "Goof," taking the role of Executive Officer, to be later replaced by Penny Booher. ISS Vorta first simmed in January of 1998, and continued simming for a year and nine months having never missed a sim. And no, the ship was not named after the Trek race (it was in planning and named before the introduction of the Vorta to DS9) &ndash;- rather, my apparent misinterpretation of the name of a buried Viking longship, or, as I later noted, the first word of the Romulan deity moniker "Vorta Vor" from ST:V, you choose.

My command of Vorta taught me a great deal about the ups and downs of the simming hobby. The most important lesson I can pass on to other commanders is to always, always sim, no matter what the turnout. (Actually, read my tips in the TOL Command Bible.) Vorta often had some of the lowest crew numbers in TOL, but retained more of its recruits longer than any other sim in the club, in large part because they knew there would always be a sim going if they came. In addition, I learned through both trial and failure that it really was a simple interesting story -- not an explosive battle -- that is the backbone of an excellent sim. Towards the end of the summer of '98, I issued a "Murder Mystery Sim" competition, with a small prize attached for the attendee who guessed the identity of the mystery assassin (who was, by the way, my character). The three sims over which it took place had some of the highest attendance numbers TOL had before or since, not to mention being the best sims, IMHO, I've ever had a part in.

Vorta went through the transition from simming in an AOL chat, to simming in IRC (internet relay chat) as part of TOLi (the internet division, which I championed at one time), to simming over AIM. These changes, a lack of interest in Romulans, and dwindling recruits, all ultimately led me to believe that my efforts could no longer support Vorta, and rather than dispense with the sim entirely, I merged it into the plot of Darkforge Station.

Darkforge Station (DFS) was, as I recall, more than anything an experiment in bringing an in-depth character-driven style of bulletin board simming to TOL. Charlie saw it as an opportunity to expand the club's offerings, and approved it without argument, even though I once again drew the crew directly from TOL instead of recruiting them externally. DFS was in retrospect a relatively large success in that it continued simming for some time and helped lead the way for sims like New Horizons and Viper Flight. The basic idea underlying the sim style was to implement a loosely directed round-robin story, where simmers would post in paragraph style and could add depth to their characters in ways not feasible in a chat sim, also to allow for more developed plots. The setting of the sim centered upon newly constructed Federation starbase, DFS, trapped in the Gamma Quadrant after the capture of DS9 by Dominion forces. For the first few months I was the SM, I began by posting sim events to the board, but I increasingly found that in my capacity as SM, I was engaged in more "behind the scenes" management of sim events while working with my crew than directly through posts. I suppose the only real problem I encountered as CO of DFS was infighting among the crew; I mostly refused to interfere, and they eventually worked things out to everyone's limited but reasonable satisfaction.

I had never wanted the responsibility inherent in running two sims simultaneously, and I intended to command DFS for no more than a few months, until the crew understood the

finer points of the simming style and a new CO could be found. Ultimately, I chose the most capable simmer, Karg Whitefeather, to take command of DFS (which was on AOL's Diaspora boards back then), as it was about this time that I left AOL to take command of the (then and now) defunct TOL Prodigy division. From what I understand, Charlie later conflicted with Karg and other COs over the direction of TOL's future. However, for my part I liked Karg and thought he made an exemplary CO in most aspects.

Alone but determined, I was faced with the huge task of resurrecting TOL Prodigy, a long dead and mostly forgotten branch of Trek Online. Coupled with this, it was about the same time that I realized simming on my own ship, Vorta, could no longer be continued due to crew shortages. In response, I began preparation for a new flagship sim for TOL Prodigy. I had regretted leaving DFS, and thought perhaps another sim of the same style, this time over email, would be a good form for a replacement. Recruiting for the sim was once again a challenge &ndash; the old tight-knit communities that had existed on Prodigy Classic were nearly nonexistent on the new Prodigy Internet service. Ultimately, once again, I was forced to recruit from within the club, picking up crew mostly from my old command, DFS.

USS Valkyrie, the new sim, was a 23rd century Federation "sleeper ship," sent to explore the galaxy nearest to our own, the Sagittarius Dwarf Elliptical Galaxy, or SagDEG. (SagDEG was believed to be the closest galaxy to the Milky Way in 1995, when it was discovered; in November 2003, Canis Major Dwarf was discovered and found to be closer than SagDEG). In practice the sim was conducted like DFS -- after all, it had many of the same people -- and successfully simmed for a little over half a year. It was, in my many years in TOL, the best simming experience and closest crew relationship I've had. Although I had made preliminary plans to rotate the plot of the sim from time to time, the change was never enacted, and I finally drifted inevitably away from the sim as I devoted more and more time to my offline life. Although I had not intended it, when I left the club Valkyrie was dissolved.

I attended practically every sim TOL offered at one time or another during my stay in the club, but I was also was a crew member onboard USS Stonewall, Viper Flight (VF), and USS Amazon (in order from longest service to shortest) under the CO's Clodo, Shane, and Mike respectively. I was an engineer and part-time SM on Stonewall, a target on Amazon, and Kierlin royalty on VF. Vorta had a two-part joint sim with Stonewall, and I considered a joint sim with Amazon, but it never came to fruition.

### *For The Art of Me*

Throughout my tenure in TOL, I was first unofficially and later ordained the club's artist in residence. Early in my stay on Vindicator, I recall modifying (and later altogether replacing) Charlie's ship schematics with niftier (more streamlined) versions. At first he bemoaned my interference, but made use of my modifications anyway, and later asked me to update them several times. Another of my major art projects for TOL (besides the websites, sim art, and errata) was the TOL Seal. I recall asking Charlie repeatedly if I might be allowed to update it, only to be denied on every turn. Finally, against his wishes, I decided to work on a new seal &ndash; after all, I thought, if he disapproved, he could simply refuse to use it.

As it turned out, he liked the seal (which he would later call the "Earth Seal"), and decided to make it the official seal of the club. After that, the TOL Art Division was formed and I would inform him I was working on new versions of the seal, whereupon he would specify what he wanted in them. He didn't really approve of my choice for the updated TOL "symbol," the sword and delta, on account mostly of its somewhat phallic appearance. But after my obstinate refusal to remove it, he finally gave it some esoteric meaning and allowed it to remain. Beyond this, I did much of the graphic work for the club website (and coded much of it), and many other little projects for the club.

My other major contribution to TOL in the way of art was the TOL Park comic strip, a parody fusion of South Park and Trek Online, chronicling the silly adventures of the alter egos of TOL's brass: Narley Spammer, Squato, Goblin Blight, Spike Cookie, and Turkey (and guest starring Potato Chip, Teepee, Goof, et al). The comics were well received, but they were extremely time consuming to produce (I did them all by hand in MS Paint) and my plans to expand them were never realized &ndash; in all, I made just 7 episodes and 11 "weekly" comics. Later, I had also intended to create a TOL Park 2, and had even made a promotion movie and part of an episode (featuring smitebots no less) in flash, but sadly once again I found my schedule too constricting to allow me to finish my work. Nevertheless, TOL Park remains a testament to TOL's culture and erm ... all of the insanity and knavery that entails.

### *My So-Called Political Life*

For better or worse, I was involved in TOL's politics since shortly after I joined. I started by giving Charlie suggestions, and then lobbying him on a few issues. In any case, I was active in TOL's politics for some time &ndash; that is, I commented on Charlie's decisions, eventually receiving my first true political post, President of the defunct TOL Prodigy. At the time, the trinity of TOL services (TOL Prodigy, TOL Internet, and TOL AOL) was run by myself, Mike, and Charlie respectively. Though the services were initially self-governing bodies answerable to Charlie, after a bit of discussion and surprisingly little resistance they were reorganized to be theoretically equal (in practice, we complied with Charlie, and rightly so). All of this lasted for a few months before TOLi lost it's last regularly meeting sim (Vorta as it so happens) and TOL was reunited into a single entity. Following that, I was elected president of TOL for a few months and served some time thereafter as TOL's ambassador to the Simming League and its President as well as a TOL Assembly representative, finally ending my political career as a justice for a few months.

Ever since I joined TOL, I had been at odds with Charlie over political matters (both real and club-related). My views on things were often insightful, and just as often Charlie rejected them (or at least tried to wait until I pretended to forget about our conversations to change his mind). Perhaps in part I met such opposition because back then I lacked the tact to choose my fights and present my views effectively &ndash; that and Charlie is likely to be the most stubborn human being ever to walk the virtual world. In any case, it is important for the reader to understand that although it may seem that way, my relationship with Charlie was never one of antagonism; we argued a great deal, but he knew that I was loyal to the club and would never try to usurp his authority, and I knew he wasn't going to quash me for dissenting with his views. It was not until many years went by that I broke



Charlie's habit of answering me in one-word sentences and we started to form some consensus in our views, or at least we agreed to disagree on the more trivial aspect of most matters.

Perhaps the most ardent source of disagreement between Charlie and myself was the very principle of the club government. While Charlie was adamant that TOL, as a simming "state" of sorts, should be administrated as a working miniature republic, I was of the opinion that TOL's hundred or so members was too small a population to warrant or support a republic, and that there were not enough politicians, lawyers, or the like among us to make it work effectively. To criticize one of Charlie's favourite examples, you don't see hundred member Boy Scout troops with a constitution, president, senate, and judiciary. Moreover, and more importantly, I thought the "state" analogy was invalid because simmers had their pick of clubs &ndash; because we had no monopoly on simming and was free entry and exit of simmers and competition for recruits (unlike citizenship in real life), there was no reason to construct a convoluted and inefficient system of governorship to assure checks and balances. Essentially, I thought of simming to be more a business serving the whims of simmers than an exercise in political expediency. As far as government went, I supported (and would still support) a simple charter securing basics of member rights and club organization and a president elected by COs, who could also be ousted or overruled by them. To paraphrase his opposition, Charlie saw this as "some kind of feudal system where the lords (COs) could gang up and overthrow the king (me)," and rejected it outright.

Despite my disapproval, and mostly because of my powerlessness to change things, I gave into Charlie's instance on developing a republic, and lended my hand in cementing its foundations where I could. Charlie was convinced that with the republic, he had sewed the seeds of TOL's longevity. I, however, was equally convinced that the small size of the bloated republic would lead to politicians and judiciary of convenience rather than statesmanship, and the inept leadership that resulted would bring forth the club's downfall &ndash; the point, after all, of electing your leaders is to actually select leaders, not the only person in town (or in a sim) who wants the job. I saw the earliest signs of this trend when Charlie on multiple occasions used TOL's judiciary to pressure his political enemies into accepting his terms, which I termed as using his "pressure cooker." This disturbed me because the judiciary, which was by no means comprised of lawyers, was not acting independently, but rather as a pawn of Charlie's will. This was fine as long as Charlie was president, as he was extremely tolerant of dissent, if not disloyalty. In fact, being whom he was, the whole system worked under Charlie quite well &ndash; it was the republic's longevity under other leaders that I questioned. I feared, and it turns out rightly, that later TOL politicians might use the courts to squash political dissent as well &ndash; it is ironic that Charlie should turn out to be the most crucial victim of this failure. It is important for the reader to note, however, that it is easy for me to see the fruition of my ideas in retrospect. At the time neither Charlie nor I knew what would happen or who might be right nor to what extent, and certainly Charlie was correct in that the republic ran benignly under his leadership &ndash; we each did our best in an attempt to assure TOL's future in our own ways.

Despite our disagreements, by early 2000 Charlie was ready to retire to captaining his sim and I was his unofficial choice for his replacement as TOL's president. Although Charlie never endorsed me, in order to "promote democracy" no doubt, it was well known whom he favoured, and I'm sure it influenced the vote (the reader will note however that I have bias in my contention that TOL was never a functioning republic). Regardless, I beat Matt and Bo Duke soundly with a large majority and the transition of power was altogether smooth. My first step as president, besides "housekeeping" duties and awarding Charlie a medal of some kind, was to start a recruiting drive, but I was informed I had to get approval from the assembly first, so I proposed a bill to help make such drives routine, but had to wait a month for its passage. I also had long complained to Charlie that the club roster was being inflated by members who had stopped attending sims and activities but were still counted; to this end I urged COs to clean up their member lists. In fact, my inclination toward accurate record keeping may in some measure help explain part of the "drop off" in membership during my presidency.

As president, I did make some mistakes, most notably by not working hard enough to promote recruiting (though I did recognize the problem and acted on it), and by taking over command of Endeavor during one of Matt's frequent unexplained and unplanned disappearances. I wanted to put someone from the crew in charge of the sim (permanently), but Matt did not have a reliable XO and I ended up falling into the trap of commanding it myself in the interim, which unnecessarily took up much of my time and caused me a great deal of stress. (Later I recommended to Charlie that although Matt was a great CO, he was consistently unreliable and when he returned he should not be allowed to command again; my advice was not followed.) I also had some successes, namely in keeping the club together and maintaining the respect and friendship of the members and other clubs in the simming community, which is no small task, as I'm sure any other sim club president, and especially any TOL president, would relate.

Whatever Charlie or others may speculate, I absolutely did not resign as president because I felt I was overwhelmed by the job. On the contrary, I liked being and wanted to be president. I thought the problems that the club and I faced were not out of the ordinary and entirely surmountable, and moreover if I had stayed on I am confident we could and would have still overcome them. The simple, inelegant truth is that I really liked simming, but it was still just a hobby, and I resigned in order to devote extra time to the many more important things that were occurring in my offline life.

Once again, I have to assert here my belief that TOL was never a properly functioning republic (nor could it be, for reasons I've discussed in detail earlier). When I took office I had been sufficiently "groomed" for the job and had intended to stay there, and I wanted Kyle to be my vice president because I thought he would learn to run the club over time. Although I liked and respected Kyle, when I resigned I was of the opinion that TOL needed a seasoned leader, and Kyle had not had the time to develop the relationships, skills, and knowledge necessary to deal with the problems the club faced. For that reason, I asked the assembly to make Charlie the senior vice president, and turned the club over to him when I resigned. It may not have been democratic or diplomatic, but it kept TOL alive and well, as was my goal. It was perhaps an altogether callous thing to do to Kyle, and maybe if TOL was

ever going to be a true democracy I ruthlessly smashed its best hope for "rule by law," but it was my decision and I stand by it.

For quite a while, on and off, I was a member of the TOL Assembly. It was thus that I cemented my view that an important element of statesmanship was lacking in many members of the Assembly. During my time in the club, for reasons already discussed, there was a general lemming-like accord among the majority of the body to follow Charlie's will, a phenomena I undiplomatically termed "monkey see, monkey do." That is not to say that there weren't a few voices of dissent, mine most prominent among them, offering alternatives and suggestions to Charlie's established line. Of course, under Charlie, the Assembly was a workable system, because, as I've mentioned, he was willing privately to heed dissent to his views, while still maintaining the tough exterior needed to maintain authority over the club. In fact, the assembly was both quite efficient and effective during Charlie's ascribed "Golden Era" of TOL in 1999 and thereabouts, and I supported the Assembly in my time. But once again, it was the Assembly's value as a paradigm &ndash; it's longevity &ndash; to which my doubts tended.

One of my longest fought and few ultimately (un)successful battles in the Assembly was against TOL's established rank and position system. Prior to my agitation over the matter, TOL's ranks were organized as a hierarchical system that mirrored Federation naval ranks or their alien equivalents, although authority was only invested in the command-level ranks (ranks below Commander were principally for show and were endowed with no particular powers). Positions were officially to be chosen at the outset of a sim by the Commanding Officer (CO) from a list of desired positions filled out when joining the club &ndash; the command positions were reserved for the sim's CO and XO, although the Sim Master (SM) could be anyone. It is only fair to note that this system, while official club policy, was not enforced under Chas &ndash; he ultimately allowed COs the freedom to decide on this point.

Nevertheless, I opposed the rank and position system on the grounds that in character-driven sims (like DFS and Valkyrie) club ranks were unnecessarily and malevolently interfering with the ranks of characters with respect to the plot &ndash; to that end I ultimately separated the two on Valkyrie. In addition, I thought (and Charlie eventually agreed) that, in official club policy at least, all simmers should have the opportunity to take a hand at playing captain, and that the rigid system of making the commanding officer the captain was not providing any extra incentives for recruits to join TOL over our competitors. It was my desire to eliminate ranks altogether, but Charlie thought they provided needed rewards to good simmers, and medals/awards alone were insufficient for that purpose (Though oddly enough he resisted all of my attempts to attain the rank of "Lord High Admiral.") In any case, ranks stayed, but they were no longer tied to positions, so a new confusing set of acronyms (like Officer Commanding, OC) appeared, and COs/OCs by in large commanded in the same way they always had. So while not really a victory from a practical standpoint, it was a policy victory, if too little and too late.

My thoughts on the matter of ranks and positions have little changed over the years. If I were to command a sim club today, I would not institute club ranks (though certainly

character ranks would be permissible as applicable); instead I would simply rely upon a few vague titles for important club positions like division directors and sim administrators. Subject to the sim administrator's discretion, I would urge that positions in the sim, including the captain, be assigned prior to the beginning of the sim with an emphasis with position rotation for interested simmers. Besides medals and other awards, there would be a system to place good simmers in line for command positions, although I would probably have a standing offer to command a new sim for any established simmer who could put together the crew. (That is not to say the reader should particularly lend care to my hypothetical statements).

At the finale of my TOL career, Charlie asked me to be a justice in the TOL court and I consented, although I indicated to him that as a justice my power would be limited, and it would be in his best interest to make me chief justice &ndash; he didn't (although I can't recall whether it was because the position was occupied or he wouldn't allow it). In any case, as a justice I never tried a case nor participated in any rulings; my lone political act was to oversee the TOL elections (without much help from the other justices, I might add), which I did without any problem.

Contrary to my justice experience, I was happy to serve TOL in the capacity of an inter-sim club liaison. I cannot recall when I was first introduced to the Simming League (SL), but I do remember Charlie describing it as "the United Nations of the Simming World," a forum for sim clubs to unite and peacefully address their differences for the greater good of the simming hobby, or some such drivel. No doubt the reader may here again note his insistence upon the analogy of sim clubs to nation-states; for my part, I quietly disagreed for afore mentioned reasons, but that is not to say I was not equally enthused about this new organization. Ultimately, I thought of the SL as (and hoped it to be) more of a Trust, or a means of sharing common resources between clubs, and thereby adding to the offerings of TOL and other friendly clubs, allowing us to better compete against non-SL clubs for an ever-dwindling supply of recruits.

My involvement in the League started with a few posts on the SL boards at Charlie's urging. Soon thereafter, Charlie asked me to break a cipher that had been used to encode a post on the SL boards by an unknown person. With Clodo's help, we found the deciphering to be trivial, the message alleging Calhoun, an up and coming FSF admiral, was a spy, a warning I am told Shuni, FSF's president, disregarded. Over time, I made myself known to the SL community (without making enemies, a small miracle in itself), and I became TOL's Senator to the League when I was elected TOL's president. Later, after my resignation, I was elected the League president for a 6-month term, and failed in a bid to become Vice President next term, serving out the remainder of my time in the League (and simming) as a Senator.

