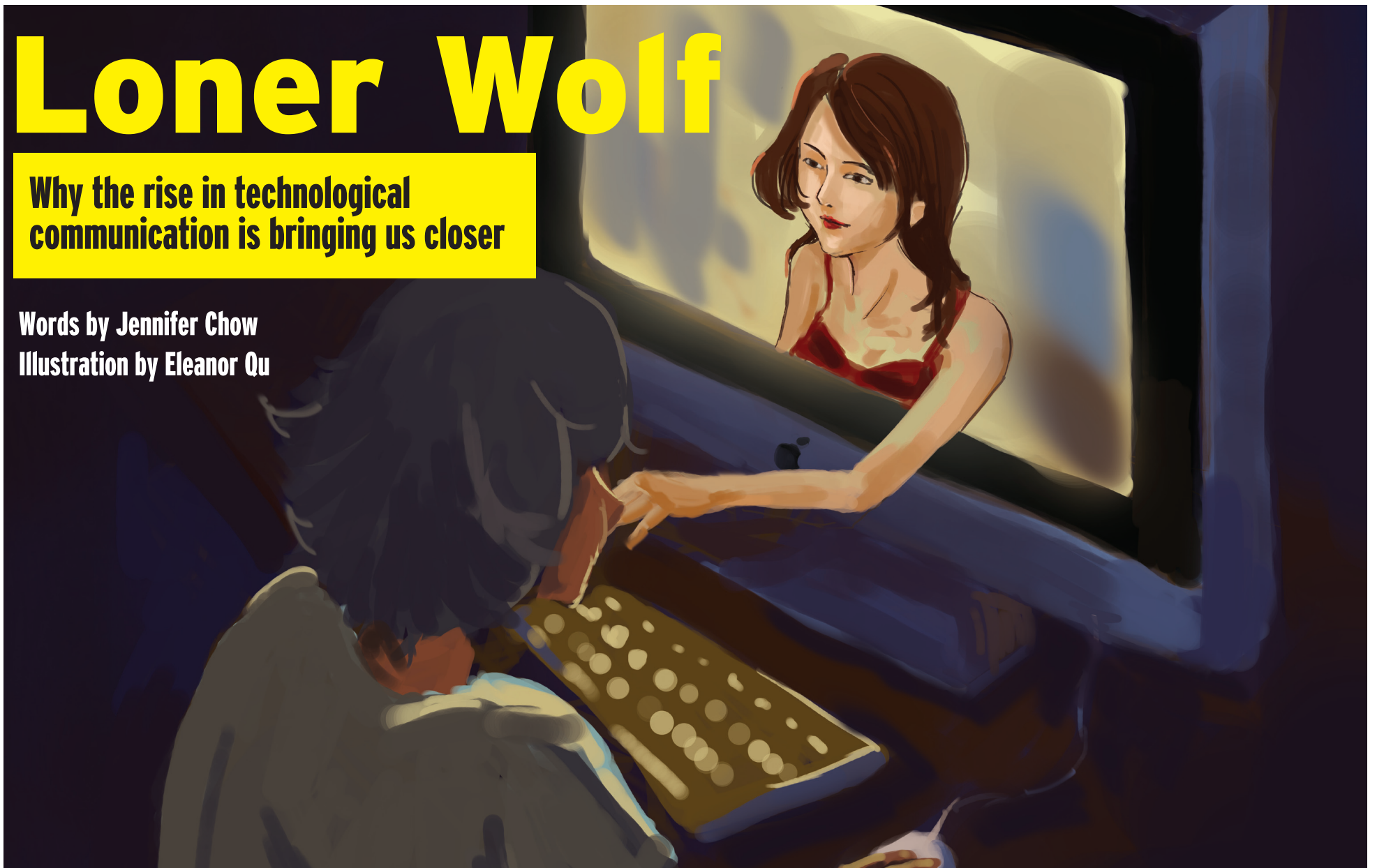# Loner Wolf

Why the rise in technological communication is bringing us closer

Words by Jennifer Chow
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For some reason, the image of a geek also often conjures the image of a loner, hacking away at the computer, tech savvy but socially awkward. Is there any truth to these stereotypes? Is there a correlation between solitude and being labeled a geek? A self-proclaimed loner myself, it is true that I am fascinated by technology — the internet in particular. I am attracted to it like a fly is to a light bulb, without really knowing why. The more I look at the topic however, the more I realize how complex the relationship between people and technology really is.

