

My First Decade at The Orgy

by **Vesperae**

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In the Summer of 2000, UC Santa Cruz released its first working map of the [Human Genome Project](#) online.

The world had somehow managed to survive the Y2K bug and widespread anxieties anticipating technological armageddon. Barack Obama was an Illinois State Senator. Microsoft was putting together an appeals strategy after being declared a monopoly in U.S. District Court. The massively over inflated dot-com market speculation bubble had unceremoniously burst and collapsed. Napster forced people to consider the meaning of copyright and intellectual property in the digital age for the first time.

Survivor

and the first U.S. version of

Big Brother

pushed the collective acceptance of our voyeuristic tendencies to new extremes of "reality."

[American Beauty](#)

was the Academy Award winner for best picture. DVDs and DVD players were becoming affordable for the mass market, and Netflix was in its first full year of business. Facebook, YouTube, MySpace, and Twitter hadn't been imagined yet, and very few people had ever heard of hanging chads, Al-Qaeda, or Haliburton.

July 7, 2000 was an unseasonably warm and sunny Friday in Seattle, WA, and I passed the time at work in a very distracted state. I was expecting a package. And what was in the package was something that I knew would change my life in ways that I could only begin to imagine.

The package was from my best friend, a graphic designer, who lived half way across the country. He'd decided to replace his virtually new iMac with a G4, since he needed a little more processing and memory muscle and a larger monitor for the work that he was doing at home. I'd scraped together what little money I had, sent him a check for the "fair best friend" price, and was anxiously awaiting FedEx Ground to deliver the opportunity to take my first totally private spin on the Information Superhighway. He called me that morning to let me know that the package was out for delivery, and I knew that that night, I was going to get to do it for the first time. I had already set up an ISP account, as well as setting up an area in my apartment with a table, special lighting complete with a dimmer switch, a surge protector, and a phone modem cable line. I was ready.

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I'd been a print subscriber to *Smoke Signals Magazine* for a little more than a year, and I'd also discovered several adult magazines that had done articles and pictorials related to the SF, including a British publication called *Tea*

ser,

as well as the American publications

Taboo

and

Leg Show.

I had also acquired a

Smoke Signals Magazine

subscriber sampler video, all of the White Stone videos, as well as several Up In Smoke videos via mail order, so I was well aware that The Community existed, but that I had very likely only begun to scratch the surface of the SF content that was available both online, and for order online.

To say that my initial offline introduction to the SFC had been exciting would be the grossest of understatements. It was thrilling and liberating and transformative in all of the ways that virtually all of us experienced when we first discovered that we weren't alone. But more than that, it was absolutely delicious to realize that there were others like us who were knowingly pursuing the creation of content designed to appeal to our hidden, unusual desires. But to be able to instantly *connect* with these people? To be able to actually *interact* with them? To be able to access content from all over the world *at any time*?

Magazines and VHS tapes that arrived through the mail were one thing, but I shivered with anticipation inside at what might be found online, in the privacy of my home, where there was no possibility of anyone wandering by and looking over my shoulder, or of anyone who might have an interest in and access to a browser history.

Shortly before 5, the FedEx driver arrived. My heartbeat rose like thunder in my chest as I signed for the package, and continued to pound as I called for a cab to deliver me and my new toy to my apartment; I'd decided to leave early, since I knew that I'd be useless for the rest of my shift, and since my supervisor (a raging alcoholic who I'd been carrying for the better part of a year) owed me a bunch of favors anyway.

Running on sheer adrenaline, I wrestled the bulky 80 lb. parcel by myself up to the third floor of the aging brick building that I lived in on Capitol Hill, locked the door, and began unpacking. The excitement was like every Christmas morning I'd had as a kid, times 1,000. Within minutes I was surveying the contents spread out over the floor amidst anti-static bags and styrofoam

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packing forms – [my very first computer](#) , a compact Bondi blue and white lexan bullet that was a monitor and CPU all in one, a matching keyboard, a mouse, a power cord, several manuals, and the software restore CDs. A 13" 800p x 600p CRT monitor, CD ROM, a whopping 4GB hard drive, 32MB of RAM, and a 233Mhz G3 processor, with a 128Kps built in modem designed for a dial up connection. Quaint specs by today's standards. Something akin to the original VW Beetle compared to the performance and muscle of a contemporary Audi or BMW, but at the time, more than sufficient to easily travel to the ends of cyberspace and back. I thought that she was the most beautiful machine I'd ever seen, and I decided to call her "Betty."