Although I had a somewhat different vision for the League than Charlie, our plans were not in any way contradictory: while he pressed for an inter-club judiciary, peace, and dialogue between clubs and simmers, I worked towards my goal of sharing common resources between SL clubs. Given the nature of the League as a diverse collection of leaders, I was (unlike in TOL) not opposed to Charlie's parliamentary model of organization for the SL,

although I did, as always, think too much time was devoted toward addressing procedures, and not enough in enacting legislation. During my time in office, I proposed a number of ideas to begin sharing institutions such as recruiting, simming, games, etc. between clubs, and enacted a framework for League Administered Voluntary Activities (LAVAs) to allow these to function democratically (it turns out there was too much bureaucratic red tape, and I had to make an attempt to fix the LAVA system later). LAVAs never really took off during my time in the SL, mostly because I failed to raise the kind of support I needed from other leaders and their membership, but the idea stuck, and I hear they are still around and (more or less) kicking even today.

Although I never had too many major disputes with the leaders of other clubs, I was constantly being directed by Charlie to maintain a balance of power in the League, and to use TOL's influence to direct support away from those he saw as a threat to the SL, a directive I followed, but didn't particularly like. Ultimately, I respect the commitment of the many leaders I came into contact with through the SL, those with whom I agreed, and those with whom I did not, including O'Neil, Seth, Shuni, and others &ndash; however it may seem, I really did like you.

I find it interesting that the Simming League has been able to outlast TOL &ndash; that was not something I anticipated. As I told Charlie repeatedly, "all good things must end," and I long predicted the demise of TOL before it happened (perhaps too long before, heh). I think there were many causes for the decline and fall of TOL, the main reasons for which were: a steadily falling interest in Trek under Berman (and a demographic shift in the Trek community), TOL's relatively small size (and ultimate lack of integrated SL sims and activities), and competition with multimedia computer entertainment (Trek games, MMORPGs, etc.). I also think that the TOL leadership was unable to effectively deal with these changes, but unlike Charlie, I do not think that any kind of leadership could have weathered the changing simming climate without fundamentally altering the principles upon which TOL was built. In other words, they were not the equivalent of Charlie in leadership, but I think Vid and Penny did the best they could under the circumstances &ndash; the deck was just stacked against TOL. Nevertheless, in some sense, I am glad that TOL has met its fate and now remains a memory of good times past, rather than a shadow of its former glory.

### *All Hail the MiB*

Perhaps the most fun I had in TOL was participating in the wacky culture that developed among members outside of simming (which, actually, was a kind of simming in itself). Ultimately, I decided to record a taxonomy of TOL culture that eventually led me to write a guide to TOL Culture, which the interested reader can no doubt still find online today (try Charlie's history site). I began my time at TOL as a pariah in the Trekonlinia pseudoworld, eventually moving up to become the supreme leader of its most feared institution, the Men in Blue.

Prior to my tacit involvement in Trekonlinian politics, we (as in TOL members, including myself) often harassed Charlie in his unprotected Orion House office (on the TOL forums),

flinging pies at him, using various spam devices, stealing his super-smiter, and generally causing havoc. In order to combat this, uh, vandalism, Charlie authorized the formation of a presidential body guard, as a supplement to the Trekonlinian militia, the Men in Blue (MiB), to be headed by TOL's Chief Justice, Aaron. As judge, jury, and executioner, the MiB sent unruly citizens and political dissenters to reeducation centers, to be taught how to act in accordance with Charlie's will. Several resistance groups immediately developed in opposition to MiB oppression, the most successful of which was led by yours truly.

Although my cellular rebel organization never officially had a name, we were often identified by the use of smite-bots, autonomous smiting robots constructed by illegal automated factories in the plethora of caves and caverns stretching far below Trekonlinia. Despite repeated MiB raids that destroyed many smite-bot factories, the rebellion grew in strength and reorganized at a small isolated and well-defended shack outside of the borders of Trekonlinia. The MiB quickly became Trekonlinia's first police force and extended its oppressive tactics under Amy, the MiB chief appointed following Aaron's retirement. Meanwhile, civil unrest enabled the rebellion to grow to a size sufficient to challenge the MiB forces themselves. A desperate conflict ensued, and seeing his forces overrun, Charlie made a deal: the smite-bots would withdraw, and I, of all people, would become commander of MiB forces.

As MiB commander, I ended the oppressive tactics that led to rebellious activity, and restricted the use of reeducation to non-political delinquency. I also modernized the MiB forces and ironically merged smite-bots into the very organization that they had been built to destroy. As external threats began to mount against the city, I received authorization to expand the MiB into a quasi-military force, expanding MiB armaments and adding hover-tanks and flyers to the MiB arsenal, as well as developing an integrated security system for the city, including dome shield generators. The two major threats faced to Trekonlinian sovereignty during the time, the Men in Purple (MiP), anti-TOL clones of MiB officers, and the Utopians, were soundly defeated in skirmishes with MiB forces outside city limits.

Sadly, since I retired from the MiB, I have been informed that subsequent MiB chiefs have weakened the organization, and resumed political persecution. While I have donated some of my assets to the resistance effort, I have watched as Trekonlinia was abandoned and left to ruin. For my part, I have chosen to remain in retirement in my nearby shack, still well isolated from the events of the Trekonlinian pseudoworld.

#### *A Final Bow*

I hope you actually took the time to read this memoir of my Trek Online experience, and found it to your liking. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone I've worked with over my years in TOL – you helped to enhance the richness of simming for me, and I appreciate it. And don't forget to take everything I've written here (and elsewhere) with a grain of salt. :^) Come to think of it, you might want to do that for Charlie's memoirs too, hehe.

## Chapter 36: The Vindicator

*"Often the test of courage is not to die, but to live." - Alfieri, USS Vindicator motto.*

Let me once again talk of simming and simmers, this time about my ship on AOL, the Vindi. It was a great ship and I had a wonderful crew...

1996

The development of the Vindicator and the unusual circumstances surrounding our first sim were discussed in Chapter 6. The very first sims of the Vindicator showed my continuing experimentation with simming - really a continuation of the free for all days I enjoyed on Prodigy but were unfamiliar to people on AOL.

Our second sim, which continued for a few weeks, involved a story arc where the Vindi was attacked by renegade Klingons. During the course of the attack - when the ship's shields went down - I was beamed onto one of the renegade ships and taken hostage. Captured, the Klingon ships soon there after warpped away. The temporary XO - Victor Grey - was left in charge.

Battle sims are always good with a new crew. They are easy for everyone to follow. However, I also wanted to develop my crew - get them to think for themselves. So, by being beamed off of the ship, I was taken out of the sim and the crew was unable to rely on me. I had seen too many sims on AOL where the crew just sat there - either unable or unwilling to speak up and just following the captain. Over the course of the next few sims, it was up to the crew to find me and rescue me - which they eventually did. From that day forward, the Vindi crew was always independent and knew that creativity was allowed.

Most of our other sims during 1996 also focused on action - again, the crew and sim was new, so I did not want to force anything too complex onto everyone. We needed time to develop our characters, ship, and simming skills. Plus, I was still getting used to being a captain. Half of the time I was just making things up as I went along... but I found it worked pretty well. I found that if you try to plan out the entire sim, it will never work because someone will always push it into a different direction you never considered, and it is always more fun when you let the sim flow and simply try to steer it instead of direct every last aspect. So, even as a seasoned veteran, I was still making things up half of the time. It became widely known as "Pulling a Chas." Often imitated, never duplicated, let me assure you. Somehow, I always manage to pull it off and despite having no idea where the sim is going, things always managed to hold together.

However, despite the action sims and occasional battles, I always tried to stress non violent solutions. For example, in November we had a sim where we had to rescue Scott. The crew's natural inclination was to get phasers, organize an away team, and rescue him. Most captains

would have gone along with it - but I reminded the crew that we were Starfleet, and we should try to exhaust all other options before we use force. After some technobabble, we were able to find a way to beam Scott to safety. It is very sad that today Star Trek is focused on battles and violence. It was so much better - in terms of drama, for simming, and for teaching lessons about life - when Trek was a Roddenberry creation.

The Vindicator always simmed on Thursday nights. However, in November, Thanksgiving falls on Thursday. So, when in 1996 we were confronted with our first Thanksgiving, instead of missing a week of simming - partly because the crew wanted to sim, and partly out of fear that if we missed a week when we met again half of the crew would not be there (remember my past experiences of missing a week on Prodigy and the sim falling apart) - I decided to hold a sim on Wednesday, the day before Thanksgiving. However, the Endeavor also simmed on Wednesday. It was not long after that the natural thought occurred to both myself and Josh, the captain of the Endeavor, to hold a joint sim.

Thus, the annual joint Vindicator - Endeavor sim was born. However, this would be no usual joint sim with both ships meeting in the same room. No, TOL was all about being different, so it was decided to have each crew meet in different chat rooms. The Vindicator was attacked and we sought refuge in an asteroid field when our systems started to fail. The Endeavor responded to our distress call and came to our rescue. In the Vindi sim room, we simmed our bit. In the Endeavor room, they simmed their bit. Josh and I IMed each other to make sure we stayed on the same page. I only wish I had saved that IM to show you how we managed to pull it off and how much fun we had in the process.

At the end of the night, the Endeavor found us, drove off the attacker, and organized an away team to beam over to the Vindicator to assist in repairs. As the away team beamed off of the Endeavor, those simmers transferred to the room where the Vindicator was simming, and the sim shortly there after ended.

It is amazing what you can pull off if only you are willing to think out of the box and give it a try. Too many sims and clubs just stick to the old tried and true ways of simming.

## *1997*

December of 1996 saw a series of short traditional sims - your standard negotiations, dealing with spys onboard, etc. However, on January 2, 1997, I decided to usher in the New Year on the Vindicator by pushing the boundaries once again to see how everyone responded. Without telling anyone what I was up to, and without the ship receiving any orders from Starfleet, I ordered the Vindicator to cross into Cardassian space and begin to attack bases, planets, and the like, killing many innocent civilians. The crew was uncomfortable, but carried out the orders. About half way into the sim, the crew picked up transmissions that thousands of Cardassians were being killed by Federation renegades. Finally, the crew decided to act. Lead by Jace, my first officer, the crew started to meet in private to figure out ways to sedate me, remove me from command, etc. At this point, I was satisfied. The crew was once again thinking on its own and I ended the sim and explained that it was just a



test based in a holodeck to determine if the crew would uphold their higher Starfleet ideals by mutinying against me. I was quite happy with the outcome.

After such a serious sim, I allowed the crew to relax the next week. Once again, it was a holodeck sim - one of those ones where it goes on the fritz and the crew had to combat various silliness, escape floods, and navigate their way through the battle of First Manassas (isn't it odd how similar things seemed to happen on the Orion?)

Oden, who would later become the captain of the Wrightstown, stepped forward and served as the Sim Master during the month of February. His sim caused the Vindicator to go back in time to 1997, except that Bob Dole was the President. There we foiled a group of terrorists who were trying to mess up the timeline. During those dark days in February of 1997, these sims represented another example of the growing humor and uniqueness that would later mark TOL, but during the time was just an attempt for us to forget about all of our troubles. The little things - President Bob Dole - lightened the mood and became the stuff of TOL inside jokes.

March and April were also marked by sims that spanned most of the month. During March the Vindicator was on assignment in the Badlands, and in April we battled a virus that featured a cross over by Jedifire with his USS Monitor from Prodigy. Jedifire returned in May and June for a series of sims to show the crew that it was wrong to think about overpowering an enemy to find a solution to the problem. In the sim, the Monitor had been captured by the Jeh'madar and began to attack the Vindicator. Being more powerful, the Monitor was able to withstand the Vindi's attacks, at which point the crew decided to undertake some technobabble and were able to find a weakness with the Monitor and disable it.

Over the course of the next several sims, an away team beamed over to the Monitor to try to figure out what had happened, and the Jeh'madar managed to take control of the Vindi. But naturally, after lots of heroics on everyone's part, we were able to retake both ships.

In July, we had a nice little sim that featured my favorite areas of Star Trek - the Maquis and the Romulans. In the sims, the Vindi worked with a group of Maquis who had discovered that the Romulans were fast at work building a phase cloak ship. We went undercover, tracked the Romulans down, and destroyed their ship still under construction.

Then came the Vindicator's 42nd sim on July 17, 1997, one of the best sims I have ever taken part in. Let me simply post the log...

The events that have unfolded with the strike team have been confused and weird, to say the least. I was sitting on the bridge, minding my own business, when a temporal rift and wormhole opened up at the aft station, and a rock came out, flying across the bridge and smashing into the viewscreen. Than a few minutes later, a Klingon Knife came hurtling across the bridge, almost killing the ensign manning the Ops station. Shortly after that, our strike team emerged.

Now here is what happened to them. After going in on a runabout with orders to work with the Maquis to stop some kind of Cardassian weapon, and after meeting a Cardassian ambush, the strike team ended up in orbit of a mysterious planet, which had decloked in front of them. On the planet, they found doubles and triples of themselves, and these other versions of themselves claimed that subspace partials sent out by the planet's cloaking device had caused them to be brought back in time over and over again. The team was escorted into a massive cavern, and in the center there was some kind of huge reactor. However Vorahk threw a pebble at the reactor, thus determining that it was only a hologram.

Doors came slamming shut and the team was trapped in the cavern. They made their way to a computer station and began to access the main databank. There, they found that the planet was not a planet, but actually a huge ship. After accessing transporter controls, the strike team beamed to the surface and, looking up, saw a huge wormhole being created, fed by thousands of energy pulses flying out from the planet.

With in minutes, the planet was enveloped by the wormhole... and on the other side of the wormhole, Oden2 appeared and explained to the team that they were now 4 billion years in the past and that they would begin their transformation to a higher being. They were then all beamed up to the runabout (that somehow came along for the ride) and found that the ships computer had been changed - it now had a free mind and no longer responded to orders. The team refused to be transformed into these 'higher beings' and lead by a true Klingon like Vorahk, attempted to kill themselves, only to be quickly brought back to life by an alien creature named Davido. Oden2, tired of trying to explain the new universe and higher life to the team, ordered the team to beam down to the surface for one hour, to meditate and prepare for the transformation. However the team quickly got to work on trying to get back home. Vor threw a pebble at one of the energy tubes, and the pebble disappeared into a wormhole. (((which lead right to the bridge of the Vindicator... and why to the Vindi, well it was convenient))). Vor then threw his blade and arm into the wormhole, which appeared on the Vindicator, and by doing this found that the wormhole was stable. The team went through and arrived safely on the Vindicator.

This was a really fun sim. It went on for 2 hours (everyone was having so much fun they did not want to stop) and it shows how with a good crew and a little imagination, you can end up with some wonderful stories. Yes, there are a few plot holes, but so what. It was this souring flight of fancy and collective story telling that I loved about simming.

August saw the return of the Monitor and another story arc. The Vindicator was flying along quite happily when a probe from the USS Monitor appeared suddenly out of a temporal rift and hailed us with a prerecorded message telling us that the Monitor had gone back in time (ahh time travel) and for us to send medical and engineering supplies back in time to the Monitor. A little while later, another probe appeared requesting that we come to offer much needed assistance to the Monitor. A runabout was dispatched throughout the temporal rift and found the Monitor adrift in orbit of the Earth and another Federation ship, the USS Viking, crashed on the planet's surface, and a rocket being launched towards the Moon.

At this point, the sim divided into three plots as I sent out 3 away teams to deal with different matters (and by this time, I was fully comfortable engaging in such an elaborate sim). An away team headed by Captain Oden beamed to the surface. There they found that Captain Samuleson of the Viking had set himself up as a God and was using technology from the Viking to build up the area. The away team naturally was imprisoned by the Captain and spent the rest of the time trying to escape.

A second away team was dispatched to the Moon, where they found alien creatures up to no good. A third away team, lead by my First Officer - Jacey - beamed onto the Monitor and found the ship to be disabled and the crew unconscious.

At this point in time, I became concerned that the away team was taking their time and the runabout had not yet returned, so I took the Vindicator through the temporal rift. The away teams were rescued or returned to the Vindicator of their own free will depending on their situation, and we decided to use the sun to slingshot back in time a few more years to stop the Viking as it first arrived. We moved to intercept the Viking, but thousands of tiny alien ships appeared and destroyed the Viking before the tiny ships themselves combined together to create an exact recreation of the Viking. We destroyed the copy ship, decided to call it a day as the sim was rapidly becoming very strange, and headed home, finding the Viking and Monitor perfectly intact as if nothing had ever happened.

It was a good series of sims, very complicated, but it started to fall apart at the end so I decided to bring it to a conclusion. We never did find out what those pesky aliens were up to - which would have been the focus of future sims.

September featured some short low key sims, including the discovery of a hundred old Dreadnought class ship, the USS Consortium. With the start of a new DS9 season in the fall, the Vindicator got into the act by engaging in a series of battle sims with the Dominion during October... but of course not happy with standard battle sims, I had to throw in a twist... we ended up battling the Dominion in an alternative universe that featured one Admiral Riker. (At this point you are probably wondering if we ever spent any time in our own universe and time period.) The best sim out of the little saga was when the Vindi was damaged and crashed into an ocean of orange goo on a distant world.

I rewarded the crew and relieved them from all of the death and destruction with a two part comedy sim in November during with a series of wormholes opened up on the ship causing people from various historical time periods... Greece, Rome, the Civil War, etc, to suddenly appear on the Vindicator at random places and often during compromising times. We eventually got everyone back home and closed the wormholes.

Our second annual Vindicator-Endeavor Thanksgiving sim once again put the ship in an alternate universe (I guess we did not spend much time in our own). For several months, the Endeavor had been engaged in a long story arc that placed them in an alternative universe ruled by the Bajorans. A convenient warp core accident on the Vindicator caused us to arrive in this universe, where we found the Endeavor under attack. We came to her rescue and drove the attackers away (in other words, the opposite of what had happened at the

first Thanksgiving sim). However, at this point in time Oden found that the warp core bubble anomaly thingie that brought us into this universe was wearing off, and if we did not get home quickly, we would be trapped, so naturally, we returned home.

December was a low month. People were away shopping or at holiday functions and what not, so I did not want to try to muster a complex sim. As a result, we had fun with little adventures - such as an encounter with a Q and becoming entangled in a Tholian Web (unrelated occurrences as far as I know, but Q may have had something to with the Tholians, I have no way of knowing). A few of us got together during Christmas Eve - which was a Thursday - for a big simulated snowball fight. That was quite fun.

