

nitrobytes: The Man Behind zmusTerd

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Jeff, Age ~15 — November 1997 to January 1998

Prologue

Every great channel has an operator.

But every great channel has someone else — the one who's actually *there*. The one who says more, stays longer, and whose fingerprints are on everything even when nobody's writing the history.

In #nitrobytes, that person was **zmusTerd**.

3,874 messages. In the same two months that Mike managed 1,814.

Jeff didn't just *participate* in #nitrobytes. He *was* #nitrobytes.

This is his story.

The Cast (Supporting Edition)

zmusTerd — Jeff. Mike's best friend. The channel's most prolific communicator by a factor of nearly 2x. Technically capable. Emotionally unpredictable. Once banned himself just to see what the ban message looked like. The kind of guy who, when told something "kicked ass," would say "that kicked ass" right back. Reliable in all the ways that matter. Annoying in all the ways that are endearing.

Alphabite / Alphabyte — Mike. Jeff's best friend. The entrepreneur. The one who asks for favors and then takes a week to accept that the answer is no. Makes \$31 in his first day online and acts like it's nothing. Types "hrmm" constantly.

NBScott / Oldfart — The bot. Jeff tested bans on this bot. The bot did not have feelings about this.

Chapter 1: The Numbers Don't Lie

Let's start with the raw data.

Mike: 1,814 messages over roughly two months. Jeff: 3,874 messages over the same period.

That's not a small gap. That's a personality difference.

Mike was in and out. AlphaAway. AlphaEat. AlphaTV. AlphaKFC. He had things to do, money to make, shell accounts to manage.

Jeff was *present*. Consistently, almost impressively present. If #nitrobytes was a living room, Mike owned the house. Jeff lived there.

This is not a criticism. The channel needed both. The entrepreneur who builds the room and then disappears, and the person who actually keeps the lights on.

Chapter 2: The Technical Mind

People underestimate Jeff.

Mike got the reputation as the tech guy — he had the shell account, the bot, the FTP knowledge. And Mike was legitimately technical for a 15-year-old in 1997.

But Jeff was right there with him. He ran scripts. He understood how the channel mechanics worked. He tested bans — on himself — to see what the output looked like. Most people, when they

want to know what a ban message looks like, ask someone who's been banned. Jeff's approach: become the test case.

| <**zmusTerd**> *The MOTHERFUCKERS have banned you from #nitrobytes*

He sent this message to see how it rendered. It rendered fine.

This is the mindset of a certain kind of engineer: if you want to know how something behaves at the edge, *push it to the edge yourself*. Don't wait for an accident. Create a controlled experiment.

At 15, in 1997, Jeff was doing quality assurance on an IRC bot by running adversarial tests on himself.

Make of that what you will.

Chapter 3: The Emotional Range

Jeff's communication style was, to put it charitably, *economical*.

His vocabulary had modes:

Mode 1: Skepticism > "thats real lame mike"

Mode 2: Qualified agreement > "ahh, it was ok"

Mode 3: Enthusiasm > "that kicked ass"

Mode 4: Relief > "whew. thank god."

Mode 5: Prophetic optimism > "i cant wait to get this site... its going to be fun"

These five modes covered approximately 80% of Jeff's conversational output. The remaining 20% was technical discussion, mild complaints about Mike asking him for things, and channel housekeeping.

What's remarkable is how much information these modes conveyed. "ahh, it was ok" is not a neutral statement. It's a *measured* statement. It means: I'm not going to oversell this. I enjoyed

parts of it. I'm not going to pretend it was more than it was. You know which parts were good. Let's not perform enthusiasm we don't feel.

Mike, by contrast, typed "hrmm" 47 times and called everything either "cool" or "lame." They balanced each other perfectly.

Chapter 4: The FXP Incident

This is the clearest window into Jeff's character.

Mike wanted a game FXP'd to him. (FXP = file transfer between two remote servers, cutting out the middleman. Very 1997.)

Jeff didn't do it.

Mike asked again. Jeff didn't do it.