I quickly had everything hooked up and plugged in, and with a light push of a button, the familiar Mac start up tritone sound called "Indigo" greeted me, and I was bathed in the bluish glow of Betty's display. I decided to wipe the hard drive and do a full software restore, since I wasn't the original owner, and out of respect for my best friend and his girlfriend's privacy in case there was anything that either of them had inadvertently left behind on the hard drive. Once that was done, I made a few calls to Earthlink to activate my account and to get the appropriate server and configuration information, and after running the Internet Set Up Assistant, I launched Netscape for the first time, and the jarring, shrieking beeps and static of a modem negotiating with a server came through Betty's speakers and then quickly resolved to silence, and the icon in the upper right corner of the Netscape window began to spin. I was in. I was connected.

And at that moment, the moment that I'd been waiting for for about a year and a half since I first realized that there was such a thing as the SFC, with electrons strobing the phosphors of the screen in front of me, drawing me in deeper and deeper, I quickly slipped into an out of body experience. I was very much aware that I was a physical being, but a trance settled over me, of the sort that I'd experienced before, and as anyone who's ever been absorbed by a good book, or a good film, or while engrossed in any task has. But this was different. It was much more intense, because it was happening in a state of greatly heightened sexual arousal and anticipation. It was actually a few weeks before I discovered that I could turn off the modem audio – which I quickly grew tired of listening to – but interestingly enough, I found that before I did, every time I heard it, I had an almost Pavlovian sexual arousal response to it, and hearing it also invariably evoked a pre-trance like state in me. And to this day, hearing that strange antiquated sound takes me right back to that night, and to that totally focused and totally open state of mind, and to that moment when I first went online in the privacy of my home.

As twilight gave way to darkness outside my window, the deluge of ecstasy began. I first visited all of the SF sites that I knew about from before going online, but hadn't yet seen - Smoke Signals, Kelly Media / Smoke Vision, White Stone Productions, Up In Smoke, Coherent Light, VSI, Bob's Videos, and the then fledgling IRL and Specialized Videos - and as if these weren't enough to blow my tiny little mind, I also quickly found the embarrassment of riches that was and is [Ron Andrews' SF Links](#) , which on my dial-up connection took the better part of five

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minutes to completely load, and which, even a decade ago, just went on...and on...and on as I scrolled in wide-eyed enraptured shock down...and down...and down the seemingly bottomless page. There were hundreds and hundreds of sites devoted to everything smoking related, as well as countless SF message boards, groups, and communities tailored to every nuance of SF interest. Tears of joy filled my eyes.

I once had a girlfriend who believed that there were three primary sources of energy for human beings: food, sleep, and orgasms, and when deprived of any one or two, we can keep going for a long time on whatever we're not deprived of. And I put that theory to the test in the extreme over the next three days. Monday morning I called in and told my supervisor that I needed to take two vacation days on Monday and Tuesday (which he obliged, as again, he owed me a bunch of favors). From Friday night until the pre-dawn hours of Tuesday morning I experienced what was essentially one long lucid waking dream of virtually non-stop sexual arousal and release, and when I finally passed out from exhaustion, the conceptual orgy in my head went on and on as I slept all day Tuesday.

One of the very first sites that I happened upon during my first 24 hours online was the wonderful, and sadly, now lost, Smoking By Denise. To this day, it's still one of my all time favorite websites. Such a simple concept, but so very well done – what if there was a woman who really, really, really loved smoking, and decided to create a comprehensive guide to smoking that was tailor made for women, including weighing the "pros" and "cons" for those thinking about trying smoking, with advice on how to start, and on how to incorporate smoking into your identity and social life? And what if this guide was illustrated with a broad cross section of images and clips from SF and mainstream sources? The result was profoundly compelling entertainment for SF appetites, including mine, and I spent weeks and weeks reading and re-reading it. I had the great fortune of going online at the time that the project was in it's heyday, when Denise was still actively building and adding to it. At it's height in 2001, SBD was something like 70 interlinked pages long, with one article or autobiographical story per page, and several hundred images and media clip illustrations.