## 1998

However, in January of 1998 we were back into the swing of things with a sim that touched upon events that took place on the Orion. As it turned out, the one Orion sim where a shuttle had crashed on a primitive planet and the Orion crew thought they had retrieved all of the parts and stopped the cultural contamination as a result of the crash was mistaken. The Vindicator was dispatched to try to stop any further spread of cultural contamination and retrieve any lingering Federation technology on the surface. Things did not go too well when the away team was captured and a large tractor beam locked onto the Vindi and attempted to pull us down from orbit.

Over the course of 5 sims the captured away team was rescued, an additional away team took care of the tractor beam and found that Romulans were involved on the planet and using it as a base. Locke, our tactical officer, had lots of fun with this sim, for he was able to fight the Romulans on numerous occasions and in a number of interesting ways - from hand to hand to ship to ship.

In February Starfleet promised shore leave, but instead there was a flash of light and the crew ended up on a wooden raft floating down a river surrounded by very big fish with sharp pointy teeth. As it turned out, aliens were testing us (or more appropriately, as the Sim Master I was testing my crew). I had them float down the river for a little while, at which point in time there was another flash of light and the little raft ended up in the middle of the Battle of Actium, a famous naval battle where Augustus crushed Marc Anthony and Cleopatra. After a while, I mysteriously transported the crew to Kansas. At this point in time Locke, Robin, Oden, Bo Duke and company were quite confused, so I had them stumble across a farm house and after having to run away from a 1930s crop duster, among other things, they stumbled across an Iconian gateway and used it to get back to the Vindicator. I'm not sure exactly what I was testing them for, but they managed to keep their wits and survive, so all was good.

In March we finally got our shore leave, at which point in time the crew (as all good sailors are supposed to do) went a little nuts. I believe the highlight was when Robin, attempting to hunt me down while I was hiding in St. Peters, destroyed the basilica, prompting His Holiness, the Bishop of Rome, Pope John Paul XXVIII, the entire Collage of Cardinals, the assembled Swiss Guards, and whatever Bishops decided to show up, to beam onboard the

Vindi and hunt down Robin. In the end, cooler heads managed to prevail when the Pope and his clergy were reminded of their dedication to peace, and I reminded my crew who controlled their fate if they acted up...

This was promptly followed by another silly sim... and I particularly like my log from this one...

### *Admirals Log*

*Stardate 19803.26*

*Adm Chas Hammer Recording*

*I am never babysitting for Q again. One time is enough for me. If Q needs to hold another intergalactic trial, he can find a different babysitter for his kid. The kid turned the ship upside down... he threw my command chair into the view screen, pushed me through the floor... which hurt very much by the way... and made a general mess of Locke, who I assigned to watch over the kid because the week prior, Locke messed up my quarters. Humm... so maybe having us babysit a Q kid isn't all that bad if it allows me to get back at Locke. Hay Q, bring the kid back, we will watch him for a few more hours, maybe I'll have Goof watch him this time!*

Ahh, Goof, Locke, Robin, and company. They became the silly ones and the trouble makers on the Vindicator, but I did not mind because they were also excellent simmers. For the record, Goof was actually named Gonff - at least that was his characters name - but you can see how we naturally began to call him Goof. How many times did Goof whistle Dixie and cause me to disappear? How many times did Robin and Goof and Locke trash my quarters, LOL.

April of 1998 saw lots of technobabble as the Vindicator was caught in subspace seaweed that actually turned out to be a Borg transwarp conduit gone bad.

During the first two weeks in May we had to compete with the ending of Seinfeld - which aired on Thursday nights. Despite my advise, "It has come to my attention that there is some show on tomorrow night about nothing at all... my suggestion to you is, the sim is something, so use your VCRs and tape nothing so that way you can come to the sim." It didn't work. Attendance was low, so we engaged in some minor sims that involved attacking spider thingies.

However, the second half of May we were confronted with a wonderful ethical sim. We were sent to arrest a Federation Admiral accused of massacring Cardassians. While everyone was sympathetic with the Admiral, we still carried out our orders.

June featured another great sim that became the stuff of legend. The Vindicator was sent in to explore a nebula. However in the nebula we were attacked or caught up in violent storms or something, knocking our systems off line. As it turned out, it was just biologic

creatures attaching themselves to the hull of the ship and causing all kinds of problems in the process. Locke and myself decided to venture outside to see what we could do to pry the creatures off of the hull or what sorts of medicine or technobabble would sedate them and cause them to leave. While we were conducting experiments, one of the creatures ate its way through the hull, causing a huge rush of air to shoot out, knocking me off of the hull and into the nebula.

Of course, the crew promptly rescued me, but I was unconscious and needed medical attention, during which time the crew carried on without me, found some technobabble way to get rid of the creatures, get the systems back online, and get out of the nebula before the ship was eaten. It was the first time that a ship had even been partly eaten that caused this sim to become the stuff of legend more than anything else. Of course, I'm sure there have been other sims in the past where ships were eaten, but this was the first in TOLdom.

The highlight of July, I think, was Locke being promoted and receiving a mug from Starfleet as a gift. The mug said, "It's the thought that counts." In other words, it was a slow month. The sims were good, and we got to go on another shore leave, but nothing major or interesting took place. August also saw a continuation of this pattern, lots of easy battle sims for the lazy summer nights as many people were out enjoying the nice weather.

However, during September - over the course of three weeks - a wonderful complex time travel sim took place to celebrate the Vindi's second anniversary. The USS Vindicator of 1998 was attacked by a Cardassian ship with a phase cloak. We put up a good fight, but our shields and weapons were useless against the phased ship. Eventually, the Vindicator was boarded and I was taken prisoner. Shortly thereafter, the phased Cardassian ship, along with the Vindicator, were transported back in time through a series of anomalies that the boys at Starfleet Science are still trying to figure out.

Both ships arrived in 1996 (well really 23 something of another, but 1996 nevertheless because this sim was now taking place a little while before the first Vindicator sim in 1996). There was a flash and suddenly the crew onboard the Vindicator found themselves marooned on the planet below. After wondering around, the crew stumbled across a group of Maquis who insisted that it was two years in the past (1996) and lead the crew to the crash site of the USS Vindicator. They found the Vindicator to be heavily damaged, no longer space worthy, and all of the shuttle craft and escape pods gone.

Many of the old timers returned for this sim and ended up on the planet with the 1998 Vindi crew - Moses, Josh, even Ben - and it was quite disconcerting for them to come across the decaying bodies on the crashed ship.

In orbit of the planet, I managed a heroic escape from the Cardassian ship - the details of which are not important (that is to say I decreed during the course of the sim that I escaped and reappeared in the sim) - and I beamed to the abandoned Vindicator, which still was in orbit (confused yet?).

Back on the planet, engineering teams lead by Locke, our Chief Engineer, were able to restore limited communication systems on the crashed ship and sent out a distress call - which was picked up by the USS Vindicator of 1996 that just happened to be passing near the planet at the time on a shake down cruise. The 1996 Vindicator responded and after various away team activity, the 1998 Vindicator crew trapped on the surface was beamed back to the 1998 Vindicator in orbit, and an away team from the 1996 Vindicator beamed onto the 1998 Vindicator to assist repairs and see if we had any future technology to offer. It was quite fun for everyone's past self to talk to their future (or present) self.

At this time, the Cardassian ship with the phase cloak appeared. The 1996 crew tried to beam back to their ship, but due to all of the phase and temporal distortions, one copy managed to return to their ship, while another copy materialized slightly out of phase on a duplicated Vindicator. All three Vindicators engaged in the battle, with the 1998 Vindicator slowly phasing back to our time and reappearing in 1998. The copied Vindicator was heavily damaged and started to crash towards the planet as it slowly phased back in time and crashed on the planet in the past, killing everyone onboard. The 1996 Vindicator stayed in its time and finished off the Cardassian ship.

It was a very interesting sim to say the least.

October 1 saw the retirement sim of Commander Lara, the Vindi's long time doctor. Every ship needs a good doctor to be complete, and the Vindi was lucky to have had her. She was a wonderful simmer and helped to patch up my crew numerous times after I got them into lots of trouble and sticky situations. But more importantly she was a good friend, both in and out of the sim.

Most of October and November was marked by a very long continuing sim. The Vindicator was attacked by some random aliens and the crew was captured and sent to work in some mines. After a little while, I had enough of the dark and dust, so I ripped off part of my shirt and used some rocks to generate a spark and light it on fire. The sudden light blinded the near by alien guards who were wearing night vision goggles. With this, I and my crew jumped them, took their guns, and made our escape.

Making it to the surface, we searched several buildings and took shelter as alien shuttle craft approached to hunt us down. Tho'Pok, a Klingon crew member who became the captain of the IKS Dark Claw, the clubs second Klingon sim (the Dark Falcon being the first), and a TOL character in his own right for his epic sims full of blood and gore, took out several of the shuttle craft, and managed to steal another one, which we used to escape from the planet.

We made it to the Vindi, only to find that the ship was being converted by the aliens. We spent one full night battling to regain control, and another night trying to repair the ship and undo the changes they made. But in the end, we of course were victorious and got everything back online and flew away to safety.

And of course, the end of November brought the Third Annual Vindicator - Endeavor joint sim.

The sim opened with the Vindicator adrift in space. The crew awoke and had no recollection of what had occurred. We were able to restore our systems and retrace our route, where we came across some minor wreckage from the Vindicator, a Federation ship - the USS Messina - blown to pieces, and several lifeless Jeh'madar ships floating near by. Wanting to find out what happened and in hopes of trying to restore our memories, away teams were dispatched to various sections of the Messina and the Jeh'madar ships. At this point in time, several new Jeh'madar ships appeared and attacked.

The USS Endeavor responded and came to our rescue, driving the Jeh'madar ships away. We noted several Jeh'madar ships on the edge of our sensor range transmitting sub space broadcasts towards the Vindicator, and thinking they had something to do with our memory problems, both the Vindicator and Endeavor went after them. Naturally, we destroyed them, and a second later, the Vindi crew passed out in a flash of restored memories. The Endeavor crew beamed over to the Vindi (and our chat room), to help revive us and repair the damage to our ship.

With the war in full swing on DS9, more and more of our sims were involving it as a background. As you have seen, we had plenty of battle sims, but I made sure to throw in lots of twists so they did not become your watered down generic battle sim. However, in December I wanted to try a different variation, so with the Vindicator in the ship being repaired, the crew was given a covert operations mission. We infiltrated deep into Cardassian space and made it to a planet in the heart of their industrial belt where we met up with a Romulan team on the planet that was collecting data on Cardassian weapons manufacturing.

Our mission was to sabotage one of the main power stations on the planet, and clad in personal stealth suits, we made it to the power plant with the Romulans as our guide. I of course did not like working with the Romulans, but I had my orders. We were to make everything look like an accident and were not to destroy the power plant, but to trigger a radiation leak that would damage a lot of its systems and look far more like an accident. However things started to go amiss when the Romulans decided to start blowing up factories and surrounding buildings. It was clear that our cover would be blown, that the Cardassians would realize teams had penetrated this far and would increase security on their planets, making similar missions far more difficult.

So, I quickly sprung into action. I had my team beam back to the ship in orbit, but I stayed with Ben (he was a very good simmer when he wanted to be) on the planet. We made our way into the power plant. The trick was to pull off the helmets of our cloak suit so the crew in orbit could get a transporter lock on us a second before our explosions went off. But being a sim we naturally pulled it off. Bombs went off, we shot our phasers at things, an anti matter tank was breached, and the plant and surrounding factories went boom. Apparently, we were successful in making it look like a huge accident, and it covered for the buildings the Romulans destroyed. (Sims do not have to have the most consistent plots in the world.)



1999

In my opinion, the sims of 1999 were some of the best that the Vindicator ever produced. The year started off with the death of a major character. The Vindi picked up power signals on a Federation starbase that had been decommissioned 50 years ago. We dispatched an away team and discovered that 2 Founders were being kept in stasis in their liquid form on the station - a potential intelligence bonanza. We decided to beam the frozen Founders over to the Vindicator where we could hold them, study them, and see if we could revive them and retrieve any info.

As one would expect, the Dominion would not allow this, and several Jeh'madar ships approached and attacked. We managed to destroy them, but in the process the Vindi was damaged and we lost power in sickbay where the Founders were being held. I dispatched Robin with a security team, but they were ambushed and killed by the Founders - Robin included. As the Sim Master, I took particular pleasure in killing off Robin - she had bugged me and destroyed my quarters far too many times. And of course, she wanted to die, for she was too busy running her own ship now to give time to the Vindicator.

One of the Founders took the form of Robin and made her way to the bridge. But the virus that would doom the Founders had already taken hold and for a second, the Founder lost cohesion and we quickly responded and killed her. A second security team was dispatched to sickbay and found the second Founder dead from the virus, and retrieved the bodies of our first security team.

Of course, we were all sad that Robin met her demise, but Robin still mutters that I took a little too much pleasure in it.

In February, I decided that Chas needed to become an epic war hero. So, I set up a situation similar to the battle of the Bulge. The Federation lines were advancing and all looked well. However, there was a massive Dominion and Cardassian counter attack, the Third Fleet was destroyed, and the Vindicator was hastily put in command of a newly formed Ninth Fleet to plug the hole in the line and stop the Dominion from reaching our ship yards and supply center at Muon 4.

We engaged in some epic fleet battle sims, smashed the Dominion flank, drew the Jeh'madar out and destroyed them, broke up the counter attack, and saved the day. Chas and the Vindicator became household names back on Earth.

In March Moses, my old academy pal and friend, returned to be the Sim Master. As you may recall, Moses had been my original First Officer, but during 1997 he was busy on Thursday nights and had to give up the spot. During 1997, Jacey, another good friend of mine, became the First Officer, but by 1999 Jacey had drifted away from the sim, although I still kept her on as the First Officer when she showed up. She was a great simmer and perfect as a First Officer. In a sim, the position of First Officer is not very well defined. You need someone who is creative, who will take initiative, who can quickly follow the sim, realize who

among the crew is not doing much, and give that person something to do that is constructive for the sim but does not mess up the flow.

In the sim, we were on a runabout heading back to the Vindi when we became entangled in some subspace seaweed. We lost control of the runabout and crashed on a near by planet. At first, everything seemed ok, but suddenly monster thingies begin to attack us, and to compound matters it began to rain, and the rain turned us into mutants! In typical Moses fashion, he finally showed up with a rescue team, but he held back until the last moment for dramatic effect before saving the day and getting us back to the ship where the good doctor turned us back into humans.

During the remainder of March and all of April, Moses undertook a series of sims that engaged the Vindi once again in battle against the Dominion. There was the usual back and forth of battle and the Vindicator losing shields and being bored. Through heroic exploits, we retook the ship, but the Jeh'madar left a message, "We have gotten everything we needed." After making repairs, we found that the Dominion had stolen our warp converter, which, if they were able to unlock its secrets, they would be able to mask their warp signatures as Federation ships.

We got lucky when, several hours later, we responded to a distress call from another Federation ship. They were under attack by a Romulan Warbird that we soon determined had been captured by the same Jeh'madar who raided our ship. We defeated the Warbird, but the Jeh'madar escaped on a shuttle to a small, cold, icy world several light years away.

Moses organized an away team composed of Bel, our Chief Engineer, and Ten, the Chief of Security, and beamed down to the surface. They found the shuttle, a camp fire, and two dead Jeh'madar next to the fire, apparently recently murdered. As the team moved in to inspect the shuttle, it took off, made a pass at the away team, and swung around to make another pass. Luckily, the away team was able to bring it down with phaser fire. They inspected the wreckage and found ten dead Vorta and were able to recover the stolen components from the Vindicator.

During the month of May we were kept busy with different challenges. Starfleet ordered us to test out new engine components despite my protests that they weren't safe. After a few hours of tests, the things blew up, damaging the ship, and that's when things got interesting. Apparently the reason the thing blew up was because it was infested with spider like creatures. They burst forth and began to dig their way through the hull of the ship, and they encased several crew members in a web of goo that allowed the creatures to feed off the energy of the encased crew members. Only after much technobabble were we able to get rid of the infestation and save the encased crew members.

Over the first two weeks in June, the Vindi returned to the theme of the Dominion war, but once again we put a twist on it so it just wasn't another bland battle sim. We were dispatched by Starfleet to secure the support of the Nausicans in the Federation's final assault against Cardassia. We secured the support of one clan, but as news of that spread, several other clans showed up to put a stop to it. Confronting 50 ships, I knew there was no

way to win a battle against them, but I had my orders to get them to join the attack against the Dominion, so I ordered the Vindicator to fly right through their fleet, knowing they would chase after us. As we zoomed by, the Nausicans turned and followed us to the battle, where, upon realizing that it would be much more fun to attack the Dominion instead of us, did just that and attacked the Dominion. The ensuing slaughter of the Dominion was glorious. I summed it up in my log by quoting from the Kosovo Cycle, written in 1389, "All was holy, all was honorable, and the goodness of God was fulfilled."

The final Dominion and Cardassian lines were broken, and the Federation made it to Cardassia. The war was finally over.

But we didn't get a chance to rest. The Vindicator was sent to Cardassia and I was put in charge of 'peacekeeping' (aka occupation) operations on part of the planet.

The operations began at the sim on June 17 when an away team was beamed down to the surface to meet with local Cardassian officials to prepare for peacekeeping and relief efforts. The away team, however, was captured by resistant forces called 'The Watch.' After some technobabble, however, we were able to lower the shields around the away team and beam them to safety. This sim was judged by the Tournament of Simulations, and we all thought we blew it. The sim got off to a slow start and it was pretty one dimensional. It wasn't one of our best sims, and even Moses apologized to the crew for blowing it by SMing a slow story, but apparently the judges liked it, which is what mattered that evening.

The occupation story continued through July, and grew ever complex as the resistance grew, ambushing our security teams, attacking towns, and causing all sorts of headaches. The climax came when Locke's shuttle craft was shot down and the Watch used the ensuing confusion to attack our headquarters and the town it was in. After vicious fighting (al la the Tet offensive), we broke the attack and found evidence on several of the deceased that allowed us to track down the remaining Watch in the hills and break up the resistance.

The month of August war marked by some lazy sims as everyone took a break from a good run of high intensity, multi week plots, but in September we found ourselves back right in the thick of things with a plot that lead up to the ship's third anniversary.

The Vindi was sent into the Gamma Quadrant to display the flag and attempt to bring order to at least a little corner of it. We quickly made our way to the Ferangi Casino on the planet Avarice Found to... err... gather intelligence. Many Ferangi who were upset with Grand Nagus Rom's reforms had made their way to the Gamma Quadrant and the planet to keep the old traditions alive. Robin and Ten went into the casino while Moses and myself walked around the bazaar outside. Moses ran into a Ferangi selling a stolen gem, and displaying heroic disregard for his surroundings, decided to arrest the Ferangi right then and there. Several members of the Orion Syndicate who didn't appreciate Moses' intervention emerged from the shadows. I landed what can only be called a powerful first punch and, quickly assessing the situation, ran for it. Moses, despite having fallen into several tents and ending up covered in a sticky cotton candy like 'food' managed to follow close behind.

