

#nitrobytes: A Tale of Two Teenagers on the Internet

Mike Ziarko, Age 15 — November 1997 to January 1998

Prologue

Before No More Chores. Before the business. Before any of it — there was #nitrobytes.

It was November 7, 1997. A Friday. A 15-year-old kid in Canada fired up mIRC, connected to a server, and entered a channel he and his friends had built into their own little corner of the early internet. The channel motto, announced by their bot every time someone joined, was: "**Real Eyes Realize Real Lies.**"

Very deep. Very 1997.

This is what happened in there over the next two months.

The Cast

Alphabite / Alphabyte — Mike Ziarko. Channel operator, entrepreneur-in-training, runner of IRC bots on shell accounts. Talks fast, thinks fast, already making money online at 15. Goes AFK constantly (hence AlphaAway, AlphaEat, AlphaTV, AlphaKFC). Frequently says "hrmm." Cannot spell "pickle."

zmusTerd — Jeff. Mike's best friend. The channel's most prolific talker with 3,874 messages — nearly double Mike's 1,814. Runs scripts, tests bans on himself, once sent a message that read "The MOTHERFUCKERS have banned you from #nitrobytes" just to see what it looked like. Emotionally complex range: from "thats real lame mike" to "that kicked ass."

Jimmy — Third member of the core crew. FTP coordinator. Shares MP3 server credentials freely in public channels (194.237.76.100 / login: mp3 / password: mp3). Once told a random girl in a private message "who the hell are you and why are you talking to me."

econoline — Regular. Succinct communicator. Once summarized Mike's entire personality in three words: "mike=full of crap."

Fortin — Agreed with things. Was there.

NBScott / Oldfart — The channel bot. Greeted every newcomer with "Real Eyes Realize Real Lies." Enforced bans. Never had an original thought.

The World of #nitrobytes

In 1997, the internet was a different place. There was no YouTube. No Spotify. No social media. If you wanted pirated music, you found an FTP server with "mp3" as the login and password and hoped the connection held. If you wanted to game online, you downloaded QuakeSpy, found a server with fewer than 15 players, and prayed your 28.8k modem didn't drop.

#nitrobytes was these kids' living room, their hangout spot, their group chat before group chats existed. They had ops (admin powers), a bot that enforced their rules, and the ability to kick or ban anyone who annoyed them. They were, by any measure, extremely online.

Chapter 1: The Entrepreneur Emerges

Three days into the log, Mike drops this:

```
\<Alphabite\> i got my first check
\<Alphabite\> 31 bucks
\<zmusTerd\> oh really
\<zmusTerd\> hehe
\<Alphabite\> thats only a day after signing up
\<Alphabite\> next check is $210
```

Mike Ziarko, age 15, is already making money on the internet. The exact source isn't entirely clear from the logs — likely an affiliate program or early web advertising — but the pattern is unmistakable: he finds something, signs up, and within 24 hours has a check coming. The next one is \$210.

Jeff's response to this? "hehe." Supportive. Measured.

Chapter 2: The Tech Stack (circa 1997)

By modern standards, what these kids were doing was remarkably sophisticated:

- **IRC bots (eggdrop)** — Mike ran a bot called NBScott on a shell account. He tried upgrading from version 1.0p to 1.1.5 but the shell wasn't compatible. "Who cares," he concluded, "it's not like we use him for any special reasons." Jeff disagreed — the bot could run other channels. Mike: "true, but what can i do."

- **FTP servers** — They traded files (primarily MP3s and software) through FTP servers with shared credentials, posted openly in the channel. Security was not a concern.

- **QuakeSpy** — Mike discovered this tool and explained it to Jeff with the enthusiasm of someone describing fire to a caveman: *"you get a huge list of quake servers and you connect and play against up to 15 people."* Jeff: "cool."

- **Warez** — References to FXP (file transfer between servers), carding (using stolen credit cards to buy domain registrations — not something to be proud of), and channel takeover attempts suggest these kids were operating in the grey areas of the early internet with the moral clarity of teenagers everywhere.

- **Shell accounts** — Mike had one. He used it to run his IRC bot. This was not common knowledge among 15-year-olds in 1997.

