**The History of the Browser Wars: When Netscape Met Microsoft:** The “Browser Wars” kicked off in the mid-90s, at a time when the world was just starting to come online. The web was still a fuzzy, undefined medium.

**Netscape**

* Netscape had a high rise to the top of the web world. The company began soon after software engineer Marc Andreessen graduated from the University of Illinois in 1994.
* So not long after he left Illinois, Andreessen was contacted by Jim Clark, a bit of a legend in the Silicon Valley area. Clark and Andreessen met a few times and decided that a top-of-the-line commercial browser was exactly what the market needed.
* So, they went back to NCSA, and walked out with a team of top engineers ready to make that happen. Originally slated to be called Mosaic, the browser they released to the world became known (mostly for legal reasons) as **Netscape Navigator**, and the company, Netscape Communications.
* By version 2.0, released in August of 1995, they had added HTML frames, image maps, and probably most impressively, the first ever iteration of Javascript.
* But by the middle of 1995, Netscape had jumped to an 80% share of the market. It might seem short-sighted now, but at the time, coding for Netscape was the only way to go.
* Clark, for his part, made over $600 million that day. Andreessen got to the cover of *Time* and began calling for the dawn of a new age when the PC operating system would live entirely on the web, and specifically with Netscape.

And that’s when Netscape got their first real competition from the goliath they knew would eventually come around: **Microsoft.**

**Microsoft**

* Microsoft had largely ignored the web (and the Internet at large) for some time. Bill Gates failed to recognize the importance of this new network early on, so the company fell back on their core competency: personal computing. That means, if you used the Windows operating system (like 90% of PC users), you would have to go purchase a browser separately.
* Gates in May of 1995 sent out a memo to all Microsoft employees titled “The Internet Tidal Wave.” In it, Gates outlined a new future for his company, one connected inextricably to the Internet. His paranoia for competition was also clear. Netscape, Gates demanded, was a company that Microsoft would need to “match and beat.”
* Bolstered by support from the very top of their company, a few Microsoft engineers got together to start working on a new browser. And that is why a few of them ended up at a meeting at Netscape.

**Microsoft- Netscape Meeting**

Over the years, this meeting has become the stuff of legends, primarily because there are two *completely*different versions of how it went down.

* In Microsoft’s version, the meeting went off without a hitch. In a long, but productive exchange, the two companies shared ideas and visions for the future.
* In Netscape’s version, things are quite a bit different. According to Andresseen’s notes, Microsoft came to them with an ultimatum. Join up or move out of the way. Microsoft offered Netscape a meager sum for their browsers code base. When the team refused, employees from Microsoft threatened to eliminate them from the market by any means necessary.
* As Netscape’s success grew, Microsoft got their own browser ready.It was called **Internet Explorer**IE was, at first, far from impressive
* Meanwhile, the two browsers only scaled up their efforts thus continuing the wars and conflicts.
* Microsoft took a slightly different route. Microsoft started pushing their distribution channels. They gave away the browser for free to PC manufacturers and Internet Service Providers to bundle into their hardware. They included this version, for free, bundled right into the Windows ’95 operating system. No longer would users have to go to their local electronics shop and chose from a few competitive options. They would have a browser built right in that, frankly, works almost as well as any other option out there. For free.

**All at once, Netscape’s pricing model completely fell apart.**

* Microsoft’s efforts wouldn’t go completely unchecked. For one thing, Microsoft had licensed their code from Spyglass with the promise of royalties from total sales. When they started giving away their browser for free, Spyglass sued for the share of profits they would now never see. They settled out of court, but it wasn’t long before Spyglass faded from existence altogether.
* Then, of course, were the charges brought against Microsoft by the *United States Government*. In the summer of 1998, Microsoft went on trial for violating antitrust laws and a consent decree from a few years previous. The US Department of Justice argued that by giving away their browser for free, and bundling it into their operating system, they forced consumers to use their product and pushed competitors out of the market
* Microsoft’s argument was that Internet Explorer was an integral piece of their operating system, and that Windows ’98 couldn’t function without it. But that argument proved to be flimsy. In his deposition, Gates often came off as arrogant and evasive, and the evidence against Microsoft seemed staggering.
* In November of 1998, Netscape was sold to AOL for $4.2 billion
* By the early 2000’s, the Browser Wars ended, and a period of stagnation followed. But just on the horizon, a few open-source browsers waited in the wings, ready to offer another bout of competition.