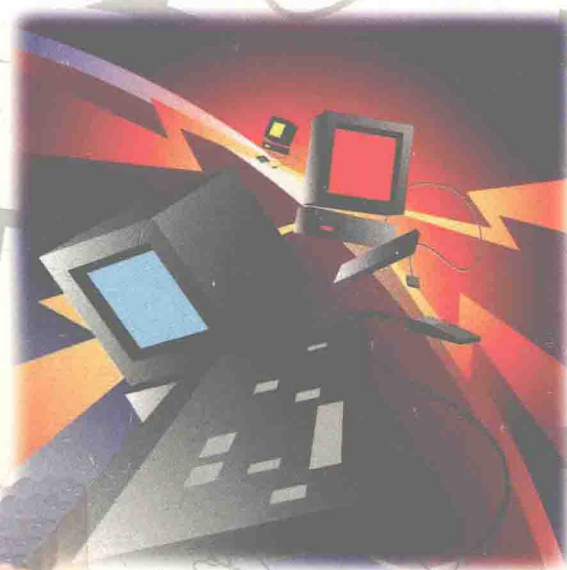


JavaScript & NETSCAPE WIZARDRY

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**Master the Art of
Customizing Netscape
and Creating Sizzling
Web Pages**


Dan Shafer


**CORIOLIS
GROUP
BOOKS**

JavaScript & NETSCAPE WIZARDRY

Dan Shafer

 **COROLIS GROUP BOOKS**

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preface

Netscape is cool. You probably already believe that or this book wouldn't even have found its way into your hands. But I just want to reassure you that Netscape really *is* cool. As one who has been described as a “rotund gray-hair of the software industry,” I’ve been around the block a few times. I’ve seen a huge amount of technology in my day.

I remember quite clearly the first day I saw a World Wide Web browser. I was visiting the offices of the now-all-but-defunct Taligent Corp. researching a book that never got published. One of the senior technical people invited me into his office to see NCSA Mosaic. I was awestruck. I said then that it was the coolest piece of software I’d seen in 10 years.

I was wrong.

It was the coolest piece of software I’d *ever* seen.

And now there is Netscape, the younger but far more precocious brother of Mosaic, designed and created by some of the same amazing programmers who designed and created Mosaic. Now in a reasonably mature release, Netscape has established itself—at least for the foreseeable future—as *the* standard World Wide Web browser.

And it is still cool.

This book describes this coolness. If you have half as much fun exploring the new release of Netscape with this book as I had writing it, you’re in for a real treat.

Who Should Read This Book?

This book is intended for people who have had some experience surfing the Web with earlier versions of Netscape (prior to 2.x) and who have at least a nodding acquaintance with HTML (Hypertext Markup Language). You don’t

need to be an HTML guru capable of whipping out hundreds of pages a week of scintillating animations and whizzy graphics. Nor do you need to have any prior experience in programming or scripting.

You must, however, be curious. Curious about the deeper things that you can do with Netscape that other books and the user documentation either ignore or gloss over lightly. Because I take you into the depths of the wonder of Netscape in this book and to linger there long enough to benefit from it, you can't be someone who is just interested in how to load your favorite URL.

What's in This Book?

The first two chapters of this book look at the new release of Netscape to define what the coolest of the newest features are. In the process, I'll let you know where in the book those features are covered.

So rather than provide you with the obligatory chapter-by-chapter preview of what the book covers here, I'm going to try to give you some of the flavor of the book's contents.

This book is a little schizophrenic. I hate writing books that are like that, but I didn't feel I had much choice in this case. Because Netscape, when it released Version 2 and subsequent upgrades, really created a kind of split-personality product.

On the one hand, there are a number of new features that will appeal to the curious end user. (I refuse to use the word "power user." It is too imprecise and it leaves everyone who doesn't think they are a power user feeling powerless. There's enough powerlessness in the world already.) Such things as frames, the built-in ability to deal with mail and Internet news groups, and the use of the new and exciting plug-in architecture are there for the taking.