We ran into the casino, where the door greater, former heavy weight champion of the galaxy, Abdul Mohammed Jamar, saw the situation we were in and put up a delaying action that allowed us to beam back to the ship before the Orion gained entrance.

Back on the ship steaming with righteous indignation, Moses and I decided to take action. We arrested several members of the Orion Syndicate and Ferangi smugglers. Hey, that was how Moses and I operated. We blazingly beamed down to the planet, showed that there was a new sheriff in town, and got to work. We could have done without Moses falling into all of those tents, however.

After interrogating the Ferangi and Orion, we found that after the war the two sides had cooperated to set up a vast black market operation, and the Ferangi even dreamed of establishing an empire in the quadrant. However, relations quickly soured. Rumors had it that the leading Ferangi were skimming off the top and stashing tons of money, jewels, weapons, and other goodies at a secret location, and when the Orion found out, they were upset. The Ferangi leader and his ship was ambushed and destroyed, and knowledge of the treasures location died with them. Ever since the Ferangi and Orion had been looking for the treasure.

We got our lucky break on September 17 at the third anniversary sim of the Vindi when we responded to the distress call of a Ferangi ship. The crew had been searching for the treasure and determined its general location, and assured us that with the help of our sensors, we would be able to find the exact location. Not trusting the Ferangi, we helped to repair their ship, but I instructed our Chief Engineer to put a device into their engines that would allow us to disable them at our will.

The Ferangi, of course, couldn't be trusted. They wapped away to a near by nebula, and inside we found the Ferangi ship and an Orion Syndicate ship standing off near a massive vessel that contained the treasure. Apparently both sides had discovered the location of the treasure, and the Orion ship had disabled the Ferangi ship we just helped to reach it first. Luckily for the Ferangi, we came along to repair them just in time. Like in Star Trek 2, the conditions of the nebula caused shields to be useless and weapons ineffective.

The three ships slowly moved into position and danced around each other. We could knock each other off with a single shot, but there were three of us? Who would shoot who? Who to shoot first? Would we kill each other?

I ordered our engineer to employ the device, causing the Ferangi ship to lose power. At the same second, our tactical opened fire and destroyed the Orion ship. We arrested the Ferangi and recovered a fortune in stolen goods that was promptly turned over to Starfleet. Our initial ground work generated enough interest and provided enough evidence to get Starfleet to take notice and send in reinforcements who broke up the black market operations.

The rest of the year war marked by short, easy sims. The most interesting involved the crew of the Vindicator flying along on a runabout. As usual, it crashed, and as everyone

exited the wreck to take stock of the alien world, we ended up in Central Park in 20th century New York City. We ended up being arrested by the police, but were able to escape, at which point things became a little silly and no one is quite sure what happened, but such things can occur in New York. The next week we magically ended up back on the Vindicator.

There also was the annual joint sim with the Endeavor, which in 1999 brought a third ship into the act, Mike's USS Amazon for the first three way sim in TOL history. The plot was very simple because the execution and coordination between three sims occurring at the same time in three different rooms was tremendously difficult, but somehow we pulled it off.

It began with the Vindicator entering a system, encountering some engine problems, and being sucked into the gravitational well of a near by planet. The Endeavor, as per usual, showed up to rescue us by providing a power transfer that allowed us to get our systems back on line. At the same time, the Amazon was passing through the system chasing a pirate ship. However, the Amazon was damaged in battle against the ship, and had to break off pursuit. The Vindicator and Endeavor responded by getting the pirate ship, but in that second battle the Endeavor was damaged. However, our crew responded by helping repair both the Endeavor and Amazon. A successful day for all.

## 2000

The year 2000 began with the Romulans taking a page from Starfleet tactics. The planet Romulus was completely defenseless as a comet screamed towards it. With no one else who could help, the Vindi was called in by the Romulan government to stop it. Upon close examination, we found the comet was actually a space station that had drifted through space and accumulated a large amount of ice on its hull after who knows how long.

We melted the ice, deflected it from its course, and sent an away team over to investigate. Robin unthawed a creature on the station and decided to beam it back to the Vindi. But as it turned out, the space station had been a prison and the creature a dangerous criminal who began to run amuck on the ship. But it wasn't anything we couldn't handle, and by the end of the day the bad guy was dead and the ship was safe.

By the time I retired as President of TOL on January 31, 2000, all of my old crew had already retired from simming or moved to other ships... Jacey, Moses, Ten, Locke, Karg, Robin, Ska, and Riley. Most had trickled away over the fall. They were a wonderful crew and some of the finest simmers around. Most of them had been there for two or all three years, every week, simming away. We developed tight relationships and could read each other. Our timing was wonderful, allowing us to pull off complex sims. Two away teams, crew back on the ship fending off crises, computers, alien bad guys, all at the same time, we could handle it. They were the ones who made it fun for me, and I think the sheer volume of diverse and complex story lines over so many years speaks for itself about their skill and dedication.

There were new cadets and simmers added to the crew during the fall and winter, but it just wasn't the same. It wasn't my crew. I know with time they could have been great, but I

didn't have the energy for it, but I promised Robin I would keep the Vindi running for at least a few months. We both worried if I disappeared right away it could have caused a wave of retirements in the club. Still, with the few months left, I decided upon a fresh start to see if that would help to rekindle my interest. I ended the Vindicator story line set at the end of DS9 and returned to my roots. In STECO I had wanted to command a movie era ship, so with my new crew I reinvented the USS Vindicator as a Constitution Class starship set during the classic movie era of Captain Kirk. But it didn't do it for me. I was burnt out after all the years. I no longer enjoyed showing up each week. So at the end of March, on the heels of my defeat in the Simming League Presidential elections, I called it quits. The crew of the Vindicator was transferred to other ships and I disbanded the sim.

After 3 and a half years with the Vindicator, my glorious run had come to an end and I got some well deserved rest.

# My Simming Memoirs

## Part 6: Afterglow



Preparing for Mutiny by N.C. Wyeth, 1911

## Chapter 37: My Return

*"I told him you tend to be straightforward, and that sometimes people take it wrong the way because of how you word things." - Vid to Chas in an IM reporting how Vid calmed down a disgruntled member, April 2, 2001.*

My retirement was short lived.

In March 2000, I quietly disappeared from Trek Online and the Simming League. After simming nonstop for 5 years and running TOL for 3 years, I was glad to be finished. I still enjoyed simming, but it was no longer my passion.

Two months later, Robin informed me that the club was in trouble. She was in over her head, didn't have the time to be the president, didn't realize how much the job would take, and hated being president. Without a forceful hand to guide the club and make it a reality, TOL began to fall apart.

Membership plummeted from 110 members when I left in January to 75 in May. This was the result of several factors. First, when I left the presidency, several weak performing sims were closed, and several people took the time to also retire - such as Clodo. This, though, was planned for. The real problem was that, over the months, the club began to stagnate. Robin didn't pay adequate attention to recruiting and member retention. She also wasn't as good at managing the day-to-day business of the club - the breathing life into the club to keep it alive each and every day. Questions and concerns went unaddressed, newsletters weren't sent out, and things generally began to fly apart. Of the sims that remained open - sims that had been vibrant at my retirement - they were noticeable beginning to suffer from a lack of attendance.

Robin was very smart, and it's to her great credit that she realized the problems early on, and realized that she didn't have the time or ability to address them. Only if some of TOL's other Presidents had that ability...

In retrospect, returning to the presidency was the greatest mistake of my simming career. I should have taken on a mentor role. I had invested myself into Trek Online and in doing so had created a unique, complex governmental system. It was a system that worked for that time. But the essence of Trek Online is what was important - the community, openness, the uniqueness of the club. If Trek Online was to survive, new generations would have to take ownership of the club, and be able to evolve the system - create new systems even - so that Trek Online adapted with the times while maintaining its essence.

It was a mistake to have passed the reigns over to Robin and to have so totally disappeared. I should have remained around to help Robin, as Chip had helped me. But once that mistake was done and Robin decided she wanted to step aside, I compounded the situation by returning to the Presidency.



I should have tried to convince Robin to remain to the end of her term and offered to return to the club to help her out where I could. Or if she was set on resigning, Kyle, her Vice President, should have taken over and I could have returned to help him. Robin and I felt that Kyle wasn't ready to be the President, but I've since learned not to put much stock into such assessments - who would have thought I was ready to run a club after one month as the Vice President in a broken down sim club on Prodigy? Kyle was the VP and he should have gotten the job.

I, however, was unable to stop myself. When Robin mentioned that she wanted to resign right away and asked if I was interested in returning as the President, I instinctively jumped, without thinking. I didn't want to see my club die. Even if simming was no longer my passion, the challenge of returning and fixing the club was too much to pass up.

The governmental system of Trek Online had been enshrined in a constitution, and I insisted that my return be done legitimately - that provisions in the constitution to allow the Assembly to appoint a Vice President, and for there to be a senior and junior VP, be followed - and that is what occurred. Robin nominated me to be the senior VP, with Kyle becoming the junior by default - and the Assembly quickly voted in favor. All knew this was being done to facilitate my return to the Presidency, and as soon as the Assembly finished its vote on May 23, 2000, Robin resigned as the President and, as the senior VP, I was automatically elevated to the Presidency.

Yet, all of these legalities ignored the overall essence of Trek Online. We were a community built around communication, openness, and allowing the members to select the president. Robin had been elected as the President by the members of the club, and Kyle as the Vice President. By doing what I did, I used the system to violate the essence of Trek Online.

My sudden return rubbed people the wrong way.

Kyle was upset about being pushed aside, but he continued to impeccably carry out his duties as CO of the Dark Falcon.

The critical fracture was that, at the end of my Presidency and into the beginning of Robin's term, the DASG and its two ships - the Dark Angel and WM Wolf - merged into TOL. All of my talk of republic and voting came across as hypocritical to them when I returned in a hastily thrown together backroom Assembly vote. The seed of mistrust had been planted and would explode 3 years later.

Had I been smart and paying attention when I returned, I would have quickly reached out to Vid (CO of the Dark Angel), Travis (CO of the WM Wolf) and members of the DASG, offered them key posts in the club, promoted some of them to captains and first officers, and asked for their advice. I also would have toured the club, attended all of the sims, and try to get to know everyone in the club. I needed to do what I had done in 1998 and 1999 - work with and promote a new generation of leaders within the club. But I had become an old timer stuck in my ways. I reached out to my old core - Mike, IR, Robin (who remained a sim

host after stepping down as President) - and also pulled people out of retirement, and plugged them back into the club; Moses became my Vice President. Clodo returned as the clubs webmaster.

I figured I would stay for a few months till the end of Robin's term, fix the club, and have everyone vote on a new President. That's why I didn't bother to get to know the club, which had changed a lot in the few short months I was gone. And, because I didn't think I was going to be there for very long, I had no vision - which I have found to be a dangerous thing. Without a goal to reach, I was swept along by the events of the day, instead of being a leader and shaping the events to my advantage.

I did push through a few changes - I restarted New Horizons as my sim and attempted to promote it's open sim idea - where you had a set crew, but no set ship or captain... every week it would be something new - with limited success (I also restarted the Vindicator as a message board sim with more success). Aside from that, I was on autopilot. I responded to questions, I gave orders, I made sure my captains sent out their logs and simmed on time, I recruited, I trained new cadets, and soon enough the club started to stabilize. We even entered into a partnership with a German club. One day in July, I received an E-mail from [www.trekonline.de](http://www.trekonline.de). We agreed to exchange banners and link each others site. Nothing ever came of it, but it was a reminder of how small the world had become.

I was optimistic that things were going well. In August, I began work on expanding my memoirs (at the time they only covered 1996 and 1997). In the introduction I wrote, "Located in a virtual world where nothing exists and everything changes at the speed of light, simming can be a perilous, and sometimes dangerous business. The online role playing universe is a chaotic world that is always in flux, a world where a minute could forever make or break a club. In this world, most simmers move on to another club within a few months, and most clubs die within a year. Yet, Trek Online has somehow managed to navigate the virtual storms, and not only survive, but thrive.

Founded in 1996, Trek Online is ancient by simming standards, where a year could be considered a century. In fact, the club has existed for so long that no one person, not even myself, has been around to witness its entire history.

But despite this, as a club, Trek Online remains young and vibrant. You can always tell when a club has become old; its sims become stale, its people unenergetic, and its machinery bogged down in pointless rules and procedures promulgated by a top-heavy staff of admirals. After four years, none of those signs of age exist in TOL."

It was all very good belief, but I didn't notice that some of the staleness had already found its way into Trek Online, and my detached management style caught up to me soon enough. Every fall the club experienced a decline in membership and attendance as people returned to school. But it was particularly drastic in the fall of 2000. Membership, which had slowly climbed to about 85, suddenly plummeted to about 60. I'm not sure why the school slump was so severe this time around, but I do know I hadn't been aggressive enough with recruiting during the summer to try to offset it. The only people who had been recruiting

were old timers like Amy. Very few newer members or people from the old DASG had stepped up, which indicated a serious problem - they didn't feel like they had a stake in the club and/or simply weren't motivated to help out.

Things in the club had fallen deeply, and I think the barbarians who always circle just outside sim clubs sensed our problems, for a few of them - kids with nothing better then make fun of Star Trek - began to attack some of our sims in October 2000. However, I had learned my lesson with Ben. I quickly E-mailed everyone in the club what was going on, instructed people not to provide them info about the club, and told my captains to move to block the people if they showed up, and move to another chat room if necessary. Soon, the raiders grew tired and seeing they weren't going to get to us, gave up and moved on.

We also had a reoccurring bout with a nut named Greg, who you could say was FSFs version of Forum Ally times 10. He turned up in TOL in July, began harassing and threatening some of my members. Working closely with Chief Justice Anne, he was promptly kicked out. He attempted to sneak back into the club November and January under assumed names, but we tracked him down and kicked him out. Since this was Shuni's criminal, I deferred to him. He felt behind the scenes coordination was better than an all out Simming League trial, and that's what we did. Greg never bothered TOL again, but I know he turned up from time to time in the FSF.

To compound matters, most of the people who left when school resumed were from "TOL sims." Again, I have no idea why this happened, nor have I been able to find a common reason to explain it. Perhaps it was just the luck of the draw. In any event, the Dark Angel enjoyed strong attendance while the TOL ships declined. By November, the club was pretty much split evenly between TOLers and DASG members.

The merger with the DASG had been slow and deliberate. It began in the summer of 1999 when TOL and DASG "met" via the Tournament of Simulations. During the fall of 1999 and into the winter of 2000, the DASG slowly joined TOL. My concern was preventing a civil war - like there had been with the Independence Group - and this approach prevented a war because it allowed both clubs time to get used to each other and avoid misunderstandings. However, it also preserved the divide that the DASG was separate and apart from TOL. Plus, all the hoops that the DASG had to jump through - the rules, the votes, the timelines, gave the DASG a sense that Trek Online was a rigid, bureaucratic place.

By the fall of 2000, the net result was that an artificial, psychological divide between TOL and the DASG persisted. DASG simmers maintained their own core and hadn't been fully integrated into TOL. I perpetuated that divide by not reaching out to simmers from the DASG and plugging them into the senior leadership of TOL.

Luckily or not, no one ran against me in the October 2000 Presidential election. My plan to serve out Robin's term and leave didn't pan out, but given the sudden declines in membership, it probably wouldn't have been best for me to leave.

The sudden decline and being forced to remain in office longer than expected made me reevaluate the situation. I saw that I needed the help of Vid and the crew of the Dark Angel. In the past, the Vindicator, Endeavor, and Stonewall had been the core of TOL. I realized the Dark Angel was becoming the new core with its tight nit crew and well attended sims. I realized I had to go out into the club and get to know it. TOL had changed drastically over the year. Very few of the captains and simmers who were active in TOL in 2000 had served with me during my first go around as President. I was a stranger to them.

I put Bel - Vid's wife - in charge of the monthly TOL Times newsletter, and she did a great job. I began to attend the Dark Angel and WM Wolf sims and the other sims in the club. I got to know the crew members and encouraged them to recruit - and recruit they did. New people poured into the club, membership shot up, and by February of 2001 the crises had stabilized. The club returned to 85 members, and over the spring, TOL continued to grow towards its normal level of 100 members.

In March, I made Vid my Vice President, and things seemed to be getting better. The club began to thrive again. The sims and activities were full, the quality was good, TOL continued to receive awards and praise, and remained a leader of the simming world. But still I had not gone far enough. I was still relying on my old timers and plugging people like Matt, Mike, Robin, and Carrie, into commands when I should have been finding deserving Lieutenants and Commanders and making them the new generation of club leaders. Also, I didn't treat Vid as a Vice President. I continued to go to my old core for advice, and I gave them duties to carry out. Vid isn't the kind of person to speak up, so he suffered in silence, wishing I would turn to him, wishing I would treat him with more respect. In the end he just became resentful of me.

Because of all of this, under the surface of TOL's revival were growing cracks between Vid and myself, and between the junior officers (most of them from the Dark Angel) who deserved commands and my old core who were still in power.

In the early summer of 2001, I finally began to wise up to the situation. I turned to Vid for advice and gave him orders to carry out. When there was an opening on a ship for a captain or first officer post, I turned to him to give me a name, and the club soon ended up with wonderful new captains - such as Rilles and Nate Horn. I quickly realized it was my time to step aside as the President and let Vid take over. I saw the work he had done in the DASG before it merged into TOL, and I knew he had the raw talent to make a good President. I also knew the club was becoming his. The Dark Angel was the dynamic center of TOL. It was his crew that was the most active in the club. It was his people who were becoming the new captains. My new plan was to work with them, mold them into TOL, prepare Vid to take over the club, and step aside.

## **Chapter 38: STS**

*"All I've asked for is loyalty, loyalty to STS, abidance by STS procedures, and continued effort to sim in my absence. Despite Charles' statements, there is an STS, and procedures to follow. I have been absent on and off for about one year now, with real life difficulties,*

*but I have always been available via email to help anyone with anything. The Lancelot is an STS ship sim, and my absence is no reason for secede the ship from that organization no matter how inactive or how small it may be in a person's opinion. If any of you are unhappy with the Lancelot, or STS... feel free to leave. You are all citizens in a free country, however the ship named Lancelot belongs to STS, and remains under all rules, procedures, and regulations set forth herein." - Vice Admiral NFO, attempting to defend himself, in an E-mail to what was left of STS, December 30, 2000.*

By the end of 2000, the once grand Star Trek Sims (STS) club lay in ruins. Unable to cope with the new simming era, it suffered a massive split in 1997. Admiral Trekker and Vice Admiral NFO had attempted some reforms, and Moses had stepped forward to become a leading captain and Sim Master in the club during 1998, but by 1999, STS was exhausted. Trekker and NFO had given up, Moses had quit, and all that remained of STS was NFO's ship, the USS Lancelot, and a lone E-mail sim, the USS Harvard.

