

BEVERLY_HILLS.COM

A comedy for the 1990s

4,000 words; weekly, 1-hour format

The Scene:

Loving over the wires! Join our group of cool Gen-X kids as they cruise the data superhighway in search of adventure and romance! Every week, netsurf along with roommates ALICE and XENIA and laugh at the antics of their wild assortment of friends. *Melrose Place* meets cyberculture! *Max Headroom* mellows out by the sea!

The setting is Santa Cruz, California, college town, retirement community, surfer-hippie/nature-mystic hangout, bedroom community for Silicon Valley, and not so coincidentally, the setting for the cult horror film, *The Lost Boys*. Our heroines live in a second-story unit of a pink stucco fourplex 10 blocks from the sea. They call their place Ossian's Cave. It's modestly furnished, except for the 35-inch Mitsubishi TV, where the gang gathers religiously every week to watch *Beverly Hills 90210*. In tribute, they call their own small cyber-ecosystem "beverly_hills.com."

Part of each show is split-screen: the audience sees the girls lounging in their ergonomically correct chairs as they type on the computer screen. The online format allows ample venues for guest stars, much as on *Hotel* or *The Love Boat*: different characters met online can be brought on for F2F encounters. What's more, computer and communications hotshots are dying to go mainstream, so would be eager to play walk-on roles - for example, JOHN MALONE might be persuaded to appear in an episode in which our heroines are having trouble with their cable! He would appear as the concerned, quality-conscious CEO that he undoubtedly wants to project to mainstream America.

The Setup:

Two of three episodically recurring characters (VICTORIA, BOBBY)

communicate with our lead characters by e-mail at the beginning and end of each episode. Both BOBBY and VICTORIA are out of town most of the time (BOBBY lives in LA, VICTORIA is a traveling salesperson), so there are ample opportunities for location cameos, say, showing BOBBY going online from the deck of a beach house in Malibu, tableside at a celebrity-chef restaurant, or VICTORIA communicating from the slopes at Alta, the United Airlines Red Carpet Club lounge in Seattle, or the Knowledge Systems Lab at Stanford.

These logins and logouts can be topical jokes, as in a Johnny Carson monologue, insider computer quips ("Q: What is the information superhighway? A: It's just like the Internet, except it's more expensive and there's a commercial break every 10 minutes," or "How many Newtons does it take to change a light bulb? Foux! There to eat lemons, axe gravy soup!") or merely slice-of-life vignettes that help foster the relationships between our characters and develop the audience's investment in them.

Interstitial Fun:

The segue to each commercial would be a 15- to 30-second Cyberpunk Moment◆, which could be a jump-cut, for example, to VICTORIA hiking down the steep path to Lake Tahoe's pristine, pastoral Emerald Bay, only to arrive at a pay phone emblazoned with an MCI decal; BOBBY driving in his rehabbed 1966 Mustang convertible, glancing up at a record store marquee that lists "Software/Videos/Laser Discs;" RIMBAUD flipping out his PDA to write down the phone number of a woman he's obviously just picked up; or an item torn from a newspaper announcing Pizza Hut's new Net address. Cyberpunk Moments◆ can also be brief dystopian glimpses: a newspaper headline about the death of a species, a press release for a product too awful or silly or wasteful to exist, anything that concerned Gen-X kids might care about.

Viewers would be invited at the end of every show to send in their own logins and logouts or Cyberpunk Moments◆. Materials would be considered only if they are received through the show's e-mail address.

Lead Characters:

ALICE: A tall, strawberry-blonde, all-American beauty who escaped from her Iowa farm upbringing into the thrills of Big City living and computer high jinks! Works as a Mac systems analyst for a breast-cancer research center. ALICE got a

gymnastics scholarship to Stanford, where, because of a growth spurt, she became too tall to compete. From a Mennonite family, she has a tremendous fascination with her Russian ancestors and all things Russian. And growing up as a religious minority, she has great sympathy for the underdog. She first got into computers through a work-study job cataloging dissident materials newly available (because of the fall of the Soviet Union) to the West. Her great love is a former Sovietologist now in residence at the Hoover Institute; they parted over politics.

XENIA: Her roommate, from a broken family. A rebel girl who traveled far and wide as a teenager and has somewhat settled down. XENIA is exotic-looking rather than beautiful, and dresses with theatrical flair and thrift-shop aplomb. She freelances in desktop publishing. XENIA came from a dying New England mill town, where her divorced, lapsed-Catholic parents drank too much. XENIA got into desktop publishing when helping put out a magazine for the local women's bookstore. Typical of XENIA's pluck, she worked a full-time shift at a local oatmeal-cookie factory in college to pay for a trip to Prague. XENIA took her name from Exene, the '70s punk singer; her real name is Mary-Josephine, reflecting her French-Portuguese-Polish ancestry. She met ALICE at a Surfrider Foundation event. XENIA is also an NRA-certified firearms instructor and has survivalist friends. XENIA is the Mork to ALICE's Mindy.

