

Olia Lialina
Bear with Me

A play for
two webmasters
starring
Kevin Bewersdorf

Frames **No frames**





The stage backdrop is a huge screen displaying a default Windows Screensaver.

Downstage left, a tower PC/CRT monitor setting is placed with Webmaster sitting behind it, only partially visible to the audience. Webmaster controls what is happening on the projection screen throughout Alan's monologue.

Alan enters stage right, rushing to center stage. He looks in the direction of the audience as if the monitor is in between him and the public. He makes an impatient gesture, as if operating the mouse. Screensaver disappears from the screen. Windows Desktop. Netscape starts. Alan's hands shake, when he takes a piece of paper out of his pocket and starts to read.

ALAN: h t t p colon slash slash w w w dot geocities dot com slash silicon valley slash 6666

This URL appears in location bar. Page loads very very slowly. Alan waits impatiently.

The page finally loads..

*Jake's PC Paradise.
Computers-Monitors-Printers-Scanners*

FRAMES NO FRAMES

ALAN: (sarcastically) You must be kidding me! Frames or no Frames!?

I've been waiting for 5 minutes to download your stupid page and you're gonna hit me with the old Frames or No Frames? Couldn't you decide for yourself, you sad clown. Why should

I bother? If you want to make it with frames then make it with your damn frames! And don't annoy your visitors with your decisions.

Oh how very generous of you to offer Frames or no frames. All these choices!

How I love it:

English or Spanish,

English or Swedish,

Spice Girls or Britney Spears,

Windows or Mac,

Internet Explorer or Netscape,

640 to 480 or 800 to 600,

under 18, over 18,

Enter or Exit,

Frames or no Frames! Very nice, very thoughtful - Yes you're just the Shakespeare of our times, the Hamlet of Geocities with this little haiku you've written here, Jake.

JUST SHOW ME THE DAMN CONTENT!

But of course I know what you thought, I know what you all think. You think "I'm so cutting edge that I'm gonna update my website with every new feature every second day." Or, that I really believe frames is the solution—a feature, not a pest! No, I really believe frames are the future. But, I know that I'm not alone online. I know that there are other sad clowns out there and some of them can't even install the browser that supports frames, so they, poor souls, who can't enjoy my website in all its glory, should be blessed with one tiny piece of it.

That's why I will make two versions of the website: THE MASTERPIECE and the modest little page... the one that actually works... maybe... maybe... if I manage to link all the files together anyway.

I tell you, Jake I will not dare to click on your Frames button. I don't want to spend the next hour waiting for your miserable frameset to download. Believe me, I already know how it looks...I can smell it.

There is one frame on the top with a "Welcome to my Homepage" sign over the star background, stars are blinking, the welcome sign is rotating or jumping or sparkling. This frame takes 20% of the screen. Why? Because you read in some usability book somewhere that the upper frame shouldn't take more than 20% of the window.

This book was written by another sad clown, an EXPERT who made half a web page once and thinks he is ready to dictate to the rest of the population how to build their own corner of cyberspace in a weekend...by stealing graphics, codes and layouts from the pages that are already out there. Strangely enough made before he started to teach how to make them.

But that's not all! The Welcome frame on the top is just the beginning. Believe me, I know what I am talking about: on the left there shall be another frame, a column, and it takes another 30% of the screen. And there you put your navigation.

NAVIGATION!

Home button,

Back button,

About me button,

My links button,

Webring,

Email me,

What else...what else...what have I forgotten? Ah yeah,

MY AWARDS!

You don't know to whom you can link apart from Yahoo, you don't have anything to say about yourself, no one gave you any award, but you stole 1/3 of the screen, MY SCREEN for your NAVIGATION.

You don't care that there is no need for a back button and no need for a forward button. They are up there big in the top of every browser. Can't you see them? (*pointing to the upper left corner of the screen*) That's the navigation!