Throughout this period, I had remained in STS, serving on the Lancelot as a Lt. Commander and Chief Engineer. It was a good ship with a fine crew, and I always had a good time. No one knew I was Chas, so I was able to relax and enjoy simming without the pressures of command. For most of 1999 and 2000, NFO wasn't seen, and the ship's first officer, Commander Jana Voi Windstar (Windy), served as the acting captain. She did a wonderful job, I would have made her a captain in TOL in a second. By December 2000, Windy was tired of simming and of command. She stepped aside, and as the next most senior officer onboard, promoted me to Captain and put me in command of the Lancelot. NFO quickly appeared to bless the arrangement, stressing that he was still in ultimate command, and disappeared again.

I moved quickly to shore up the ship. A few old timers returned and we managed to bring in a few recruits. We enjoyed a good multi week sim during January and February in which the Lancelot uncovered the Romulans building a base on a pre-warp world and busily working to get the local population on their side. We had a nice faceoff with a Romulan Warbird, and our away team made a dramatic escape from the natives on the planet.

During January, I talked to Windy, NFO (whenever he decided to reply to my E-mails), Admiral Trekker, and Daman, the CO of the Harvard. STS had been a good club, and even though there were only 2 ships left, it was one of the few surviving early era clubs on AOL that was dedicated to providing an accurate recreation of Starfleet on both the in character and out of character levels. I wanted to save it, in part because the simming world needed clubs like STS to keep alive the old ways, and in part because I enjoyed the challenge that rebuilding an old club where no one around knew I was Chas.

I presented several ideas for how to rebuild the club... have a new military leader, have Trekker and NFO step back up, have a command council, etc. Sadly, things quickly came to a head, with NFO sending out the occasional E-mail saying everything was fine and that he was still in charge. I got fed up and pointed out that he hadn't done anything for 2 years and things were hardly fine. Windy stepped in to try to calm everyone down, and I backed off. I focused my efforts on reviving the STS newsletter and the E-mail Trek trivia string. Per my

usual style, I also turned my attention to the guidebook, which was years out of date. To help train the new cadets on the Lancelot, I would need current info. On February 20, 2001, I E-mailed my new guidebook to Daman, Windy, NFO, and Trekker to get their feedback.

I was expecting a constructive debate, but I was assailed from all angles. Daman accused me of copyright violations for updating Trekkers and NFOs guidebook. NFO once again said everything was fine and there was no reason to change anything, and that he was still in charge. NFO also made the sly comment that I should go start up my own club and write my own guidebook... little did he know ;-) Windy also wondered what was wrong with the guidebook and why it had to change. Wishing to get a discussion going, I E-mailed a series of points where the guidebook was out of date and why I made changes to it... things like deleting divisions that no longer existed, changing the rules for Sim Masters to reflect current practices, putting forward a new command structure, etc.

On the 21st, I finally got a hold of Trekker in an IM, but he didn't seem to care. I think he would have been happy to see his club continue, but he didn't want to run it, nor did he want to oppose NFO - the real power. So nothing came of the discussion.

On the 22nd and 23rd, the situation deteriorated into back and forth mudslinging and was hopeless. Windy was ready to resign, but I talked her out of it since she was a good officer and I didn't want to lose her. In a last desperate attempt, I revealed to Windy that I was Chas, that I knew how to run a club, and that she should trust me and help me out. It backfired. Perhaps fearing I would take over and merge STS into TOL (which is something I would have never done - STS was too different and I wanted to preserve the unique old styles of STS as an independent club), Windy retook command of the Lancelot. I resigned on the 23rd, and NFO quickly and happily accepted.

The Lancelot and STS carried on for a few more months, but Trekker and NFO did nothing, and eventually the crew of the Lancelot fizzled and parted ways. STS was no more, and I was put on warning by history of what could happen to a stubborn old leader who couldn't or wouldn't retire or get out of the way.

## **Chapter 39: New Era**

*AdmChasTOL: Credo Elvem ipsum etian vivere*

*ViceAdmVidiotTOL: Whats that mean?*

*AdmChasTOL: I think Elvis is still alive*

*ViceAdmVidiotTOL: LMAO*

*-Vid and Chas attempt to come up with a Latin motto for TOL, IM chat, June 24, 2001.*

During my second presidency, I began to realize that simming was entering a new era. The time when simming was dominated by online services was rapidly coming to an end as people

rapidly moved onto the internet. Like with the revolutions of 1997, clubs that changed with the times in 2001 survived and prospered, those that did not were swept aside by history.

Trek Online had already been moving with the forces of history. We had a wonderful website that helped attract new recruits, our chat sims were moved out of AOL chat rooms so that anyone could take part in them, and we established internet message boards.

I also saw that simming was changing, and I attempted to open up the club to new ideas - such as New Horizons and the idea to have rotating captains - but my biggest push came when I tried to expand Trek Online beyond sims altogether.

Admiral Dailey of CompuServe fame - who I remained in touch with - came to me with the idea to organize gaming clans for TOL. With increased competition from EverQuest and other online computer games, he argued, and I agreed, the club had to respond. He volunteered to organize the gaming clans - groups of people who owned online multiplayer Star Trek games.

The clans proved to be an amazing success, rapidly attracting over a hundred people who played the games together, and who competed with each other and the other clans. But at the end of August, the clans mutinied and went off on their own. What happened was a clash of personalities between Dailey and the principle gamers, but it was my fault really. I didn't pay any attention to them, didn't get to know the gamers, didn't understand the clans, but tried to force them into the Assembly and the clubs structure.

It was a major wake up call to me. I didn't have the time or energy needed to pay attention to the gaming clans. While the gaming clans didn't impact the sims, I knew I didn't have enough time to run the full club too, and I worried the same things may eventually happen to the sims if I just continued to work on auto pilot.

At the same exact time, things were exploding in the Simming League. Shuni had served as the President of the League from March to September 2000, and Robin - who took over as TOLs Senator after I left in March of 2000 - served as the President from September 2000 to March 2001. They both had been able to repair the major damage caused by the Ben, Gillis, and Eppy messes, and the President at the time - Erik Nighthawk - was enjoying a successful time in office.

I become the Chief Justice of the League in the summer of 2000, and through a series of landmark cases, expanded the role and prestige of the Court. In August 2001, my long time friend, Ender Maki - who had served as my Vice President in the League, and who came up with the idea for SciWorld - posted a speech that was critical of Shuni and the FSF.

During 2001, there was growing concern in the League about the FSF's increasingly aggressive recruiting and merging tactics - it seemed as half of the League ended up in the FSF - and its PR people also seemed to quickly show up to 'correct' any bad statements made about the FSF.

When Maki's speech was mysteriously deleted from the League's message board, many people were upset and outraged. The real kicker is that, at the time, the League's message boards were on AOL - so an AOL staffer with proper access had to delete the post. It was widely rumored that Shuni and members of the FSF had such positions with AOL, and the deletion of the post raised serious questions about the growing power of the FSF in the simming world.

Maki filed a case against Shuni, alleging that he deleted the post, thus violating League rules for freedom of debate. Under the Simming League rules, there weren't separate investigators and judges. The justices conducted investigations, asked questions and collected evidence. Nothing major, just a quick look over to make sure the case had merit. If they felt there was enough there, both sides would be called and a full trial would be conducted. For simming, it's a good enough system and worked in the past. However, Shuni's crack team of simming attorneys and PR people quickly got to work, claiming the system was un-American and citing Federal law. They filed motion after motion, and I tried to explain that this was a simming case. The Court heard their arguments and responded to them, citing the League constitution and League rules saying there wasn't an issue. But they just simply refused to listen and cooperate.

I became so fed up that I quit the court. Ironically, the day was August 31, 2001, 5 years to the day after I started Trek Online. I was just burnt out, that's all. I didn't have the energy or patience left in me to deal with these petty disputes or run a sim club. I had been thinking about retiring for months, but now it all came to a head and the date seemed appropriate. Frustrated by the League, and realizing I was losing my edge after the gaming clan incident, I also announced my pending retirement to the club. I decided I would not seek reelection and would step down at the end of my term in November.

My final months in TOL passed quietly. On one level, my second Presidency had been a great success. By 2001, the club was strong and prosperous once again, with about a hundred members, a dozen sims, and lots of fun. My more ambitious ideas - the gaming clan, New Horizons, etc - didn't take hold, and I wasn't as focused and determined as I had been in my younger days. However, during my second Presidency, I had left a bad taste in Vid's mouth, and that would come back to haunt everyone.

The Simming League was a different matter. The collapse of the trial against Shuni brought the League to near civil war. The feelings pro and anti towards the FSF were running at a fever pitch - you either loved them or hated them. Luckily, cooler heads prevailed, thanks mostly to President Nighthawk and Zappy.

Erik Nighthawk was facing difficulties and revolts in his own club at the time. But instead of focusing on them, he focused on the problems in the League, doing everything he could to talk to everyone, calm people down, and hold the League together. In the end, the problems in his club destroyed it, but he saved the League, and for that he received the Simming League Prize for Peace. Zappy, who was elected the President on September 19, 2001, continued Nighthawk's work, and managed to get myself and Seth - the Senator from the Starfleet Legacy Alliance (SLA) and Shuni's primary lawyer - to sit down and work together



on a new constitution and a package of League reforms to fix the problems with the court and other potential fatal flaws.

For nearly 4 months Seth and myself worked and battled it out. Many times it seemed our positions and ideas for changes were too vast, but Zappy kept on prodding us along, and somehow we found common ground. In the end, we produced a new constitution far superior to the previous one. It was quickly agreed to by the Senate and member clubs, and the Fourth League was born.

When the new constitution came into effect on February 9, 2002, Zappy stepped aside and Seth became the President and I the Vice President. Even while I was retired from Trek Online, I stayed on as TOLs Senator and continued to serve in the League. Vid didn't care much for the League, and he had no problem with me staying on as the Senator. I would update him and the Assembly as to what was occurring, but no one seemed to care too much.

Seth's term in office was quite good. He moved the League to internet message boards and more so than any other President in League history, he was dedicated to the notion of the League as a forum where clubs could interact and exchange ideas. He lead many discussions on a wide range of simming topics. He also established the first League library of documents - guidebooks, essays, and simming advise - that clubs, simmers, and leaders could reference and use in their own club.

Our activities also picked up - SciWorld 2002 went well - and the Tournament of Simulations was restarted. In a sign of how things in TOL were beginning to slip after I had left, the club had won the ToS in 1999, won the scaled down version in 2001, but failed to win in any category in 2002.

However, as Seth's Presidency progressed, he found that he had less and less time to run the League, and in early August, he announced that he wouldn't run for reelection.

I wasn't interested in becoming the President - I had been there and done that. The only person who was interested in being the President was Gillis. Despite all of his earlier problems - with Ben, Eppy, Wizzo, etc - he had been behaving himself. I still didn't trust him, and he didn't trust me, so what is one to do? I was tempted to run against him, but before I did that, I offered to be his running mate, figuring that way I would be able to keep a very close eye on him. Really wanting to become the President, and fearful I would win if I ran, Gillis accepted.

It was a political arrangement forged by common mistrust and loathing. Had I known people would think it meant we were friends, I would have never done it.

For several weeks, it looked like we would win unopposed. However, at the last minute, and I mean the last minute - one minute before the filing deadline at midnight - Seth changed his mind and decided to run. As election day approached, everyone, including Seth, was sure Gillis would win. Seth went out of his way to explain he really didn't want to be reelected, he

just wanted to run to make sure there was an election. But my fellow Senators had a different opinion.

In the League, the election occurs over several days, during which time Senators E-mail their votes to the Justices. The election is scheduled to end on the 19th, but by the 17th all of the Senators had voted. The Justices decided to announce the winner a few days early. Seth had won. Apparently I wasn't the only one who didn't trust Gillis.

The only problem was the Court didn't have the power to end the election early. The Constitution clearly said the election was to continue to the 19th. In addition, Senators had the right to change their votes up to the last minute, so just because everyone had sent in a vote by the 17th didn't mean it was set in stone. Gillis, of course, argued that the election was still open and asked the Court to reopen it till the 19th. In my typical nuanced fashioned, I argued that the Court should declare the election to be open to the 19th, but recognizing the fact it goofed, also rule that no one could change their vote, thus effectively ending the election while keeping everything constitutional.

The Court rejected my line of thinking and reopened the election till the 19th. Gillis wasted no time hounding the Senators and getting people to change their votes. He would later claim that he lost the election because people didn't want me to be the Vice President, and as soon as he talked to the Senators and calmed their nerves that 6 more months of me as Vice President wouldn't be a disaster, people switched their votes to him - whatever.

As things would have it, when the election finally ended on the 19th at 11:59pm, Gillis had won by one vote. However, the Court didn't want Gillis to become the President - they didn't trust him either. Two of the Justices conspired to get one of the Senators who had voted for Gillis to change their vote to abstain - this occurred at 2am on the 20th - 2 hours after voting ended. The Justices soon after announced that it was a tie, and in accordance with the Constitution, the Court would vote to break the tie.

Before this happened, Seth and Gillis met. I don't think their actions were done with malice. Gillis wanted to be the President and Seth didn't want to be reelected, so they reached an agreement that Gillis would be the President and Seth the Vice President. The Court, of course, was furious. On the surface they claimed that the Constitution was being ignored - but in reality their plan to keep Gillis out of the presidency had been circumvented. The Senate was truly furious that Gillis and Seth, in effect, ignored the entire election, constitution, and vote of the Senate. The League was thrown into turmoil. Gillis and Seth quickly backed away from their plan and Seth resigned as the President on September 23.

Because the election was still up in the air, when Seth resigned I, as his Vice President, became the President (confused yet). As per my natural course, I addressed everyone in the League explaining what was going on and that we would wait for the Court to break the tie. When that occurred, I would step aside and whoever the Court selected would become the President. Soon a semblance of calm and order returned to the League.

Gillis, however, knew that he should have won the election - enough Senators had promised to vote for him. He began investigating to find out who didn't live up to their word. Within a few days, he uncovered what had occurred, evidence was quickly produced, and two justices resigned in disgrace. Most important, he uncovered that at 11:59pm on the 19th when the election ended, he had won by one vote. On September 29, 2002, when all of these details had been worked out and certified, Gillis became the President, and I became his Vice President.

Despite the cloud surrounding his election - and the fact that when the vote closed the first time on the 17th he had lost to a man who said he didn't want to be reelected - Gillis entered office like he had won a landslide and threw himself into the job with an energy and vigor not seen for a long time. Of course, energy and vigor is a good thing, don't get me wrong, but he didn't have the political base to get his ideas enacted.

This is where Gillis personality came into sharp focus. He took everything way too personally and he tried to control every last little situation, thought, and statement. Even if a supporter criticized him, he would chew them out in an unpleasant hour long IM. He never learned how to let things bounce off of him, and this was his fatal flaw. Despite his enormous talents, intelligence, dedication, and work ethic, this flaw prevented him from achieving greatness time and time again.

Resentment and resistance to him grew in the League. Frustrated that people weren't listening to him and were opposing his efforts, he became even worse. Because he helped to set up and maintain the League's webserver and message boards, he threatened to shut them down and disband the League because no one was listening to him. In the weeks prior, I had done my best in the League to try to ease tensions and smooth over the problems Gillis had caused, and I tried my best to talk to Gillis and get him to calm down, but after he threatened to destroy the League, there wasn't anything I could do.

By the time I signed on to read Gillis' threat to the League, there were already several calls for his resignation, and I joined in. In the Senate, I called on Gillis to, "Do one decent and honorable act as President - resign."

Gillis did, and resigning on November 12, 2002. Shortly there after, perhaps to get back at me, he joined TOL. (More on that later).

As his Vice President, I once again became the President of the Sim Senate.

My term in office wasn't anything spectacular. I pushed through some constitutional changes and League reforms. For example, the Senate was expanded to include representatives - regular simmers - to try to break the hold of admirals and presidents on the Senate and bring in fresh ideas. The Courts were reformed, making them focus on negotiations and mediation instead of trials. And I worked to clean up the League as it were - dead wood was removed, new Senators and clubs were brought in to replace the inactive ones.

In the March 2003 election, I lost to Truce, the Senator from the FSF. I didn't mind. Truce was a good guy, and his two terms as President were quite successful. I didn't campaign that hard against him, I had no new ideas, and shortly before the election, the Leagues message boards went down. It took a week to get them back up, and I was blamed for the delay, which doomed me in the election.

#### Chapter 40: Gillis

*"Most of the people who don't like me never had a really good reason. Most of the people who have good reasons to hate me don't. Like Shuni. Like you." - Gillis to Chas in an IM, November 25, 2003.*

Chas Note: Gillis, I couldn't agree with your quote more. Because truth exists in the middle, I've included this chapter written by Gillis about his time as President of the Simming League. Also, in Chapter 43, I've linked what he wrote about his time in TOL. He, of course, sees things a bit differently.

Greetings readers,

Gillis is back once again to rebut a few of the "facts" that Chas has been so kind to recollect. Despite conversations I've had with him before my retirement that cleared up many misconceptions, and his promises that he'd update his memoirs to fix those discrepancies, Chas has saw fit to change his stories to include even more of his insulting and disdainful tone.

See, recently, I retired, due to a change in my life. I got married, and just a few months ago, had my first child. Being a full time grown up, and realizing the simming that I grew up loving was no longer the same, I gave it up. Not many people believed I would, but I don't believe anyone remotely connected to simming has even heard from me since last November.

Well, today I was bored, and decided to check out how Simming.info was doing. Being an original idea of mine that was executed by Chas with much help from my graphical expertise, I figured I'd want to know what's going on with it. So, I check it out, and his memoirs catches my eye. I check it out to see what changes he's made, and I'm appalled.

If you're wondering, I'm referring to my election to the presidency of the Simming League. The way Chas has it written, it's riddled with half-truths and conjecture, mostly shifted to fit Chas' delusional world. I have come to set that straight.

One major joke people have going is that I "lost" to someone who told everyone he didn't want the job. Of course, what most people don't realize about Seth is that he always wants the job...but, his "modesty" is a part of his charm. I remember when I asked him to run as my VP the election before, and he told me that he wasn't sure he wanted to get into politics. A week later, he announced his candidacy for president. Surprise, surprise. In all of this, those who sling the lies leave out one important fact.

For my one month of campaigning allowed before the election, I was nowhere to be found. See, at that time, I was a bachelor living in my own apartment, with one computer. Funds were tight, so buying a bunch of expensive equipment wasn't really feasible. So, when lightning struck, surging my computer to a burnt crisp, I was left without a mode of accessing the Internet. This basically ate up my entire month of campaigning.

