

Site History

About

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In mid-2003, I underwent a fairly major personality change. My interests, beliefs, and political views all shifted drastically, and most importantly, I started creating things. I had a passion for writing that I'd never felt before, and I wanted a venue for my written work. Since social networking sites hadn't really caught on with people in my age group yet, and I had some HTML skills, I opted to create a personal website. I didn't have a name for it, so I just stuck my name on it.

This early version of the site focused almost exclusively on my writing, specifically my political articles, but I also used it to display some of my graphic design work, an area I was exploring at the time. It had a small audience, but it was there, and it gave me a place to post my earliest written work.

In late 2003, I discovered the [furry community](#), and quickly felt at home with a new group of peers. Since the fandom was very decentralized at the time, having a personal website was quite popular, so I created a second site for character info, event photos, and artwork I commissioned.

Unfortunately, in early 2004, disaster struck. My computer's hard drive failed severely, and I lost pretty much my entire writing career, including the half-finished manuscript for a novel I was working on (which, in hindsight, was terrible, but losing it still hurt), and a number of finished or almost-finished stories and columns which hadn't been posted online yet. I didn't keep proper backups at the time, so when the drive couldn't be recovered, they were gone for good, and I was completely devastated. It took a long time to fully recover from that, emotionally, and at the time, the last thing I wanted to do was write more. So, my writing site stagnated through most of 2004, and my furry site didn't fare much better.

In late 2004, I was re-inspired by a trip to a lake I hadn't been to in many years. Visiting it reminded me how much I love nature, and inspired a rather ambitious story/novel idea. It involved some pretty serious world-building, and in the process, I came up with the name "Lupinia" for the story, and the fictional nation the story would be set in. I also decided to combine my personal sites into one, and called the newly-created site Lupinia as well. It launched in October 2004 with its own domain, and with many of the design elements which still exist today (use of photography in the header, white text on a dark background, green as a prominent color, etc). It featured a forum, which still exists, but is no longer publicly accessible, as well as an image gallery, which originally ran on Coppermine.

The original story idea, and part of the reason for its failure, involved using friends' characters. I didn't realize that this is a failed proposition from the start, but it seemed like a good idea at the time. So, while the Lupinia website primarily focused on my written work, it also prominently featured profile pages for the friends whose characters were included in the stories.

In mid 2006, Lupinia received its first major overhaul. Inspired by other web communities and forums I was a part of, I decided to take the sense of community surrounding Lupinia to a new level, and make it a community-oriented site instead of a personal writing site. I added a pre-built content management system, Mambo, and used bridging plugins to connect it to the forum, and to the image gallery, which was replaced with Gallery2, the system still used to this day. The idea was to create a site that every community member could contribute equally to, and in theory, it worked very well for that.

The problem with theories is that they don't always line up to reality, and despite my best efforts, the community-centric version of Lupinia flopped completely. Even I had trouble adding new material at times, and I hadn't yet

learned the cardinal rule of web communities: There has to be something adhering the community together for it to flourish. In this case, the Lupinia stories were the only thing holding this community together, and I wasn't working on them. Essentially, I had created an overbuilt fan site without content for people to be fans of. So, it stagnated, worse than ever before.

In early 2007, after my hosting account started to strain its limits, I decided to pursue a different direction, by making the community-centric version of Lupinia into a web hosting community. I opted to purchase a 1U server, and host it in a co-location facility, and offer free hosting to new personal and community-oriented sites. In the process, I created two separate entities under the Lupinia umbrella, the Lupinia Hosting Community, and Lupinia Studios.

Lupinia Studios shifted back toward being a personal portfolio in mid 2007, as it should have been from the start. I based the redesigned layout on my original 2004 version of the site, and changed the sections to make more sense for the site's new purpose. The forum was moved to the hosting site, and while the gallery remained, with member albums still present, no new accounts were allowed to be created. Having recently discovered the joy of photography, I created a section for my photos. And, the "member profiles" were scrapped, shifting my non-Lupinia writings to the main writing section, instead of keeping them in a secondary personal directory.

Around the same time, I decided to seriously learn PHP, so the Lupinia Studios redesign was the perfect learning opportunity. I rapidly developed the site's underlying code, making it progressively more advanced in an effort to make the site easier to update and maintain, and easier to use.

While my code changes greatly improved the process of adding new content, it still required creating a new file, and any changes to the code on each page (what little there was) required applying the change to hundreds of individual files. It became rather unwieldy after awhile, and I didn't update as often as I wanted. I did add new sections, though, including the [link directory](#) and [email form](#).

In late 2008, I added a Wordpress blog to the site, partly in response to changes in Livejournal policies, but also because I wanted an easier way to update the site. I didn't want to run the entire site on Wordpress, but I wanted something easy to post to that would allow me to do some blogging from my site. For a few months, it went well, but I ran out of steam, and abandoned it in March 2009. However, many of the posts I made in that time have been added to the [writing section](#).

Not much changed after 2008/2009. I gradually added new content, but aside from photo uploads, didn't post to the site more than once every couple of months. Due to a focus on my career, and other projects, I didn't have the time to improve the code, so a lot was left undone. I wanted to revamp the site and really turn it into something I was proud of again, but I just didn't have the time to put into it.

In late 2011, I encountered a font that inspired me to create a new layout for the site, and after a few weeks of careful work, I had a functional template to build from. My progress was interrupted by an unexpected career boost, but I spent weeks planning what I wanted to do with the new version, and in February 2012, the latest version of Lupinia Studios was born. Featuring a robust custom CMS, newly-rewritten underlying code, and a variety of new features (some of which are still being developed), it was truly my best web work to date. More importantly, it completely the transition of focus back to my own work, feeding into a cycle of improved self-confidence.

Currently, the site is in a state of active development, with new code added as rapidly as new content, but I hope to stabilize things over the course of the next few months.

About the Author, and Contact Information

Natasha Lockhart is a web application developer, and avid photographer and writer, living in rural Virginia. Visit www.lupinia.eu to learn more. Contact information, including an email form and links to other websites, can be found at www.lupinia.eu/contact.php.

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