Can you see anything that is not blinking or rotating? No you can't. That's why you stay awake all night making those buttons, or you take them from "free collections," or you download them from 10 different websites so that no one can catch you! And you put them inside the frame and you link them to the pages that are to appear in the main frame of your super modern website. But the problem is you don't know how to link inside the frameset!!! You skipped that page in your favorite "Web Design for Dummies" manual. You were in such a rush to make your page public, to impress the world with what you've got, you were so afraid of being left behind.

Alan takes a breath.

Your main frame is spatial, it's different from the one on the left and the one on the top. It's a square, it doesn't have a starry night background. No. It has...it has clouds because clouds are nicer to read on.

But there is not a lot to read, you didn't leave enough space for yourself to write anything. Instead you've gotten "Welcome to my Homepage" big again. It takes up half of the square. Not that you don't realize how stupid it is to have "Welcome to my Homepage" written on one site twice, no of course not! It is just your experience, your knowledge that



tells you that it could happen, that some user out there, some saboteur, might make a link to your website without linking to your frameset. He linked instead to this exact page, the main page. Which would mean that someone could come to your website and never see your top frame, never be welcomed. Oh how unimaginable it is not to “Welcome to Your Homepage.” The whole internet will collapse if a user or two will miss a Welcome sign. And just like you doubled your welcome Jake, you doubled the navigation as well. It looks terrible and makes no sense...but you remain calm...because you know you are not the only one who has given life to a page that was never supposed to be born.

So I’m telling you, there is no way I’m clicking on FRAMES. I’m not here to admire your design, I just want to get my scanner.

He makes a sort of symbolic clicking gesture with both hands. An empty page with star background and several UNDER CONSTRUCTION signs appear on the screen very small almost invisible under them is “Bare with me, I am working on it!” and blinking back button.

ALAN: NOOOO! “Bare with me!”

Oh no, I should have known it was a trap. I thought you were giving me a choice here, JAKE!

Under construction!!! OK, you win...you win...I’ll go back...forgive me for using the browsers back button, OK? And not your little masterpiece, who knows where IT would bring me...

Again the entry page is on screen.

ALAN: Well, I’m ready!

Alan makes a gesture symbolizing the upper frame and the navigation frame.

ALAN: Three, two, one ENGAGE.

He squints. The frameset exactly as he described before pops up on the screen. Plus the X-Files tune plays very loud. He closes his ears with both hands.

ALAN: Daaaamm!

With eyes closed and one year closed he “looks” for a mouse and “moves it to disable the sound” The sound is off in 10 or so seconds.

Alan opens his eyes and breathes.

ALAN: It’s OK, it’s OK. If web pages can have pictures, if they can have animated pictures, why can’t they have sound as well? After all, this is the multimedia age. And things are only getting more multimedia with time. Pretty soon we will be watching video on the internet! In the browser! Like a whole X-Files episode, or all X-Files episodes one after another in Netscape. For free. Like TV but in the browser. Not an animated GIF of Mulder and Scully, but an actual episode. There will be play, pause, fast-forward, rewind, bookmarks and a TV button and everyone can watch whatever they want. Next year or in 99 at the latest. You’ll see!

Alan starts to “scroll” up and down navigation frame, looking closer into the monitor.

ALAN: But no TV right now, I need a scanner! Not a TV, not a monitor, not a mouse, not a printer, a scanner...a scanner.

Scanner button appears.

ALAN: Yes!

He makes a gesture as if he grabs or really pushes it. The button is clicked on the screen, but instead of revealing a new content it repeats the navigation frame. And again. And Again. And again. Screen becomes four navigation columns. Alan falls on his knees, then on the floor. Laying on the floor he gropes and makes a gesture of turning the volume up. There are several seconds of X-Files tune. He stands up again. Sound is off. When he continues talking, the Webmaster is opening the source code of the page copies it and pastes to the text editor. From now on the Webmaster edits the document till the end of the monologue.

ALAN: I hate the Web. It was all wrong from the start. What the web should be is pristine simplicity. But all these people who don't know anything about programming, who don't know the difference between structure and style, who make two
s instead of one <p>, they shouldn't be allowed to make web pages. Never. Never.