One blatant lie by Chas is that when the votes were released early, I "campaigned" to allow the election to go on. Careful study of records would show this to be untrue. No doubt I probably would have done so, but I had not yet gotten access to the Internet back.

Election night, roughly 10 PM, I was at my mother's house. I begged her to use her computer, and she let me. Checking the forums, the first thing I came upon that caught my eye was a reply to Seth's campaign announcement. Goran, a die hard supporter of mine, had posted in support of Seth! Knowing this was BS, I somehow managed to get on AOL Quickbuddy[I say "somehow", because it generally never works for me], and I contact Goran.

I ask him why he's supporting Seth, and he tells me that in my absence, he thought that Chas would take my place in the elections. Basically, he voted for Seth because he preferred Seth to Chas. Letting him know this was not the case, he quickly changed his vote. During the course of this conversation, I did notice the debate on the whole election results thing. With him promising to change his vote, I knew I'd win, despite my month long absence.

So, I signed on the next morning, and I see an abstain vote. I speak with Goran, and he swears up and down that he changed his vote. On the forums, Casteclear, aka SFEFGavic, is speaking of how he "noticed" a vote change at 11:59 PM EST. Considering Gavic was a senator, not privy to election results, changes in election results, or the names of those who voted and for whom, this was odd. Even more suspicious was that SFEF had a justice, SFEFTexmist.

So, this scenario starts to form in my head. A scenario involving someone with an insight into the court process who was willing to share information, and others who would find a Gillis supporter and convince them to change their vote to abstain, sending the vote to the Courts. The Courts, who had three justices. Twistermac, SFEFTexmist, and SLAGarrison. Texmist and Gavic hated me with a passion because of my repeated moves to thwart their attacks on SFC. Garrison, although never proven conclusively[as I decided not to push it], was Seth's subordinate, and I believe, had the biggest hand in this entire thing. With 1/3 of the court against me, and the 1/3 working for my adversary, I was destined to lose. Bringing this to light, things started to get ugly.

This is when Seth approached me. He wished to keep the league from being torn apart, and offered the deal where I was president and he was VP. Actually, his original offer was to make ME VP, and him president. I managed to convince him otherwise, leading me to believe that he was merely trying to appease me before I did uncover the truth. See, one thing you could count on with me...I always uncovered the truth.

We came to the League with this idea, and it was quickly thrown down. The fight kept going, and there was no end in sight. It was then that Goran IMed me, and confessed what really happened.

At 11:59, Goran did INDEED change his vote. Seeing their candidate lose, the Chief Justice[Garrison] quickly mobilized his troops to run in, and convince Goran to change his vote. Put aside the fact that the court justices were strictly prohibited from trying to alter the results of an election. The real injustice was the changed vote they accepted two hours after close of polls.

Goran forwarded me the original emails, complete with time stamps. With this irrefutable evidence, Chas had to step down as president, and I was put in the position that I had earned through an honest campaign. In retaliation to this, I'm sure, Seth decided to pull his group down to Observational membership, removing himself as senator, and Garrison as Chief Justice.

One thing that Seth really tries to push in his history is how the evil Gillis attempted and failed to impeach Garrison. This tactic is used to ensure his members realize that I am the devil, and will not question it. Anyone who was around at the time will tell you differently, though.

It was simple....I didn't want to lose SFEF. Although I had problems with them, and didn't particularly like the new regime that had replaced my good friend Lemax, I put the League first, and put out an olive branch. I vowed not to impeach Texmist for her blatant disregard for the constitution. In doing so, I was prevented from impeaching any other justice involved in the matter, as it would set a precedent for double standards. Garrison was not even thought of, as he had resigned his position long before an impeachment was suggested. My impeachment of the justices never failed...I never allowed it to hit the floor.

Given the polarizing nature of this entire event, many of the issues I brought forth soon after my election were met with resistance. Normally, such measures would have gone smoothly, had it not been for the still tender wounds inflicted by the entire scandal.

One pet peeve of mine has always been non-existent clubs in the League. I was a big proponent of small clubs joining the league, don't get me wrong....but, a group of 2 or 3 people who called themselves Admirals and never held a single sim was not a small club. It was a circle jerk. Noticed by myself and my VP Chas, some senators weren't even voting. One most notably was Troy of....I can't even remember the name of the group. Well, Chas sent an email to her asking for her to start posting and voting. She replied with a very insulting email. I then emailed her, asking her nicely to vote. In a fit of immaturity, Troy then came to the boards, and voted no on all the bills presented....simply to spite us for having the audacity to ask her, a senator, to vote. Coming out many times and making it quite blatant, a small debate ensued. At this time, it wasn't a big thing.

It was around this time I received an email from Justin Atherton, my appointed director of the Tournament of Sims. Seems he had contacted her, as he did all the other senators, to

inquire about their participation in the event. Her reply to him was that her group had not simmed in many months, and were on hiatus. See, when we created the new constitution, we increased the member requirements...but, in doing so, in order not to kick out current members who were below the new standards, we put in a grandfather clause. Those clubs that were around at the time of the new constitution's ratification needed only to hold a single active sim to retain membership. News of Troy's group ceasing to sim for many months was more than enough for me to exercise my power to remove their voting rights.

I made one small mistake, though. As I had been involved in the League for years, I didn't make it much practice to constantly cross reference the constitution, as most of it was easily remembered. In the old constitution, failing to meet member standards would move you to Provisional Membership. In the new constitution, you simply lost voting rights. In practice, both were basically the same thing, with the exception that a Prov Member would need to be voted back in. Making this verbal mistake, I was quickly corrected on it, and quickly accused of intentionally violating the constitution by my rivals.

So, to calm things down, I decided to give Troy a chance. It was far within my powers to remove her voting rights then...I had an irrefutable confession by her that she was in violation. But, being nice, and not wanting to cause more strife, I agreed to give her a chance to hold ONE sim. This failed utterly.

I came to the boards, and was about to announce her removal. This is when another swath of crap came at me. I crumbled again, and decided to give her yet ANOTHER chance. I showed up to this sim, and they had maybe three or four people there. Contacting them in IM, they freely admitted to not being real members of her group. Afterwards, I got yet another stream of crap, and I turned to a friend of mine.

FSFJFerguson, a relatively new face to the League, was a recently confirmed justice to the Courts. Speaking with him, I began to vent. Not knowing me quite that well, he took some of that venting seriously. Most damning was my statement about "I can't take this anymore. Maybe I should just delete the forums, and disband the League, and be rid of it all." Anyone who knew me would know this was just venting, and I'd be alright by the next day. I'd never do such a thing to the League. Hell, for years I held the power to do such a thing...years later, buying half stock in the company that hosted them for free, I had the power once again to do it...but I never did. I'm not that type of person.

Well, Ferguson, not knowing I was venting, came to the forums, and posted this log. I logged on to find all these calls for my resignation. It was at this time that I reflected upon my career in the League. How I had spent more years in service to the League than most of it's members had been simming. About how the only person who could claim to have put more time and resources into the League was Chas himself. How in all these years, I never saw a good thing come out of the League. About how certain power clubs...\*cough\*FSF\*cough\*.....managed to gobble up the resources of any kind that we sent to the league for it's programs. So, seeing how my hard work, and Chas' hard work, had been years down the drain...a practice in futility...I decided to resign, and remove my club from the league for the last time.

I stayed with the league for some time though, through my Directorship of RoleplayerUSA. Up until when Mike decided to retire. It turned out that Mike had been coerced by Chas into signing a contract that gave Chas and the SL exclusive ownership to RPUSA when he retired. Thing was, Mike didn't have exclusive ownership of RPUSA in the first place, so the contract was illegal. He signed it without informing the other half, me. After me confronting him, he signed over RolePlayerUSA, and all it's properties and rights, to me. It was at this time that Chas broke off the long lived partnership with RPUSA...and, overnight, the forums were moved to the FSF server.

So...that's my story.

## Chapter 41: Vid

*"I only hope that we can live up to your expectations, and to at least one day come close to filling the shoes Chas has left for us. I am very honored that you all felt confident in my ability enough to vote me and my partner into office. We will do our best to make this club stay where she's at." - AdmVidiotTOL, in his first monthly club address to the club in the TOL Times, November 2, 2001.*

My second retirement worked out better, at least for a while. Instead of running the club up to the last day, I gradually turned control over to Vid. Yes, there was a small chance he would lose the election, but Vid was popular, and he was my appointed successor, so I didn't worry.

Almost immediately after I made my announcement on August 31, 2001, I met with Vid every few days and told him what had occurred in the club. That way, when he took over, he would be in the loop and have several months of background info. During September, I started to turn tasks over to Vid, and I began to direct people with basic questions to him for an answer. By October, I had the captains regularly reporting to him. I was there in the background to help him out and give him advise when I though it was needed. Had a crises occurred, I would have been there to step in, but lucky there were no surprises.

By the time the election came around on October 20, 2001, Vid was already running the club. For the record, Vid won, capturing 73% of the vote, against Ditto, the captain of the Endeavor, who received 16% of the vote. Even though I wasn't running, I still got 11% of the vote.

But, I soon made the same stupid mistake I had done in 2000 - I disappeared from TOL. This time, I didn't intend to. Had I been around, I doubt Vid would have listened to me - because I had never sought him out much during my Second Presidency, he never sought me out during his Presidency, and I know by this point in time he just didn't like me. Looking back at the IM logs and chats, it's clear that by July and August of 2001, Vid was starting



to become short with me, but at the time I didn't notice it.<sup>57</sup> I think somewhere during those months, the combination of my directness, how I ignored him for 6 months after I returned, how even after I made him the VP I continued to rely on my old core, and the fact we had no real common interests outside of simming and Star Trek, caused Vid to end up not liking me. I fear I made him feel inferior, and not a part of TOL. But he was my Vice President, and given my history with Vice Presidents, that means a lot. I trusted him and valued him. I always felt he was a great simmer and captain and possessed amazing talent. His vision, drive and love of simming, was, quite frankly, unlike anything I had seen since myself. To be blunt about it, TOL needed another Chas to keep it running, and I thought Vid was that person. I just never successfully conveyed that to him. I was hard on him because I saw greatness in him, but I never told him. That's my fault.

Still, had I stayed active in TOL, I would have maintained my connections, I would have been able to get to know the new generation of simmers and leaders in TOL, and that could have helped me down the road.

Yet, for that to have been beneficial, I would have to learn to step back and not impose my will.

During my Second Presidency, Clodo and Robin served as the club's webmasters. They retired in the fall of 2001, and Will, the captain of the Generation, took over as the webmaster. For the first month or so after Vid became the President, I tried to work with Will on updating the website. However, he was a disaster. I would E-mail him things 5, 6, or 7 times, and he would lose my E-mails, forget, or simply not do the work! After a few months, the site was starting to suffer. Links were broken and info was out of date.

I talked to Vid, I talked to Will, and I talked to Clodo. I was sure we could find someone in the club who was a more responsible programmer, and in the mean time, Clodo was willing to return to run the site. It looked like everything was going to go smoothly - Will would step aside and Clodo would return - when Vid suddenly, unexplainable change his mind and decreed that Will would stay. And so, Will stayed on as TOL's webmaster till the end of 2003. He stayed on for two long, critical years during which the simming world transformed itself and became based on the internet. Clubs needed a strong internet presence to survive, and with Will as our webmaster, our internet presence was pathetic at best.

I don't know why Vid suddenly changed his mind. Perhaps Will talked to him and promised to do better if he was given another chance. Perhaps Vid just got upset that I was flexing my muscles and replacing his web chief with someone from my old core. I should have handled it

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<sup>57</sup> Even a simple phone call could have made a difference. During the spring and summer of 2001, we mentioned the possibility of calling each other or even meeting in person. But it never panned out. Online I come across as rough, direct, and arrogant, but when I talk to someone from the club over the phone they're surprised I'm totally different - I'm nice and reasonable! Just the simple inflection of a voice can make a difference and fill my words on the screen with a new tone.

differently and not have taken charge and forced Clodo upon him. I should have told Vid I was having problems and let him make a decision, but after being the President for so long it was hard to let go of my old ways.

To make matters worse, Vid always hated politics and didn't like the constitution or the republic. He wanted to do things in private. He didn't see the value of discussion and debate and laws. So instead of an open political process where the Assembly passed bills and debated in public, he created a private E-mail string for the Assembly. He would keep the Assembly updated on what he was doing, they would give him advice, and he would create some general consensus if there was a big decision to be made. If no one complained too loudly, he would go forward. But there wasn't much formal voting or law making.

In retrospect, there wasn't anything wrong with his approach - he allowed people to have a voice - and I should have been more willing to let Vid to develop the government as best suited him. I should have worked with him behind the scenes to develop a new, simpler constitution that kept in place the important elements that kept the club running smoothly and prevented civil wars, but that molded the system to his style. However, I had become too attached to my creation. Instead of working with him, I complained that the Assembly wasn't being used. Vid grudgingly started to hold public Assembly meetings and conduct votes, and he hated it. Once again, Vid viewed me as trying to control him, when it really was just another instance of my inability to let go.

Vid felt threatened by me, and I felt slighted that he wasn't reaching out to me for advice.

As the club moved into 2002, I disappeared from TOL. I just became caught up in real life. Not having to sign online to run a club (or even a sim - I left the Vindicator and put Carrie, a good friend of mine, in command), I slowly became lazy and didn't pay much attention to the club or sign on as much. When I was online, so many things were happening in the Simming League that I spent most of my time over there. Plus, in the short term at least, Vid was doing a good job as President. Attendance was good, and everyone was having fun. New captains and simmers were making their mark. New cultural features and inside jokes were added to the collection of MIBs and smite buttons, and Vid expanded TOLs simming into new areas - civilian ships, medical sims, and JAG sims.

In choosing Vid as my successor, I picked a capable administrator. He embodied TOL's spirit of fun, creativity, and community. I, after all, worked to bring his sim into TOL because it harkened back to the spirit of those random, just for the fun of it sims on Prodigy that TOL was built upon. The great tragedy was that Vid and I didn't get along.

However, things changed in Vid's second term. He was reelected in April of 2002, but by that time his wife was pregnant. He thought he would have enough time for simming and the baby when it arrived, but he didn't. In his absence - once again in the absence of a strong president - the club began to fall apart. Paperwork went unattended, questions unanswered, captains began to fly off onto their own tangents, people began to leave the club, recruiting diminished, the club didn't have a viable internet presence to attract new people, and Vid became increasingly reliant on mergers to make up for the short fall. I'm not faulting him,

don't get me wrong, his family is far more important than simming, but he should have retired from the Presidency or delegated his duties to compensate for his lack of time.

Being in retirement and out of touch, I had no sense that there were major problems in the club during Vid's second term. It was only in the fall of 2002, after I had been retired for a year, that I felt an itch to sim and started to poke around the club. I quickly realized how bad things had become.

In October of 2002, Vid wisely decided not to seek reelection. Penny, a long time admiral in TOL, was elected President. On the surface, Penny had a stellar resume. She had commanded several sims, was the academy commandant, and had served the club with distinction for several years. I volunteered to help her where necessary and she gladly accepted.

The situation in the club was bad, but it could have been easily fixed. TOL was down to 65 members. Some sims had low attendance, a few were kept alive by the same core of admirals who seemed to comprise multiple crews, new recruits didn't receive any guidance and quickly left, captains were scattered, and communication was spotty. Like the situation in May 2000, the club just needed some strong leadership, a little work, and new blood to get it back on its feet. We also needed a club that was able to look at itself in the mirror, realize there were problems, and be willing to debate and fix them.

However, what we had was (a) Penny - who I thought was too nice to make a decision. (b) A culture that had shied away from debate. (c) A senior staff filled with dead wood, like Will, who would lose their seats if any changes occurred. (d) Vid, who didn't like me. (e) A whole generation of captains and simmers who were loyal to Vid. (f) My unfortunate tendency to be blunt, just show up, and take over.

## **Chapter 42: The Wisdom of the Court**

*"Let me get this straight... we have an Assembly to debate, but when we have an actual debate for once the club must be falling apart or being damaged somehow? TOL is stronger than that." - AdmChasTOL, to the Assembly. November 12, 2002.*

The first week of Penny's Presidency seemed promising. She persuaded people to stay in the club or return, and one of her first acts was to nominate me as a Court Justice. It would have been a good role for me. After all, as Penny explained, I wrote the constitution, and would be able to provide advice and answers about the government.

The Assembly met by message board and had 2 weeks to cast their votes. At first, the Assembly agreed, praised me, and began to vote me in as a justice. Then things took a drastic turn for the worst. On November 12, word reached the Court that a serious real life issue was occurring between Carrie, a long time captain, and CJ, a popular club member.

TOL precedent was clear. This was a serious real life matter, and all of our sim government was just a game. Whenever we had similar problems in the past, the President had

discretion to take whatever action was necessary to protect members, to protect the club, and to comply with the law.

The vote in the Assembly to make me a justice wasn't complete, but seeing how I was close to being approved, I met with the Court (not as a Justice, but as an advisor) and explained that in such a situation the Court was allowed to remove the person from the club without a trial. Plus it would have been very foolish for us to have a sim trial and force Carrie to testify in front of CJ. Nothing could have been more dangerous or stupid.

But to my absolute shock and horror, the justices didn't agree with me. In fact, they didn't even believe me. I don't know what happened in the year I was gone. The justices were all good people, but they must have heard some horror stories about me or something because they all honestly felt that because Carrie was my friend - was part of my old core - that I was willing to break all of the rules for her, and that I must have been out to get CJ - one of Vid's friends - for some reason or another. So, the justices decided to hold a trial. Carrie and CJ were brought into a chat room, and in front of everyone, Carrie had to explain the situation and listen to CJ belittle her and say it wasn't true.

The trial took a major emotional toll on Carrie, and half way through she ran away. I, and others, tried calling her, but no response. She literally ran away, and for a day, no one, not even her roommate, knew where she went. Luckily, she eventually turned up safe - she just had to get away from everything.

But while she was gone and no one knew what happened, I was livid. I started to call the justices all kinds of choice words and I called for their impeachment on the grounds they were complete idiots. Luckily, in their infinite wisdom, the justices agreed that CJ should be expelled from the club, and so did Penny and Vid. I told Penny and Vid to address the club to explain why CJ had been expelled, but they never did. As a result, rumors began to fly that I had forced them to kick out CJ; that Penny was a puppet of mine; that I had no respect for the Justices (this was true); that I just wanted to return and be a dictator, etc, etc, etc.

In very short order, just about everyone changed their vote to no, made speeches saying that I was no longer fit to hold a leadership position in the club, and that I should leave.

Now, up to that point in time, I had been nice. I felt the best way to fix the club's problems was to return and offer my services and advise. But that path had been rejected by the members, so I decided to speak my mind.