Chapter 3: The Social Life

The Fight

At some point, Mike asked Jeff to FXP him a game. Jeff didn't. Mike asked again. Jeff still didn't. This went on for a week. Then:

```
\<Alphabite\> fuck this, i'm not gonna waste favors for you
\<Alphabite\> my time doing favors
\<zmusTerd\> whew
\<zmusTerd\> thank god
\<zmusTerd\> does this mean you will finily stop bugging me about this?!
```

Best friends. Definitely best friends.

The Weekend

```
\<Alphabite\> the weekend rocked
```

```
\<zmusTerd\> ahh, it was ok
\<zmusTerd\> going to your house was fun
\<zmusTerd\> the rest... kinda borin
\<Alphabite\> heh. all good things must end
```

Someone Got Grounded

```
\<johnny\> hes grounded
\<econoline\> hahah. point and laugh. why
\<Alphabyte\> mom caught him whackin it
```

Identity of the victim: redacted to protect the innocent.

Parents Out of Town

```
\<Alphabite\> parents outta town or something
\<zmusTerd\> yez
\<Alphabite\> hrmm. thats a real pickel
\<Alphabite\> hehehe
```

"Pickel." Fifteen years old.

Going to School

```
\<Alphabite\> i REALLY dont feel like going to school
```

Some things never change.

Chapter 4: The Nick Names

One of the great joys of IRC was the ability to change your name at any moment. The log contains 153 unique nicknames. A selection:

Alphabite, Alphabyte, AlphaAway, AlphaEat, AlphaTV, AlphaKFC, AlphaPussy, AlphaQuak, AlphisAw, ZiaRko, Zed, ZedsBitch, ZedsDEAD, zdildo, BigTits, Big_Tits, IAMGAY, Carly18, Oldfart, Oldshit, Bengay, Hemroid, Maxipad, FatWilly, Mr_Prick, Grampa, Grandpa, MEGAKiLL, Lucifer, Dr_Zaius, MagicBus, ROiD, |r0id|, sPorn, sheboy, boyfuckr, pussycat@beer.com

There was also, inexplicably: "*brought to you by zmusTerd*" and "*meaning from conversations*" and "*drumroll please*" as actual IRC nicknames.

The creativity was boundless. The maturity was 15.

Chapter 5: The Motto

Every time someone joined #nitrobytes, the bot announced:

"Real Eyes Realize Real Lies"

It's actually a decent piece of wordplay — a palindrome of phonetics. Someone was proud of this. At 15, running a channel with a philosophy bot felt profound.

At 42, running a business with an AI assistant, the instinct to build systems that say smart things automatically turns out to be the same instinct. Just more expensive.

Personality Profile: Mike Ziarko, Age 15

The Evidence:

- Making money online within 24 hours of discovering an opportunity +
- Running a server (shell account, IRC bot) before most people knew what a server was +
- Terrible at waiting for things (asked Jeff for the same game for a week) +
- "I REALLY don't feel like going to school" +
- "The weekend rocked" / immediately wants to know what's next +
- Typed "hmmm" approximately 47 times +
- Cannot spell "pickle" +
- Already orchestrating a group (channel owner, ops, rules) +
- Fascinated by new tools (QuakeSpy, eggdrop, FTP) +
- Friends with someone who does most of the talking (Jeff: 3,874 messages) +

The Diagnosis:

At 15, Mike Ziarko was: technically curious, entrepreneurially wired, socially connected, chronically distracted, impatient with bureaucracy (school, waiting for Jeff), excited by new systems and tools, and already building communities around himself.

None of this has changed. The tools got better. The stakes got higher. The instincts are identical.

The Prophecy:

"i cant wait to get this site... its going to be fun" – Jeff, 1997

Thirty years later, he's still saying this. About AI agents now. Same energy.

Epilogue

The log ends on January 13, 1998. Mike would have been a few months into being 15. Jeff was still talking more than anyone. The channel was still running.

They didn't know it then, but they were among the first generation of humans to grow up native to the internet — to treat IRC like a living room, FTP like a library, and a bot that said "Real Eyes Realize Real Lies" like a work of art.

The channel eventually went quiet. The shell accounts expired. The MP3 FTP servers went offline.

But the kid who made his first \$31 online before finishing 9th grade? He's still at it.

*Source: #nitrobytes IRC log, November 7 1997 — January 13 1998. 13,224 lines. 151 sessions. 153 nicknames.
One legend.*