Truly, we are headed for a disaster, a global, intergalactic disaster. By comparison Global Warming will be peanuts.

It will be an Information Superhighway of agony. We will be burning ourselves alive, falling from one under construction worm-hole into another; suffocating, being squeezed between GIF, being crushed by progressive JPEGs.

Alan writhes

Webrings will become our torture chambers, framesets will be our crucifixes, broken links will dig into our wounds, the spears of incomplete homepages. We will be raising our hands to the heavens wishing we had died in a flood, wishing we were never born, wishing for Tim Berners Lee to never

be born, or that his computer would have exploded when he went to show his colleagues what he had done.

No, wait. Let him be born, let Tim Berners Lee's computer be stable, fast and reliable. I only ask for one thing. One little thing to change in the past: to not have an option to see the source code of web pages? Does that sound like a plan? Sounds legit? Because as it stands right now everyone and their brother can grab the rightful code of others basically pillage it. Violate it. Start replacing this character with that one and test how will it look if the font is smaller or if the font is bigger, if the border is one pixel bigger, one pixel smaller... it's not right. That's my code!

Don't get me wrong, I believe in end to end, in peer 2 peer, I am a pull media guy, I give my left nut for the World Wide Web!

But it is just that...it is just that yesterday, I met a woman. I met my dream woman.
I don't meet a dream woman every day.

I meet a lot of women. I'm not some virgin dork sitting around making java applets all day. Just because I like computers doesn't mean I don't know about women. I like women, I like people in general. It is just not a lot to talk to them about. Sometimes they don't even know the simplest things. Like you give them a URL and they don't know where to type it in. Or you ask them their domain name and they give you their AOL email. I met many who don't know that internet and the WWW is not the same thing. How do you even start a conversation with them? Or like...oh I can tell you a lot of stories.

But Lisa, her name is Lisa—like the first desktop computer. Not important for the story actually, and a bad development if



you ask me. We would be further along today if the computer industry would have chosen a different metaphor, other than the desktop—but anyway, Lisa, my Lisa is different.

She, you know she is the one who keeps her paragraph tag closed, she uses quotes, she does not underline headlines. She knows that only links can be underlined on webpages. It is not Microsoft Office, OK? It is the web, the realm of hyper-text!

She knows HEX color numbers, maybe even by heart. Why not? There are not so many safe colors—216. Is it so much to learn? I am sure she uses only safe colors. If she wants to make text a vibrant healthy green she types pound 339933. If she wants to make text red, not that ugly candy red ff0000, I mean a deep passionate red—she types pound ff3300. Of course one can just type out the letters R-E-D and the browser will understand it, but it's wrong. Many do, but it doesn't make it right. The browser is forgiving, but its patience also has its limits. How much more “natural language” should we put into the code until it becomes uncompileable?! People don't take it seriously, they just copy and paste, copy and replace.

Lisa wouldn't just copy somebody's code. She would write one herself! Yes, she would. And it would be beautiful... you know she would type all her tags in upper case, and if one tag would be nested in another (I'm sure she knows that tags can be nested). She would make a new line and indent

indent

indent.

Alan gestures in a way that reflects this fantasy.

She'd leave comments in her script. She leaves comments... I know she does...for those who understand, or just for herself.

She would save all the html files in one folder and all the images in an appropriate subfolder. And all these files would have right file formats and the right extensions. She'd call her index file index dot html. And she would never link to the index.html from other pages...she would link to the parent directory.

And when she's finished, she would take this folder, with all the files and their extensions written in lower case...she'd take it and upload it to the server. I am sure she would!

We didn't talk about it yesterday, but I am sure this is the kind of girl she is.

We didn't talk a lot, but she told me that she was making a website. And just like me she was bored. She said she'd rather be at home working on her site, but she couldn't keep going because she needed a scanner and the next time she could get around a scanner would be on Monday. So that's why she thought she might as well go to this stupid party.

SCANNER! YEAH! SCANNER. “I have a scanner at home!” I hope I wasn't being too enthusiastic, but probably I was. I don't remember.