Attendance was dismal. Leadership was non-existent. Discipline was all but gone. It was routine for sims to start an hour late - and none of the captains seemed to care or understand this was a problem. The sims had descended into mindless blow them up action adventures that were so sloppy and poorly executed that I was embarrassed to have the TOL name attached to them. Someone needed to tell it how it was and needed to kick people into shape.

I made a series of speeches in the Assembly in which I said what I felt was wrong with the club. As far as I am concerned, my criticism was very tame and professional. It was, in fact, no different from the type of criticism I gave my captains when I ran the club. If they weren't doing their jobs, I would let them know. The entire club wasn't doing its job, so I let everyone know. I was professional, I didn't call anyone a name, I didn't make wild accusations, I backed everything up with evidence and explained as best as I could why it was a problem. And the universal response was that I was a parent who couldn't let go, that the problems weren't that bad, and that criticism was bad and anti TOL.

In my day, we had debates in the Assembly that made other clubs think that TOL was on the verge of collapse, but everyone in TOL understood it was just a debate and didn't take it personally.

Well, everyone this time took it personally.

Part of this was because most of the people from my day had long since retired, so there was no memory of how things used to be and a sense of how far we had fallen. One would think Penny and Vid knew the truth, but they said nothing.

Part of it was because during his year in office, Vid had fostered a culture that avoided debate - he liked everyone to get along and achieve a quick consensus.

But a big part of it was my own doing. When TOL revised its constitution in 2000, one of the innovations was to do away with Assembly elections. Anyone who wanted to be a member of the Assembly could become one as long as there was an open seat. At the time, we felt this would be more democratic and easier as pulling off elections on over a dozen different sims was time-consuming. However, under the 2000 constitution, when a person ended up in the Assembly, it became impossible to get rid of them. Even if they stopped simming, they retained their seat, becoming dead wood that stopped all reforms. With out an election Presidents would also make sure it was their supporters who ended up filling any open seat.

The composition of the Assembly under the 2000 constitution proved to be a fatal flaw. A sizable chunk of the Assembly took what I said personally because it targeted them personally - it was clear that I wanted to shake things up and cut out dead wood. Perhaps had we continued the requirement that the Assembly be composed of captains and one active crew member elected from each ship, the Assembly would have been willing to listen to my ideas; or perhaps they would have taken a more active role and not have allowed the club to slide to the state that it had done.

But given the makeup of the Assembly, it was not to be.

Frustrated, in private I said, "TOL is rotten, and soon it will die." Word of what I said spread, and that sealed my fate as the most hated person in the club.

So yes, I lost it and I messed up. I should have held my tongue. I should have framed my criticisms in a more positive light. But I was deeply hurt. I had given 5 years of my life to

the club, and to see people run the club - all of my hard work - into the ground and not even care or think it was a problem, was just too much for me to take. A lot of me was in that club and it was as if I was seeing myself being pulled down. If the club was doing well, and I was acting like an upset parent just because TOL was doing things differently than I would have, I would have accepted that and said so. But that was not the case. TOL was down right awful and no one was doing anything about it.

My first instinct was to keep on fighting. However, memories of my experiences with NFO, combined with memories of my ill-fated adventure to replace Will as the webmaster, kept on dancing around my head, so if the club felt I was old, out of touch, and didn't want me around, I decided it was best to disappear into the background.

### **Chapter 43: Working Behind the Scenes**

*Chas - ::while Angel is happily walking along, a canoe falls out of the sky onto her::*

*Angel - ::stops and rubs her head, confused:: Do I dare ask why there is a canoe here?*

*Clodo - I'm curious as well... let's, uh, back away from Chas ::takes steps back away from him::*

*-From a series of New Horizons Lounge message board posts, March 2003.*

Defeated politically and unable to push for any major reforms in TOL, I confined myself to the background, helping out Penny where I could, and putting on a brave face in the League in order to keep up appearances with our fellow clubs. When I found that the TOL guidebook had been reduced to a poorly written short e-mail, I wrote a new guidebook and turned it into a pdf file complete with graphics. When I found that no one had bothered to update the welcome letters for months, causing cadets to be sent information that told them to report to captains who were no longer captains and arrive to a sim at a time that no longer was correct, I updated them. Only later would I find that Penny didn't bother to use my work.

Writing about it years later, I am still besides myself. I just cannot believe the club slid that far. Things just completely stopped. Everything was frozen in time. When Vid became busy in real life, Nate, Vid's VP, did not step up to help. Penny, who was the academy commandant at the time, apparently never thought, "Humm, no one has told me, but I know that sim has a new captain, I better update the letter."

The collapse that occurred in TOL starting in the spring of 2002 and accelerated under Penny into the spring of 2003 was total. Very few people were recruited into the club, and those who did join were greeted by sloppy letters, directed to the wrong places, and found a club that was a mess. As a result, there was no new blood in the club. What was left in the club was an assortment old timers and a few officers who, for whatever reason, decided to stay put, and an ever changing cast of people who just flowed in and out of the club. The club had at most 50 members supporting a dozen sims.

To make matters worse, Star Trek was declining in popularity. Voyager was bad, Enterprise was horrible. There were fewer Star Trek fans to recruit into the club in the first place.

But there was hope, for there were several talented captains who represented a bright future for TOL. Against all odds, they kept their sims running. In most cases it was raw talent. With a proper hand who could whip them into shape, get them to start simming on time, and teach them what paperwork they needed to do to improve attendance and retain recruits, they could have been great, and TOL could have become great once again. Only if they had helped themselves by taking initiative. Only if one of them had ran for the Presidency.

But they did not because TOL had become a club where it was all about seniority and chain of command and following orders and not taking initiative and not speaking up. It was a club where someone like me was woefully out of place.

Because I was reviled and - after my "TOL is rotten" was leaked I couldn't trust many people to speak to in confidence - I limited the number of people I talked to and didn't dare appear at any sims or post on the message boards. I figured my skills and experience would compensate for the lack of real time information, but I was wrong. I remained aloof to the new generation of captains and simmers. They had no reason to doubt all the horrible impressions they had of me.

To compound matters for TOL, earlier fears that Penny was too nice to make a decision were correct, but in a mutated way. In an attempt to please everyone, she would do whatever the last person who complained to her wanted, until someone else complained. She acted nice, but all the while she would do everything she could to hold onto power. She would shift blame, saying it was my fault or someone else's fault. She would undercut any captain she thought to be a threat, and she surrounded herself with incompetent individuals to make sure no one got the better of her. When none of that worked, she would complain she wasn't feeling well and sign off.

This pattern was on full display with her handling of Ben and Gillis.

In early January 2003, the screen name Forum Ally reappeared and began to harass club members and attack sims. Penny and her gang freaked and had no idea what to do. I was away on vacation at the time, which is probably why Ben decided to attack. He had learned his lesson years ago and didn't dare mess with the club while I was around. But now that I was marginalized, and away from my computer on vacation, it was the perfect time for him to attack. All TOL really needed was a slight push and it probably would have collapsed. Ben realized this and ceased the moment to get his long delayed revenge.

Luckily for TOL, Gillis had joined the club in November - right after he resigned as the President of the Simming League. Perhaps his way of getting back at me was joining TOL, bugging me there, and seeing how many people's buttons he could push.

Gillis, as always, proved to be a great simmer, but he could never control his contempt. He would bagger people in sims, IMs, and on the message boards. He acted like he owned the club and would chew people out for the smallest infractions. Sometimes, he would yell at people for 15 minutes, sending them IM after IM. But for some reason, he became friendly with Amy and Carrie... fate was just working against me I suppose. He was seen arm in arm in TOL with two of my friends, plus, he was from the Simming League, which was my key project. For that reason, everyone thought Gillis was my friend too, and a lot of what he did was blamed on me.

Of course, Gillis and I were enemies, but we had common ground. We both saw the importance of the Simming League, and we realized the need to keep Ben under control. For those two reasons, we had a sort of understanding and were able to cut deals when it involved the League or Ben.

For that reason, when Ben attacked, Gillis didn't waste any time. He knew about TOLs earlier history with Forum Ally, and he quickly came to realize that this Forum Ally was nothing like the one from 1997. If anything, he strongly resembled Ben.

Gillis hatched a brilliant plot. He created the screen name Uridien - which the real Uridien had deleted years ago - and used it to contact Forum Ally. Pretending to be Uridien, Gillis yelled at Forum Ally and chewed him out for stealing his name and identity. Ben apologized and revealed that it was Ben. Gillis then revealed his plot and told Ben it was Gillis and he got him again. Sufficiently humbled, Ben stopped the attacks and disappeared once more.

When I returned from vacation and found out what had happened, I asked Penny to decorate Gillis. I'm all for recognizing the good people do - Gillis had stopped Ben and deserved to be recognized for it. Equally, Gillis deserved to be punished for his earlier harassment of TOL members, and I pushed for that as well. However, Penny refused to do either, and given Gillis' personality, rumors were already swirling that Gillis was Uridien from history, and that he and Ben were working together to destroy TOL.

This belief was enough to cause several of the captains - the same ones who I felt had great potential - to do what I wished they would do. They decided to take the initiative. They brought Gillis up on a number of charges, from being Uridien, to harassing club members. Although I was all for punishing Gillis for his harassment of TOL members, if he was to be punished, I wanted to make sure it was for the right things - so I pointed out that Gillis was not the Uridien from history. That charge was quickly dropped, but the others remained.

However, some of the evidence consisted of IM logs between Penny and Gillis. As a result (probably looking for a way to not have to confront Gillis) Penny argued that because she was a witness in the case, she was therefore constitutionally barred from punishing Gillis. Despite my screaming and yelling that there was no such bar, the Justices agreed with Penny's line of reasoning and the case went nowhere.



Gillis continued on in TOL, causing more headaches and getting into fights with nearly everyone in the club. If I could have kicked him out of TOL, I would have. He was a pain in everyone's side. But I had no power. Penny didn't listen to me and wouldn't take any action, and the Courts didn't believe me. The only thing that stopped Gillis - amazingly - was the Assembly. The only time they went against Penny was when she proposed to promote Gillis to captain and put him in command of a sim. The Assembly, almost unanimously, voted no.

In the middle of all of this, one of the captains, Mac, IMed me and more or less said, "I respect you, and many in the club respect you, they just don't like the fact that you are criticizing the club and not helping it out."

He gave me some good advice and I thought about what he said. As a result, I decided to throw myself back into the club and run a sim. I revived my New Horizons sim idea, and I went out and recruited a crew. In a short time, I had 15 crew members. New Horizons began simming in March of 2003, and NH quickly became the most popular sim in the club. It had the highest attendance in TOL, and instead of mindless blow them up plots that had become standard fair in TOL, we had complex plots that took advantage of the open New Horizons model.

Remember, with New Horizons, there was no set ship, background, etc. Every week, it was something new. In one sim, I set it up so that we were a cloaked Romulan ship that suffered an accident and exploded. As soon as the explosion occurred, I shifted the scene to the bridge of a Federation starship in the area that detected the explosion. I was worried how it would work, but the simmers picked up on it immediately and went with it.

For New Horizons I also created a web page and set up a Yahoo Groups to show the club all of the internet tools we had at our disposal, and how we needed them to compete in the new era.

It, however, was a major fight in the Assembly to get New Horizons approved. A significant number in the Assembly didn't want me back in command of a sim, and wondered if I could still do the job. It was only after I went out on my own and started up NH as an independent sim in February 2003 that people gave in and voted to make NH a TOL sim.

With New Horizons up and running, I felt I had turned a corner. It was March of 2003 and there was still hope for TOL. We had 50 or so members. We still had several good captains and people with potential. With proper leadership, the simmers were capable of more than mindless battles and could be counted on to show up, on time, and sim week after week. With hard work and the cutting of dead wood, we would have been able to build a new core and revive TOL. I was now fully involved. I was starting to get a sense of what was going on around me. I just needed time to fully understand all of the forces at work in TOL.

But fate once again conspired against me. In April of 2003, TOL held presidential elections, and my luck ran out. During my entire simming career, I had been lucky and was able to survive wars, mistakes, and the rest. TOL had declined far, but I was back in command of a sim and as a captain I was in a far better position to help. I didn't want to return to run

TOL, I just wanted to help, to show people how great things used to be and what needed to be done. I knew that with a little time, I could redeem myself, talk to people, get my side of the story out, and show people what TOL had been and could be again. It just didn't work out that way.

#### Chapter 44: The Mutiny

*"Due to several personal, and not so personal reasons I do hereby Tender my Resignation as Vice President and a member of this club. I will not give reason or excuses other then this is my decision. To those of you who have supported me in the last few years, I thank you most graciously and wish you luck on your way and continued simming exhistance." - AdmVidiotTOL, his resignation letter to the club, April 21, 2003.*

In the weeks before the April 2003 election, I talked with several club members, and the consensus was pretty much universal. Things were bad, but there was hope. Penny was a horrible President, but the person running against her, Nate, was even worse. Nate was a moocher. He had only risen to the heights he had in TOL by being Vid's friend, before suffering a spectacular falling out with Vid. Nate was also very narrow-minded and didn't posses key leadership or administrative skills - but neither did Penny.

In 2001, because Nate was going to be Vid's Vice President, I invited Nate to sit in on meetings where Vid and I went through a whole list of things going on in the club and I communicated to Vid everything people had told me over the last few days. All of this was designed so that when Vid took over the club, he would be aware of the issues.

I know there are a few crazy simmers out there who would have loved to be involved in such meetings, to see the inner workings of the club first hand. However, Nate found everything to be a totally futile exercise. He didn't think that I as the President should be concerned with day to day matters. Clearly, Nate was not presidential material. To top it off, he once flat out told me, "I do not like you, so I don't listen to anything you say." Apparently he wasn't the only in the club who felt that way.

In any event, Nate lost the election badly and Penny was reelected. The only people who had voted for Nate were a few captains - the very captains that I felt represented TOLs greatest hope. They weren't voting for Nate as much as they were voting against Penny. They were fed up with Penny's leadership, her attempts to under cut them, and the fact time and time again she refused to listen to their advise and let them help the club. Unknown to me, in the background, they had been busily working with Penny and pushing her to make changes. But they didn't come out in public as I had done, and with Nate being a Vice Admiral, they felt he was the next in line to run for the Presidency. None of the other captains thought about challenging Penny, it wasn't their place. I had asked them to run, but they would not hear of it because it was Nate's turn to run. "Maybe next time" was the universal reply.

If any one of them had ran, they would have defeated Penny. But it was Nate who ran, and no one in the club liked him, so he lost. But still, Nate didn't even try to win. The campaign

was non-existent, and because debate is somehow bad, there wasn't any. Penny's failing as the President went unaddressed.

So, upon her reelection, what did the captains do? Well, with the constitution, debates, the Assembly, elections, running for office, and fielding competent candidates totally unacceptable to them, they decided to mutiny. In other words, they were so afraid of debate in a sim club that they decided it was better to mutiny than to discuss the problems in open!

So, you can only imagine what I did when I signed on and I found that Vid and several of the captains were in the process of forcing Penny out as the President and arrangements were being made for Vid, as the VP, to take over - all days after Penny had been reelected. I called it a mutiny. I didn't like Penny, I didn't think she was cut out to be the President, but I wasn't going to allow a mutiny.

I E-mailed the club, explained the situation, and called it a mutiny. This, of course, didn't go over too well with Vid and the conspiring captains, all of whom promptly left the club on April 21, 2003, and took their ships and crews with them to form their own club called the Rogue Fleet Simulation Group. It didn't help that they thought they were taking a move from my playbook in 2000 when I took over for Robin - and that now I was criticizing them for what I had one previously. Of course, there were distinguishing factors - Robin willingly stepped aside, the Assembly voted for the change, and everyone was fully aware of what was going on. Still, on a general level, the two situations look similar, and I can understand why they thought me a hypocrite.

As soon as I sent out the E-mail, I knew it was a mistake. I signed online, heard the news, typed up the E-mail, and sent it. I didn't think. I didn't take time to talk to people. I didn't investigate the matter. For a year and a half relations between Vid and myself had been strained. The club had fallen apart and no one seemed to care. I was fed up that people rejected all of the channels available to them and decided to mutiny. Had I known they had been working the background with Penny to make changes and she under cut them, had I taken some time to think and realized I was being very hypocritical in criticizing Vid for getting Penny step down and return as the President, I would have supported Vid. The survival of the club and its essence was more important than the governmental system.

Before I sent the E-mail, I did IM Vid and asked him what was going on. He became upset and told me that it had been a mistake for him to have stepped aside in 2002, so he was taking the club back. (Can you imagine the reaction had I said it was a mistake for me to step aside in 2001, so I was taking the club back?) Both of us quickly became enraged, and I sent out the E-mail before Vid could announce he was the President. In that final moment, all of the years of tension and animosity between us broke and it became a race to deny the other the club we both loved so much.

With that, TOL was shattered. I and others made frantic attempts over the next few weeks to patch things back together. I made public and private appeals and apologies, and so did many others, but it was too late.

The apologies, appeals, and subsequent debates and explanations as both sides tried to explain their positions did produce some good. As all debates end up doing, they got everyone talking. Hard feelings were reduced and the captains who left came to realize that I really knew what I was talking about and that I wasn't (too) arrogant. Only if they had listened to my advice earlier they said. In the end, several of the people who left expressed to me that they no longer hated me, but they had already set their course with Vid, and it was too late to return to TOL. Perhaps if Vid had set an example and returned, they would have returned as well. But Vid's ill feelings towards me had only grown stronger, and the last thing he was going to do was return. He was fed up with me, with Penny, and with Gillis running around getting into fights with everyone.

The debates made me realize, for the first time, why people resented me so much. People didn't like my attitude of criticism and they saw me as bent on returning and controlling the club. I finally came to realize that Penny used me as a convenient excuse, telling the captains certain things couldn't be done because I had said it was not allowed by the constitution, although none of it was true, and I had often argued the exact opposite with Penny.

I learned many of the club's captains were as frustrated as I was. They had worked behind the scenes with Penny, but were rebuffed and undercut. Because they incorrectly felt I was supporting Penny, that I somehow had bent the rules to kick CJ out and keep Gillis in, and because the republic was my creation, they felt they would find no relief in elections or the Assembly. They felt they had no choice but to kick out Penny. When I seemingly rushed to Penny's rescue and condemned Vid, it only reinforced everything, and they felt they had no choice but to leave.

Only if we had more time... only if I had come back to command a sim a year earlier and started to discuss issues with the other captains... only if the split had not occurred... the same discussions that occurred after the mutiny would instead have occurred at a better time and in a better setting, and I know the outcome would have been positive. Everyone would have realized his or her faults, everyone would have gained new understanding. Feelings would have been smoothed out and people would have started to work together. We just ran out of time.