Unlike most people, I spent most of my life socially isolated, watching my peers interact around me. My whole life, I have felt confused and out of place when it came to social interactions. This has always been partly my choice and partly just the way I am. I've never really figured out my place in the real world, nor have I mastered how to communicate face-to-face with real people. But the internet eliminates that barrier.

Letters were once the way people communicated with each other. They were followed by the telegraph, then the telephone. For a long time — and certainly when I was growing up — the phone was the go-to method of non-face-to-face communication. But I've never liked it, and I still balk at it. We have gone from text to voice and now, in an interesting roundabout, gone back to the initial medium with text messages, tweets and Facebook statuses.

The world of texting and social media eliminates the need to socialize face-to-face, since everyone can now broadcast what's going on anyway via various technological mediums. Since socializing hasn't really been much a part of my life so far, I never had a chance to lament that. But the internet and social media today is a world of words, visuals and even sound. I thrive on words and visuals: it's what I'm comfortable with, what I'm good at, and what I run to when I don't know how to say things. To me, email is one of the best recent inventions: I can write my message out and linger over it before sending it — all without actual face to face contact with someone that I barely know (or just don't want to deal with).

We tell ourselves that it is the "new way" of communication; the 21st century way. This much may be true, but we are still writing and communicating, not unlike the letter-writers of past eras. We haven't lost sight of who we are artistically and culturally; we're just doing it differently now. In fact, our medium of communication is so different that it can be hard to see the roots of it unless you carefully read into it; words that once were scrawled on paper may now be displayed on a screen, but they are still written with emotion.

The internet, and social media by extension, can unite people from all over the world, without them ever having to see each other: they can interact directly with one another through websites, online chats, comments, forums, blog posts, and, recently, more interactive formats like podcasting. While some people find this sort of interaction too impersonal and too distant, loners like me are drawn to it, enchanted by it, and comforted by it.

With near-instantaneous communication, spaces contract and borders blur. We are more connected than we ever were and yet many people argue that we are more disconnected than before, too busy looking at our phones to connect with the people around us. Maybe that's true, but for the loners and the introverts, does that matter anyway? It can be argued that technology provides more excuses and opportunities for the loner to be a loner: to hide from the world, to Google the world but not seek it, and to remain in their comfort zone. I will not deny that I sometimes take the digital route just to stay in my comfort zone and to avoid going where I've never been before. It's just easier that way. But the internet and technology in general also allow me to express myself in ways that were once never possible: I can broadcast my words; I can share my thoughts with the world through blogs and other online communities; I can edit photos, videos and my writing. I can make my thoughts come alive and share them. I can read other peoples' thoughts, experiences and creations.

Simultaneously, we can be alone and with others. For the loner, of course, being alone works out well; yet it is possible to collaborate while still being physically alone or far apart.

Sure, as with everything, there are drawbacks. Perhaps isolation is more pronounced now with the rise of technological communication. Maybe society does have less connection, now that we know each other online, but don't really know each other. Yet for the loner, technology and internet — now nearly ubiquitous in the developed world — opens up many possiblities. The loner thrives in this habitat of relative isolation, of staring at the screen.

Maybe everyone is becoming more of a loner. Maybe everyone is becoming more of a geek. Or at the very least, maybe people are becoming more comfortable with doing what so many "loners" and "geeks" thrive on. But for all the proud loners, the geeks and the loner geeks, this is our time. Now it is possible to be heard. Now there is a place for us to reside in.

It is impossible to know what technology will bring to us in the near future but in the meantime, I will be content in my digital habitat of today. *P*

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