What I do remember is she took my address and said she would come tomorrow afternoon, which is today. After that I don't remember, I don't remember anything if I said goodbye to her or not, I don't remember how I got home. The next thing I remember is I rushing to my parents bedroom to take the scanner out and bring it up to my room. I opened the door, I saw the computer, I saw the printer, I saw the webcam (why the hell they need a webcam I have no idea) what I didn't see was the scanner. I was like...

“Daaaaad! Where is the scanner?”

“We brought it to grandma last weekend”– he answers from downstairs –“don’t you remember? She got into geneology websites and wants to scan all our baby photos to put them online. I think she’s already made quite a few pages. She sends me links to a new page everyday now. Should I forward them to you?”

“No, thanks” Damn...insane. Who would have thought?

Christmas 1995, my dad gives my grandma a computer, his older one...I am sure she never even turned it on. Christmas 1996 I gave her a CD with 10 hours internet access. On the first day of 1997, literally at 9 am she calls, wakes me up asking whether I think Microsoft Frontpage would be a good program to make the website? I have no idea what I answered.

And here we are! February 1997, my grandma is making her webpage, ruining my life. Taking my life away from me! Taking my scanner, Lisa’s scanner away from me. Because of her I will be the dead end of her interactive family tree! I can hear my Aunt Janet now: “Alan, Alan (*makes a clicking gesture*) Why is Alan not a hyperlink?”

WHY? Because he didn’t get a chance to marry and have children. This chance was taking away from him by Grandma Betty, the webmaster of this site! “Sign my guest book.”

Alan takes a breath, takes out Wired Magazine.

In Wired Magazine this month there is a big article. “Kiss Your Browser Goodbye.”

Alan reads from the cover

ALAN: PUSH! Kiss your browser goodbye!
The radical future of media beyond the web!

Remember the browser war? Well, forget it! The web browser itself is about to croak. And good riddance...in its place (continue on page twelve) broader and deeper new interfaces for electronic media are being born. Think video, think text flickering over your walls, think games at work. think anything where a staid, link based browser is useless...useless... useless...and then here... here was good paragraph: “Sure, we’ll always have Web pages. We still have postcards and telegrams, don’t we? But the center of interactive media – increasingly, the center of gravity of all media – is moving to a post-HTML environment, a world way past a Web dominated by the page, beyond streamed audio and video, and fast into a land of push-pull, active objects, virtual space, and ambient broadcasting. You might not want to believe us, but a place where you can kiss your Web browser goodbye.”

May be I should call my grandma? May be I should read it to her? Will it stop her?

Anyway, too late. Soon Lisa will be here, she will think I lied to her. Or may be should I tell her the story about my grandma? But who would believe it? I could ask her if she wants my copy of WIRED magazine, and that I want it back next week...Or we could stay here and read it together... that could work...that could work...but what if she already bought it? Maybe she is even subscribes to Wired.

Webmaster (Lisa) has finished to work in text editor, saved index.html on the desktop and closes the program.

She walks upstage. Webmaster has her hair the same style as hulagirl and turns her head a bit like hulagirl.

She has WIRED magazine in her hand. She looks out to the audience. The same time Alan rushes to the computer



she used before and opens index.html in the browser. It is a typical amateur home page with hula girl in he middle and frames/ no frames buttons in the bottom.

Sound: Hotel California.

Alan stays downstage and looks at the page as well. Both stay still for a few seconds.

LISA: Hi...Hi

Alan turns down the sound.

Hello!

Alan?

Alan rushes back upstage. They don't look at each other, only out at the audience, as if at a monitor.

ALAN: *(stuttering)* Sorry, couldn't hear you coming. Sorry I was...I was reading Wired...I mean I was writing, I was making a webpage...

Hi

Pause.

LISA: It's beautiful.

ALAN: *(nods gratefully)* You like it?

Lisa nods

There will be frames and no frames version. I didn't know which you would prefer...with or without...frames. Some people say frames are good because you don't have to reload

the whole site, you know, just the part that actually needs to be reloaded. It's more efficient, good for saving bandwidth, not everyone has fast internet yet. It can also look good, you know, golden ratio sort of thing if made right

LISA: Did you make it for me?