In the end, what we had was a failure to communicate. I am convinced the universe has a sense of irony, because from day one, TOL was founded upon the idea that communication would solve everything and make the club great. Communication in the form of logs, guidebooks, and newsletters. Communication in the form of community and republic.

I am confident had Trek Online continued to embrace communication after I retired from the Presidency in 2001, the club would still be alive today. But the club lost its way. It became afraid to communicate, and combined with failed leadership on my part, and from Vid, Penny, and the captains, it died.

## Chapter 45: Jellybeans Forever

*AdmChasTOL: CEO> Crud, I warned them about this :::my engineers charge forward, dodging jelly beans in an attempt to pull the plug, several are hit and go down:::*

*AdmChasTOL: =/\= CEO> CMO> Medical emergency in main engineering :::dives at the plug and pulls it out of the wall:::*

*RearAdPBTOL: ((god save the jelly bean))*

*AdmVidiotTOL: [CO]::Tapps::[CEO] Bridge to engineering? What in blue blazes is going on down. there?*

*AdmChasTOL: =/\= CEO> CO> The jelly bean we bought from that Ferengi merchant who seemed... well... a little off? It went on the fritz, shot out jelly beans and damaged some controls.*

*VivianaLazzara: CMO> ::charges into eng:: Where's the emergency!*

*AdmChasTOL: CEO> CMO> Oh, doctor, good :::points at engineers on the floor with jelly beans imbedded in them:::*

*ElRiov trIdryg: XO/Tac > NOIP > Never trust a Ferengi with jelly beans.*

*-A scene from one of the last TOL sims ever held, everyone back together, having fun on the USS Challenger, June 7, 2004.*

Going into May of 2003, all that was left of TOL were a handful of sims and simmers. Our most promising captains and simmers had left the club - either to follow Vid, or just to get away from the mess that was TOL. What was left were very old timers like myself, Penny, Matt, Amy, and Carrie, and a handful of people who decided to stick around. The only sim at the time that was simming was New Horizons, although Penny managed to reenergize her sim, the Challenger, and Matt, upon hearing the news of the mutiny, returned to rebuild the Endeavor.

Despite my stubbornness, I do learn from my mistakes. After the mutiny it was clear that TOL needed major structural reforms. The republic and constitution as it existed had to go. During May and June, I worked with Penny and Matt to draft a new constitution for the club. Language was streamlined and many of the detailed requirements were eliminated. That way, the important elements were kept in place, but each successive President would be free to structure the government how he or she wished.

The court system was eliminated. The courts and justices had failed the club time and time again, so we decided to do away with them. We returned to the old simple system first outlined in the Members Rights Document in 1997 - the president or captain would give out a punishment, the person could appeal, and a group of people would hear the appeal. Robin had

been right, the courts turned out to be a pressure cooker. I just wish I had listened to her warnings about the courts in 1998. The cost to TOL was tremendous. Because of the courts, we had two fiascos - with CJ and Gillis - that directly contributed to the downfall of TOL.

Secondly, the Presidency became more parliamentary. At any time, the Assembly could call for new elections, and at any time the President could retire and hold new elections. This was designed to eliminate the burdens Robin and Vid felt - that despite the circumstances, they had to stay on and finish out their term. It was also designed to eliminate the desperation the captains felt when faced with the realization they had to put up with Penny for another term.

I still feel strongly about the need for some sort of republican system in simming. People should have a voice in their club. There should be elections and a council of some kind. There should be a written document that keeps everyone on the same page, but in the end I became too attached to my particular way of doing things. I squashed attempts by Vid and the captains and others to try it their own way, with disastrous consequences.

At the same time the new constitution was being drafted and enacted, I tried to work with Penny to rebuild the club.

To help rebuild the website - parts of which said it was the year 2002 and Vid was the President - I lined up people in the Simming League to help build a new site for TOL. But once again, Will would not go, and Penny refused to fire him.

I also tried to update the guidebook, recruit new simmers and captains, and rebuild the academy. I even offered to run the academy, but Penny shot me down and ordered me to stop.

By July, I was completely fed up. I asked Penny to resign, I begged her to resign, I called on her in public to resign. Finally, under the new constitution, I made a motion to the Assembly to hold new elections.

The problem was that in order to get the new constitution approved, I wasn't able to modify the Assembly - it remained a collection of the active sim captains, plus all of the old timers who held a seat. I figured I would fight that battle another day. Yet, those remaining old timers were Penny's friends.

They refused to call a new election.

But that was not all. As the discussion in the Assembly dragged on, a growing consensus deemed the entire thing a plot to allow me to return to the Presidency - which it was not, I had no desire to serve - I had already made that mistake in 2000 - and Matt had made clear he intended to run if there was another election. Most intolerably, members of the Assembly began to claim there wasn't anything wrong with Penny. They argued she was a great president and that my sim should be smashed for opposing her. That was the final straw. I decided to stop trying.

On July 13, I addressed the crew of New Horizons and resigned from TOL.

"To my crew,

I am resigning from command of New Horizons and from the sim club it is a part of, Trek Online. For seven years I have given my time and even money to make Trek Online a wonderful place to sim and relax. Over the past year, however, the club has experienced great decline, both as a result of the actions of some, and the inaction's of those who complain in private but do not support me when I try to take actions in public to fix the problems.

Over the past months I have tried my best to save Trek Online. We were once a club that was full of proud and fun sims like New Horizons, but today, New Horizons is the only decent sim left in the club.

Over the past week I have become particularly fed up with the situation in the club, and yesterday I sent an E-mail to all of the other captains calling on our current President to resign due to her failure to solve the problems in the club. When she became the President, we had about 70 members. Today we have about 30. I said that while I would prefer it if she were to resign so that new leadership could give the club a fighting chance, if she decided to stay, I would rather want to see TOL just disband here and now so that the club could take its rightful place as a great memory instead of dragging out an agonizing existence.

These comments of mine were viewed by my fellow esteemed captains to be treasonous. After all of the time and effort I have given to this club, after all of my hard fought battles to make this club a republic where everyone could have a voice and express themselves freely, to be called a traitor and to be shown the level of ingratitude from former friends and colleagues that I have been shown is too much for me to bare.

While I no longer have any loyalty to those who pretend that they are somehow leading TOL, I still have a tremendous amount of loyalty to the club that I served for seven years. I will not secede from it and take this sim to start up a new club. Therefore, that is why I am resigning.

My only source of enjoyment in the club over these past few months has been with New Horizons and all of you. Each one of you is a fine simmer and together we were a wonderful crew. It saddens me to have to leave, but I can no longer deal with the club. It clearly does not want to be saved and it clearly does not want me to be a part of it, and by extension, it clearly does not want any of you to be part of it either. One of my fellow captains bragged to me just tonight about how he wanted to smash my crew just to prove that I do not know what I am talking about when I say New Horizons is a great sim.

If you wish to pick a new captain and continue to sim in TOL, please do so. If you wish to pick a new captain and sim outside of TOL, please do so. If you wish to disband and go your own ways, please do so.

Hopefully, our paths will cross again,

=/\=

Chas"

Thus, after 4 months of simming, New Horizons came to an end. We had an impressive simming record, which was as follows:

Death of the entire crew - 4

Mutiny - 2

Crash landing - 3

Inflicting mass casualties - 1

Extreme violation of the Prime Directive - 1

Bar Fight - 1

Actually doing something constructive - 1

Saving someone - 1

Other - 2

Exposing a counter government with in the Federation - 0

Killing an entire species to save our own and inadvertently winning a war - 1

(Having a sim where everything reset at the end of the night was very wonderful indeed, and despite the TOL silliness, the sims actually were very professional.)

After everything I had done for TOL, after the years of service, it was a very ignominious end. The club - or what was left of it - simply did not want to be helped or recognize that there were problems.

A few weeks after I resigned, and for a reason I don't know, Penny resigned as the President and Matt took over. But Matt wasn't up to the job either. He didn't sign on much, tried to avoid decisions, and resigned a few months later. Penny returned to the Presidency, and for a year, the shattered ruins of Trek Online continued to sim. It was a pathetic sight,



Penny and some people would muster together every so often to hold a Challenger or Endeavor sim.

Towards the end though, old animosities were put aside and Penny, Vid, and myself simmed together on the Challenger on a few occasions, knowing that the club was already dead and wishing it had not ended as it had.

On July 27, 2004, Penny E-mailed me and said that TOL was dead. She had given up on the Challenger and was disbanding the sim. The Endeavor had revolted and became an independent sim, and everyone else had left TOL. She told me I had won and that the club was now mine if I wanted to rebuild it. I replied that she still didn't get it. It wasn't about me. I didn't want the club. I didn't want to return as the President. I just wanted to help.

Perhaps in earlier years I would have taken up the offer and tried to revive the club, but I had already been the president twice and had simmed for a decade. There was nothing more for me to do or prove, and after so many years simming just wasn't as fun as it had been. Trek Online had a great run. It was just our time to end and become a cherished memory. Sure, I wish it had ended differently - everyone did. It still hurts that I wasn't shown the respect I thought I had earned after giving so much to the club, but I understand why it happened and where I was at fault.

I learned much about myself during my years in TOL and I made many lasting friendships. I still dabble in the Simming League, and many people from Trek Online have gone on to start up new clubs or become high-ranking officers elsewhere. When asked, I provide advise and help them where I can, knowing they're having as much fun as I did when I ran TOL.

Trek Online lasted nearly 8 years, a remarkable achievement in the simming world. We provided enjoyment and an online home for thousands. At our height, we were considered to be one of the best. We defined our generation and helped to change simming for the better. We had a great run. Who knew that a ban of misfits connected only by words on the screen could do so much, last so long, and have that much fun?

The club will always be a part of me.

I do miss it...

To all of you who were members of Trek Online, the Simming League, Star Trek Sims, STECO, ORS, and whose virtual paths I crossed over the years... my friends, enemies, and everyone in-between, thank you. Thank you for your help and the challenges; patience, hard work, perseverance, and remarkable dedication; from the bottom of my heart, thank you for everything you taught me and the fun you provided.

Jelly beans forever.

# My Simming Memoirs

## Part 7: Memories



The Flag of Trek Online

Over the years, TOLers have sent in their memories of the club, which I've posted here. If you have something to include, please let me know.

Vice Admiral Kris 'Scott' Perry, Member 1996 - 1997, CO of the USS Independence 1996 - 1997, Vice President 1997, President (for a day in 1997). Scott and I had our differences, but in the end he always came through. The club would never have become a republic without him.

Written in 1997.

Scott's memories were included in MSM as Chapter 20.

Major General Kyle Sanz, Member 1997 - 2001, CO IKS Dark Falcon 1998 - 2001, Vice President 2000. One of the greatest COs TOL ever had.

Written in 2000.

TOL was my first sim club, and though I've been in several since, the club has either completely fallen apart, or I have either left due to the dissatisfaction of the club.

Neither of these apply with TOL. I guess once you've had the best, you can never go back! One thing to remember, something I've learned very recently, if not before. TOL has hit quite a few lows in the distant as well as recent past. But through it all, TOL has managed to

stand tall, in the end. This is due to the fact that TOL has a strong foundation. The least of what matters to me is the amount of people and the superiority or size of Trek Online.

The main focus is quality, not quantity. And though some may consider TOL "small," it holds the most enjoyable sims I have ever attended, has numerous wonderful activities for all tastes, and has helped me form many friendships online.

In ten words or less, Trek Online is an absolutely outstanding and enjoyable simming club.

The Kyle has spoken...

::crawls back into hole::

Lieutenant Jamie Cole, Member 1999 - 2002, Served on several ships including the USS Stonewall, Wrightstown, Vindicator, Endeavor, and Challenger. A friend to all and a playful troublemaker who liked to keep us on our toes.

Written in 2004.

Chas...Put that Phaser down, I'm writing the Chapter already. Sheesh...you talk to the former President of TOL for one night...and he threatens your life. I mean I didn't smite him...much.

My time was on and off with TOL, but I always came back because it was fun. Clodo, Chas, Ditto, Angel...All of them were fun and funny people that I associated with on a continual basis.

On the Stonewall and the Vindicator fun was always there to be had. Angel and I tortured the commanding officers. And Chas and Clodo always got us back by sending us to Fruck, which was usually a one way ticket unless the commanding officers gave you a 'Get out of Fruck Free' pass.

I enjoyed my time with TOL, and was sorry to hear that it had been dissolved during our conversation. Darn...I can't torture anyone anymore with Mel Brooks based plotlines...

Anyhow I don't know what else to say at this time...Oh yeah..EAT YOUR JELLYBEANS...

Lt Jamie Cole, commentator and troublemaker

Commander Gnoof, Member 1997 - 1999, Served as the Chief of Security on the USS Vindicator and First Officer on the ISS Vorta. Good ol' Goof, he embodied TOL.

Written in 2004

Working on a little something about TOL. I was looking through what I've got left as far as logs and such and found this one. Remember this sim? Heh.

*After phasing back into our reality from a strange, dimensional disturbance (sometimes referred to as a "phone call"), I joined Security Officer Chas in his duties. Meanwhile, word of deadly poisonings had been spreading.*

*Chas and I were monitoring a prisoner in the brig. During some minor weapon maintenance, my phaser was accidentally fired, striking and killing Chas. I was unable to fully engage proper misfire procedure before a second Chas entered the room. In a nearby room, the head of security and the captain were in some sort of meeting. The second Chas quickly answered the captain's request for water, rushing off before I could question his presence. The captain died suddenly after consuming the water. At the order of my superior, I stopped the fleeing second Chas using a little more force than desired, vaporizing him. While we tried to fully understand the situation, news of more poisonings arrived and a third Chas appeared. Though I can't remember the exact details, it was revealed that the numerous Chas appearances were caused by a cloning machine hidden in another part of the ship. Not wishing to leave the messy scene in the brig, I transported the various bodies into Chas' quarters. We proceeded to the cloning machine.*

*The events, at this point, are difficult to understand and recall. The cloning machine was revealed. I never quite understood the insidious plot behind the device, though insidious I'm sure it was. Chaos broke out in the room, at one point involving a 9mm. I was ordered to dismantle the cloning machine and went to it. The machine exploded in the process. The events after this point are a bit hazy, probably due to the machine that had just exploded in my face. I only recall that the decision was made to allow the current Chas clone to live and that the real Chas eventually showed. He had apparently been tied up in his quarters the entire time. Slacker.*

Commodore Hailey 'Angel' Mithok, Member 1998 - 2004, Served on many ships over the years, but most notably as the First Officer of the epic Viper Flight sim with General Shane. She was one of the most loyal and dedicated club members we had. Angel, Thank you...

Written in 2004.

Since 1998 I've had different computers and lost a lot of my old TOL files. I'm going to try my best to tell my story to the best of my memory. I apologize if some things are wrong or if I forget a few things.

### *An Unforgettable Beginning*

The summer of 1998 - I recieved an IM from a man that I would later come to know, his name was Matt, talking to me about joining Trek Online. Being the avid Star Trek fan I was, I thought it was a good idea. The same day, in a very unorthodox recruiting method, I recieved an email from a very talented Captain, the woman was who go on to marry Charlie, lead the MiB and someone I would come to respect and learn a lot from. I signed up for Trek Online and chose the USS Wrightstown, under Capt Oden, as my first assignment.

After a few reschedulings, I finally went through training. My instructor was the infamous Robin, who some thought for a long time was partly responsible for my troublemaking ways. She taught me everything I could ever need to know about the basics of simming and then she decided that to get my feet wet, so to speak, Robin had me join in the final 10 minutes of the USS Vindictor sim and Charlie happened to be the Captain.

I began simming on the USS Wrightstown just as there was a captain change. I am still not sure to this day what happened to Captain Oden, but Bo Duke took over. I was there for several months and I got my barrings as a simmer.

### *The Start My Uphill Climb*

As my life tends to go, even though I was having a wonderful time aboard the Wrightstown, I transfered to the USS Stonewall under Captain Clodo. It happened to be a great career move for me, even though that is not what I was intending.

I gained tons of experience aboard the Stonewall and got to know most of the members of TOL. And as I gained more confidence, I joined other sims or visited other sims. I would serve on many different ships but none would be memorable until I was giving my first opportuntiy to command.

### *My First Command Experience*

Great friends can make the worst enemies. The USS Charleston was started up with a then good friend, Captain Malu. I was choosen to be her first officer. I was flattered to be choosen since I had never been in charge.

My time on the ship was a rocky one for many reasons. She and I had a lot of conflicts while we ran the sim. We fought over everything - to say the least - and Charlie was our mediator.

When Malu and I got along, we made a great command team, and I helped host our sim during the SciWorld Online Convention. I had a great sense of accomplishment and also

happened to meet some well known people, like Admiral Shuni, that I would not encounter again for another 4 years.

During my time aboard the Charleston, and at the recommendation of Chief Justice Anne and Justice Malu I was appointed to the TOL Courts.

Due to Malu's life keeping her away from responsibilities as a captain, and my life being just the same, and with the conflicts between Malu and I, we went our separate ways. She retired and left TOL. I went on to bigger and better things and the USS Charleston was decommissioned.

### *My One 'Case'*

During my time on the bench we hardly saw anything more than being in charge of the elections. I remember one case coming through the courts. Ben and whoever were his allies were trying to come back to TOL and reclaim the sim Viper Flight. After going through the pages of the TOL Constitution and talking with my fellow judges on the bench we managed to keep Viper Flight as a part of the TOL fleet.

It wasn't much of a case, but as long as I served on the bench, until my retirement from the Court in 2000, and until TOL's disband in 2004, there were maybe one or two more 'cases' to be placed on the desk of the courts.

### *Viper Flight*

Viper Flight was and still is my pride. I joined Viper Flight under Captain Mars (for those who don't know that is Charlie). I created a character by the name of Hailey Mithok, and over the years she has become a part of me. Mars eventually stepped down as the CO and handed the reins over to Cosari Shane. I was named First Officer.

Shane and I worked hard with a crew of 4 people - Shane, Sargon, Rouge and myself. We spent a long time creating a storyline of a group known as the Elite and it grew into an epic sim.

Over Viper Flight's history we gained and lost many crew. Unfortunately by the end of Viper Flight's time in TOL it was only Shane and I who were left, working hard to keep our creation active. But as fate would have it, she and TOL slowly faded into the horizon.

To this day Viper Flight is still my proudest work and though it is no longer an active sim, Shane and I still write the storyline for Shane, Hailey, the Elite and the characters we have created over the years.

Admiral Robin Knight, Member 1997 - 2001, CO ISS Vorta, USS Valkyrie, and Dark Forge Station, President 2000. Robin was Ms. TOL, she was everything that was good about the club.

Written in 2004.

Robin's memories were included in MSM as Chapter 35.

Commander Gillis, Member 2002 - 2003, First Officer on Starbase Gemini and the USS Generation. Gillis played a major role in the final years of TOL.

Written in 2004.

Gillis' memories were included in MSM as Chapter 40.