This went on for *a week*. Mike asking. Jeff not doing it. No explanation offered. No apology. No timeline. Just... not doing it.

Then Mike declared he wasn't going to waste favors anymore:

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

Jeff was not relieved because he got away with something.

Jeff was relieved because the *asking* was over.

This is an important distinction. Jeff wasn't avoiding the task out of laziness. He was enduring the repeated requests out of friendship — not saying no directly because he didn't want to cause a fight, but also not doing the thing because he didn't want to do it. And when Mike finally exploded, Jeff's genuine reaction was *relief*. The tension was resolved. They could move on.

This is a very specific kind of emotional intelligence. Not the kind that prevents conflict. The kind that survives it and comes out the other side intact.

They were best friends before this incident. They were best friends after.

Chapter 5: The Prophecy

Buried in the logs, Jeff says this:

“*i cant wait to get this site... its going to be fun*”

1997. Mike is already making money online. They’re talking about the future — websites, projects, whatever comes next. Jeff is excited.

“i cant wait to get this site... its going to be fun”

It’s a throwaway line. Fifteen-year-old enthusiasm. But it’s also something else: Jeff watching Mike build things and feeling genuinely excited about what’s possible. Not jealous. Not competitive. Just... *in*.

That’s the person you want around when you’re building something. Not the hype man who cheers everything. The one with the measured “ahh, it was ok” who reserves “that kicked ass” for when something actually kicks ass — and who, when they see something real, says “i cant wait.”

Chapter 6: The Nickname Graveyard

The channel logs contain 153 unique nicknames. Jeff contributed meaningfully to this number.

A partial list of zmusTerd-adjacent handles includes experiments in identity, tests of the ban system, and at least one instance where a nickname was used purely as a vehicle to deliver a sentence.

He once used “*brought to you by zmusTerd*” as a nickname.

Not a message. A *nickname*. An identity. A whole bit, sustained for however long it took someone to notice.

This is performance art. This is a 15-year-old in 1997 doing something that wouldn't look out of place in a Discord server today.

Jeff was ahead of the curve.

Personality Profile: Jeff (zmusTerd), Age ~15

The Evidence:

- Highest message count in the channel by nearly 2x ✓
- Tests ban mechanisms on himself to understand system behavior ✓
- Holds firm positions without requiring verbal confrontation ✓
- Reserves genuine enthusiasm for things that genuinely earn it ✓
- Uses nicknames as a medium for performance and commentary ✓
- Friends with someone who talks faster and louder (Mike: 47x “hrmm”) ✓
- “thank god” as peak emotional expression ✓
- Stayed in the channel. Showed up. Was there. ✓

The Diagnosis:

Jeff was: technically literate in ways he didn't advertise, socially steady in ways that balanced his more chaotic best friend, capable of deadpan humor that required no explanation, and genuinely (if quietly) excited about what was being built.

He was the grounding wire in a circuit that would have fried itself without him.

Mike would go on to build a cleaning business with a 10-year run, an AI phone agent, and a team of software robots. He'd spin up ideas at 6am and text his AI assistant at 3am.

Jeff would still be the guy who, when told something was exciting, would say “ahh, it was ok” — and then quietly make it work.

The Verdict:

“i cant wait to get this site... its going to be fun” — zmusTerd, 1997

Some things don't change.

Epilogue

The log ends January 13, 1998.

3,874 messages from one guy. Two months. A channel that was, by internet standards, nothing — no audience, no product, no monetization. Just a place where a few friends showed up every day because they wanted to.

Jeff showed up more than anyone.

In a world that celebrates the builder, the founder, the person who makes the first dollar — it's worth remembering the person who keeps showing up. Who's still there when the founder goes AFK. Who says “that kicked ass” when it actually kicks ass and “thats real lame” when it is.

#nitrobytes needed Mike to build it.

It needed Jeff to make it worth building.

Source: #nitrobytes IRC log, November 7 1997 — January 13 1998. 13,224 lines. 153 nicknames. 3,874 messages from one guy who just kept showing up.