SBD also introduced me to many esoteric and amazing sources of early SF content, including the work of professional photographer Don W. Schiele, who watermarked all of his images "DwS". I learned in subsequent years from various sources who knew him that he vehemently objected to having his SF images circulated online, and he stopped sharing them altogether in protest. His images are among the finest SF work I've ever seen (and he contributed a number of his images before going "underground" to the [Smoke Signals Online](#) member area), and it is a profound loss to The Community that he chose to leave us. It was actually the amazing quality of his work that inspired me to post my first ever message to a SF forum, to the SBD message board on Sunday, July 9, 2000, asking if anyone knew where more of his work could be found. And the very first person to ever reply to a message that I posted to a SF message board

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was...Michael C., the nicest and most ubiquitous guy in The Community, who told me that he unfortunately didn't know where I could find more of DwS's work, but that he was very pleased to make my acquaintance. :)

Once I'd broken the ice by posting my first message, I became a regular poster at the SBD message board, and scratched up the courage to post my email address, and to reach out and email SF Producers and other SF message board users, and quickly discovered the cathartic joy of being able to interact with other members of The Community. And I also quickly found the previously unimaginable value of being able to consider our diversity and our fundamental similarities. I remembered, discovered, and learned more about the origins and triggers of my unusual desires, and became much more comfortable with my SF in my first six months online than I had in the 36 years that preceded them. It was as exciting and as transformative a time in my life, and for the pleasure that I took in my SF, as starting to smoke had been for me fifteen years before, when I was 21.

A few months after going online at home, I finally got around to renting a video of Stanley Kubrick's brilliant final film from 1999, [Eyes Wide Shut](#) (which I had skipped in theatrical release due to my intense Tom Cruise aversion), and in the mansion scenes found the perfect representation of what the experience of joining the online SFC felt like for me – a grand underground gnostic orgy populated by masked revelers. I completely identified with any one of the countless women whose mask gave her the freedom to indulge her most extreme carnal urges in the dimly lit chambers beyond the boundary of "Fidelio". My mask was Betty...my mansion was the world wide web...and an endless parade of partners came to life for me via their words and images whenever I desired their touch and their smoke in my mind. The relative anonymity, the immediacy of the connection, and my imagination, were a profoundly intoxicating and erotic combination for me.

Betty served me well for many years, but as I was forced to retire her due to the obsolescence agendas / evolution of website coding, software, and operating systems. She still works after only one minor stint in the shop following six years of heavy use. She's in my bedroom closet packed in her original box, with my best friend's FedEx label still attached, and I'll always keep her for countless sentimental reasons. I'm writing this on "Diana," a contemporary 24" iMac with a 1920p x 1200p flat screen LED display, Superdrive, a 320 GB hard drive, 2 GB of RAM, and a 2.8Ghz Duo Core processor, and I'm now connected to the world wide web via a super fast ethernet modem and a high speed DSL server. Diana can easily crunch the densest code and javascript of any website in a fraction of a second, download massive files with ease, and is a marvel of technology and an absolute joy to use.

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And yet, there is no denying that I miss Betty and the pre-"web2.0" days of a decade ago, when most sites were just simple html, a 4GB hard drive seemed massive, and it felt like every SF site was a home grown labor of love. Even though there has been exponential growth in terms of the variety, volume, and sophistication of SF content available online over the last ten years, that time will remain vividly and fondly etched in my memory for the rest of my life. And no time more so than that sublime, lost weekend when I first acquired and donned my mask, stripped myself bare, psychologically speaking, and began exploring the endless, softly glowing rooms of this vast mansion that we share, haunt, and play in together.

[Email Vesperae](#)

Vesperae's discussion and DS multimedia forum: [The Sublime Desire of Cigarette Smoking](#)