Alan nods

LISA: She looks like me... a bit.

ALAN: *(very hesitant, trying to make a joke)* Yes, more like you than me.

I couldn't find a picture of you online, so I found, I took, made this GIF...just temporary. Just for a while...until we.... scan stuff.

LISA: I was very happy you offered me your scanner, I wanted to bring my photo album to scan, but I couldn't find it anywhere. I was looking all night and all morning. I thought we were robbed, but it appeared...you won't believe... my mom sent it to my grandpa because he's gotten into online geneology.

While she is talking Alan's face goes through all kind of happy faces, which he desperately tries to hide.

LISA: He is making a web page...web PAGES ...one after another. He made some buttons himself!

You know, HOME BUTTON with our family's crest on it. A huge "Welcome" sign which looks like a coat of arms. Oh this welcome sign, it spins like crazy. *(spins the magazine a bit)*

He spends all his time downloading and trying out new software for animating GIFs.

He hangs all night long on these forums...they are giving tips to each other there.

They make websites together...Webmasters!

Do you know how they make a line? *(makes a gesture with the magazine, as if she draws a line in front of her)* A ruler? He takes a one-pixel image and stretches it in html code to 600 or 800 pixels...smart actually.

They make borders around images with HTML tables. For very important images he sets table border to 20 pixels! It looks so bold, so 3D. He makes such complex nested tables now. Tim Berners Lee would kill himself if he could see it!

Lisa hits her chest with the magazine.

My poor grandpa, he met a guy on one of these forums, who claims that he wrote the script that turns your website into a rainbow...that gives your text rainbow colors.

"Bear With Me!"

Where

B is red

E is orange

A is yellow

"Yellow" they say together, and the rest, Alan lip syncs together with her.

R is green

W is blue. Can you imagine? Isn't it funny?

ALAN: What? Yes funny. What is funny? Forums? No it is not funny it is great. The web is just great.

Alan throws WIRED on the floor

Everybody is making web pages. Anyone can make a web-page, just by opening the source code of other pages! Isn't it great?!!! It's THE Digital Revolution?!

He is taking in an excited, preaching manner. Lisa gets hypnotized and. In the end of the monologue her eyes are closed.

Soon everyone will have their own webpage, everyone will be participating in the creative power of the internet: no one will be watching TV or movies, no drugs, no crime, no teenage pregnancy. No old folks homes. Everybody will be online, online at home, building their own world in cyberspace. Mark my words!

Today these are just pages, but tomorrow they will become the walls of our houses, the windows of our cyber skyscrapers. Every link will be a door...we are building ourselves into the homes of each other.

Lisa! We are witnessing the construction of the century, of the millennium.

Their hands getting closer.

Today they are just browsers. Today it is Netscape 3 or 3 point 5, or point 7. Tomorrow it will Netscape 4.0, Communicator, Transformator, Teleporter, Netscape 10, Gold, Platinum. Netscape Translator, Netscape Transmasaur, Netscape Gigasaur, Netscape VR, Netscape Holodeck... Natural, Nitro, Netscape NIRVANA

Their hands meet when Alan shouts,

Nirvana!

The WIRED in Lisa's left hand falls on the floor. She wakes up.
Pause.

LISA: You forgot a pixel.

ALAN: Where?

LISA: There is a pixel, next to her left leg

ALAN: I will remove it. Should I remove it now? I can remove.

Lisa smiles

LISA: No...wait.

ALAN: I will remove later...should I remove it? Is something wrong? What are you thinking about?

LISA: Ah nothing important really...

ALAN: Sure?

LISA: Just a stupid thought...

ALAN: But what? Tell me!

LISA: I thought...well, this fear...this question...

ALAN: What?

LISA: I thought... I wanted to ask...do you think this page will work in Internet Explorer?

ALAN: It will! I promise, it will!

The End



Olia Lialina
Bear With Me

A play for two webmasters
starring Kevin Bewersdorf

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