Their Two Best Friends:

RIMBAUD: A tall, lean, dark, hacker/cracker/slacker cyberpunk crown prince who wears leather jackets and has unrelenting seductive powers over women owing in no small part to his Lord Byron aura. Disappears for months at a time to backpack in Ladakh; makes his money doing security consulting for business computer systems. RIMBAUD's real name is Martin Rimbaud Poole; his parents gave him the middle name because he was conceived on a trip to Paris when they were seeking the site of Le Bateau Ivre. RIMBAUD makes the local, smoke-free espresso joint, Caf/ Pugiliste, his informal situation room, hanging out for hours on end with his macchiatos, PowerBook, and Skytel pager. RIMBAUD has an ill-tempered corgi named PIXIE, of whom no one dares make fun. PIXIE rides in the sidecar of RIMBAUD's BSA 450. RIMBAUD grew up in Westport, Connecticut, and maintains he went to Brown only because of its semiotics

program - though he spent more time on the computer science department's ray-tracer programs than reading Luce Irigaray. RIMBAUD is a Fonz for the '90s.

XENIA and RIMBAUD had a brief fling before the show starts: the first time he stood her up on a Saturday night, she cut it off. (She's been around.) RIMBAUD still insists that he was called away on an urgent computer-security break-in: they still bicker about it, years later.

HOWARD: Their geeky friend. The one the roommates call when their computers crash. Shy, sweet, spacey, with no fashion sense whatsoever, he works for a software start-up so secret and exclusive it won't even say what it's about. HOWARD has a secret online identity, the LAIRD OF MORDOR, who is the most dazzling, elusive warlord ever to stalk the realms of MUDs and MOOs. The LAIRD OF MORDOR is the only computer avatar who has consistently bested RIMBAUD, yet RIMBAUD has no idea that the self-effacing nerd his pals ALICE and XENIA hang out with is his archrival and better. No one in HOWARD's large family has any idea how he ended up such a computer genius, breaking into NORAD before he hit puberty. HOWARD grew up in rural Pennsylvania and attended the same small four-year college where his parents met. Never thinking to cross state lines, he ended up at Carnegie Mellon for graduate school, from which he was recruited by the Media Lab, Xerox PARC, Interval Research, Microsoft Advanced Technology Group, Bell Labs, and SRI International. Instead, he chose to work for Universal Galactic, the software company so cool no one knows what it does.

Regular Minor Characters:

ROSE: Their other nerd friend. Moon-faced, pudgy, sweet, ROSE has been smart enough in her snooping through cyberspace to suspect that HOWARD may indeed be the LAIRD OF MORDOR. She's noticed that she never sees them at the same time and place on the Net and that they share similar ways with aliases and HTML programming styles. However, she has a crush on HOWARD, and is not sure how to confront him with her suspicions. ROSE helps maintain the Net node at the local university, and hints at interests in goddess worship and consensual S/M.

CLAUDE: Their kindly landlord, the grandfather figure to the group. Though CLAUDE worked in crypto during World War II (and will never talk about his

exploits), he has had little contact with technology since. He is in awe of his "girls," as he calls them, and their genius with computers, but on some level, he doesn't understand all that ALICE and XENIA can do at their turbo workstations. CLAUDE has retired to this West Coast town after a career on Wall Street, leaving just as the quants were taking over. CLAUDE is a stand-in for the audience's confusion about but appreciative awe for cutting-edge technology. He is the girls' straight man: he often remarks on their ever-increasing phone lines, their need to have their machines on a circuit separate from the refrigerator, and the strange magazines they receive (*Mondo 2000*, *Fringeware Review*, *Wired*, *Future Sex*, *Yellow Silk*, *Anything That Moves*, and the Loompanics catalog).

JEREMY: A burned-out Vietnam vet who lives next door. He works as a landscape architect because it is a peaceful occupation and causes no harm to other sentient beings. Because of his experience in the war with electronic surveillance, smart bombs, and other nasty technologies he won't talk about, he is skeptical of the girls' activities and believes no good can come of it. Nonetheless, JEREMY has the loyalty and ferocity of a German shepherd.

PEGGY: Lives in the basement apartment with her baby and husband, a technician laid off from the defense-aerospace industry. We never see CURT, because he has taken to driving long-haul routes for a non-union toxic-waste company. PEGGY wants to befriend the girls at the girl-talk level, tries to set them up with CURT's buddies, and offers to give them a discount at a nail salon her cousin operates - not realizing that long nails are death for Computer Gurlz. Peggy is self-deprecating, feels at once sheepish and defensive that she is home with her infant, yet is frightened of moving out of her world. PEGGY has been known to ask our girls why it is that if they work in an industry where the men so outnumber the women, they are not married off yet.

