

Coping

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Summary

When he returned to earth there was some growing up still to do, after that he'd become either a counsellor or a carer. These were the plans Dave Lister had when he boarded Red Dwarf. Little did he know he'd get to fulfil his dreams three million years into space.

When he returned to earth there was some growing up still to do and after that he'd become either a counsellor or a carer. These were the plans Dave Lister had when he boarded Red Dwarf. If there was one thing the Scouser loved more than anything it was looking after someone, caring for a person in need. He was fascinated with mental health studies and had completed a few video and total immersion courses back on earth. He had loved the experience and knew he had found his true calling.

Lost in space three million years later he felt as if he'd never have his dream. Until he sensed that there might be someone who needed him. He had always known that Arnold J Rimmer had issues, which was why he had always been so accepting of his odd behaviour, inadequate social skills and OCD. After helping him through one of his many panic attacks one day he'd even started to feel strangely protective of him, he had to be as no-one else seemed to care. Studying his bunkmate Lister began to see how unsettled Rimmer could get when unable to perform his rigid daily routines. He noticed that a lot of his endless pernickiness and insufferable rigid adherence to rules and orders were obvious coping mechanisms. He realised that the man really didn't understand the difference between banter and insults. There was the obsessive focus on becoming an officer no matter how long it took. Organising everything not just alphabetically but by size shape and colour – even while eating.

Yes Rimmer had issues but Lister would only find out the true extent of his problems after his death.

Once Lister had counselled himself enough to accept the faith of being the last human alive and convinced himself that reviving Kochanski would only bring him more pain, Rimmer became his focus.

Hearing the desperate fights between the Hologram and his double he realised how much pain there had to be inside the strange sad man he shared his room with: there had to be, why else would he hate himself so much? With patience and gentle probing he tried to get the Hologram to open up to him. It was difficult at first: over the years Rimmer had built a huge wall around him to protect himself from getting hurt. Lister never gave up, knowing that over time with just themselves and an uninterested Cat for company the Hologram would one day cave in and pour out his heart.

It was a lot to take in when he did: the traumatic childhood, the physical and emotional abuse, the obvious autistic traits, the internalised homophobia, the fear of sexuality had all welded together into a suffocating ball of self hatred. He also found that Rimmer was tired, exhausted; for years he'd been running on empty in a place where he wasn't liked or wanted. No-one to talk to, only his routines rigidly without relief as his cold uncaring comfort blanket. The night Rimmer admitted this was the first time Lister wished he could hug him.

Lister thought it ironic that, despite never realizing his dream of becoming a counsellor on earth, he had accidentally succeeded in doing what he had wanted to do when he grew up; he was counselling and caring for a man in desperate mental agony on a daily basis.

Over the years that followed Lister tried to break down the old Rimmer slowly but surely: he cared for him, looked after him. He worked on his self esteem, his self worth, trying to make him ease out of his routines. The most important thing he taught him was that, now that they were alone, he had all day to do his routines whenever he wanted, he didn't need to get up at six. For a few months Holly had to pretend to be the one who "forgot" to wake up Rimmer, as the Hologram still feared he was breaking rules. The Computer didn't mind as this meant that Rimmer finally got some rest, which eased the strain on his projection.

Rimmer slowly blossomed and became easier to be with. There were setbacks, the Terrorform planet and 600 years of agony on Rimmerworld being the biggest ones. It made Lister despair: how could you possibly save a man who hated himself that much? Still he persisted, to the point of giving him up: he had to let him go to become Ace. He was certain that becoming the ultimate hero was what Rimmer needed to be happy.

Finding himself in jail with a new old version of Arnold Rimmer was tough: did he have to rebuild his friend all over again? Sadly he never got the chance.

When Rimmer returned broken and traumatised from being Ace Lister had grown up and studied and was ready to save him again. Away from Lister, Rimmer had grown tired and bitter. He had been a hero but the existence had been a lonely one. He had grown used to venting to Lister, used to sharing, to his ... friendship, maybe.

"Listy ... I ... I think I might be gay ... I think I might always have been ... in love with you."

The night Rimmer opened up to him was the night Lister had a breakthrough. It was the moment he realised that while trying to save Rimmer for all those years he had also been trying to save himself.

It was the night he kissed him ...

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