But the other side of the coin—and in many ways the more exciting—is JavaScript. I've been a fan and advocate of end-user scripting and programming languages and tools for longer than almost anybody in the industry by now. It's my *raison d'être*, if you will. From the time I wrote my first best-selling book about Apple Computer's HyperTalk scripting language until today, some 40 books later, I remain excited by the prospects of scripting languages and tools. Moving the power center nearer and nearer to the user is my idea of what computing should be about.

JavaScript, even in its first release, is an exciting tool. It can do some perfectly awesome stuff. That's why something more than half of this book is devoted to JavaScript, including a fairly significant number of examples of the use of the language. I scoured the world of JavaScript online for Chapter 12 and found some gems that do stuff in JavaScript that even the folks who wrote JavaScript are probably surprised about. (It's a fundamental principle of this industry that the people who write the tools almost never predict with any accuracy what people will actually *do* with them.)

So the book deals with both end-user and scripting-level enhancements to the first releases of Netscape. It focuses on what's new, what's cool, why you should learn about it, and what it can do.

A Word About 'Netscapisms'

Given that this book is about Netscape, it is inevitable that there are some features of World Wide Web browsers included here that are not, at this writing, supported by any other browsers. These features have come to be known as "Netscapisms." There is a lot of consternation in the Webmaster community, of which I am an entrenched member, over the issue of whether it is wise or fair or appropriate to include such features on a Web page.

The Web began life as a serious attempt to achieve cross-platform and browser-independent access to the trillions of bytes of data that live on the Internet or are accessible directly from it. In the early days of World Wide Web design, Webmasters agreed that we should keep things very simple, minimize the use of graphics, accommodate text-only browsers, and stay within the HTML 1.0 specification.

All that has long since changed, due in large part to the success of the Web, which in turn is due in large part to the success of Netscape. At this writing, estimates are that Netscape controls between 60 percent and 75 percent of the total market for desktop Web browsers. It appears that Microsoft's challenge with its own excellent Internet Explorer has already begun to make some inroads into that base, but even the most optimistic Microsoft supporters doubt that Netscape's share of this market will fall below 50 percent before mid-1997.

The situation is so out of control that the governing bodies of the Web have all but given up trying to create a single, monolithic standard for HTML. The planned HTML 2.0 specification, in draft at this writing, may in fact never see

the light of day as a single document released at one time. Instead, we may well see standards for various aspects of the World Wide Web and HTML emerge as the market drives the decisions.

All of this means that there is only a relatively little danger in designing your Web sites for Netscape. There are, as I'll point out, ways to accommodate non-Netscape browsers in such a way that your pages don't "break" when viewed with them.

My advice—which we follow at SALON Internet, Inc. (<http://www.salon1999.com>) where I am Senior Webmaster and Director of Technology—is to use the Netscapisms but be sure not to lock out any other graphical browser. Try to accommodate the textual browsers as much as possible, but don't compromise design and quality to do so.

That's not a view that everyone will find acceptable, but that's what makes a circus.

Contacting the Author

I love hearing from my readers. Email is definitely the best way to contact me. Now that I have a permanent address with my own Internet domain, you can be sure that even if I switch Internet Service Providers, this address will be good as long as I'm online. So send me email "valentines and vituperations" (to borrow a phrase from the magazine where I work) at: dan@gui.com.

I'll look forward to hearing from you!

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I appreciate the help and support of the following people, without whom this book would have been more difficult or even impossible:

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The background of the entire page is a complex, abstract 3D pattern. It consists of a dense grid of small cubes or rectangular blocks. These blocks are arranged in a way that creates a sense of depth and perspective, with some blocks appearing to rise above others. The lighting is dramatic, coming from the upper left, which casts long, sharp shadows and highlights the edges of the cubes, creating a high-contrast, almost crystalline effect. The overall color palette is monochromatic, using shades of black, white, and gray.

what's NEW IN NETSCAPE?