Episodically Recurring Characters:

BOBBY: HOWARD's college roommate. He ended up at Edinburg College because he was desperate to get away from his overbearing Staten Island Jewish parents and get closer to cows. (Because he was a smart boy who spent a bit too much time in video arcades, Edinburg was the only suitable place he could get a scholarship.) After college, BOBBY moved to San Francisco and came out of the

closet. After being kicked out of an Act Up direct-action meeting because he couldn't stop cracking jokes, he retreated into himself; within three months, he came up with an idea for a computer game based on his career as a bicycle messenger (*Street Bomba*, with extra points for attending Critical Mass rallies and cutting off BMWs making illegal left turns) that netted him hundreds of thousands of dollars. BOBBY later moved to LA, where he is now vice president of A&R for the US affiliate of a Japanese electronics firm. BOBBY misses his simpler days of cruising the Castro and grooving on voluntary poverty and outrageous non-assimilationist gay politics. He's torn between vocally trying to sell gays to middle America ("Gay guys and their Weber barbecues!") and thinking he should stay where he is to keep acquiring the money to quietly support friends dying of AIDS. Worse luck for him, BOBBY is so damned successful at developing multimedia-content ideas that sell (his own or others), he can't leave Hollywood. So, he flies up to visit his pals at least once a month. Think of BOBBY as our man from Silliwood, an updated version of the Billy Crystal character from *Soap*.

VICTORIA: Regional sales manager for Xerox high-end imaging products. Originally from North Carolina, she is a striking, green-eyed woman of mixed Cherokee-French-Gullah ancestry who reeks of a proper upbringing. VICTORIA attended the University of Rochester, majoring in special ed for the hearing-impaired - her beloved younger brother was born deaf. In Rochester, though, she was recruited by Xerox's minority management-training program.

VICTORIA and ALICE met at a Brazilian Capoeira ethno-aerobics class, and discovered a common love of pesto pizza. Before the series began, VICTORIA and ALICE were roommates; VICTORIA moved out to live with ARNELL, a graduate student in social work she met at a Buppie ski weekend. Alas, ARNELL later took a job he couldn't refuse: head of counseling at an Idaho ranch for inner-city kids routed away from juvie and into wholesome country living. The job lets ARNELL be nearer to his daughter LISHA, who lives with her mother in Montana. ARNELL and VICTORIA still make occasional efforts to cope with their own personal two-body problem. VICTORIA is aghast at outrageous XENIA, her replacement in the household, who can't help twitting the ladylike VICTORIA.

ANA: A Southern California-born Japanese-American textile designer who has worked with traditional and natural materials and techniques years before such

things became fashionable. She is annoyed at how automation is affecting her business, for while ANA's customers (/lite hotels and Manhattan interior design firms) are mad for the work of this sole proprietor, they increasingly cannot understand why her studio's products are, say, not distributable on disk. ANA and XENIA met rummaging through the remnant bins at Britex Fabrics, where XENIA was searching for materials for an opera cloak to wear to the 30th birthday party of one of her Goth friends. ANA is a woman of effortless and distinctive chic à la Adelle Lutz, and is idolized by XENIA.

Episodes:

€ ALICE gets e-mail from her high-school basketball player ex-boyfriend STANLEY, from whom she hasn't heard in 20 years! The same day, XENIA gets e-mail from her college girlfriend, SYDNEY, whom she met at a Take Back the Night march in Northampton, Massachusetts. What do our girls do?

€ XENIA is caught reading alt.child.torture. How embarrassing!

€ ALICE and XENIA end up in a MOO with both RIMBAUD and the LAIRD OF MORDOR. The girls try to come to the rescue of their friend RIMBAUD, but the LAIRD outwits them all.

€ ALICE is ticked off because she can't configure her new Pentium, and she's in a panic because she's been invited to participate in an élite, real-time conference deconstructing teledildonics - and it starts in 15 minutes! Fortunately HOWARD's available to help, but ALICE doesn't want her seemingly uncool buddy hanging around once the e-gabbing begins. How can she get him to leave without hurting his feelings?

€ RIMBAUD falls in love with a command-line cowgirl, a hired gun brought in on a secure fiber-bypass project where he's billing major bucks. NANCY is from the backwoods, where her first computer was an overlooked Kaypro from a shipment of orphaned machines sent to rural schools. With little access to parts and expertise, NANCY has become a total, can-do genius. RIMBAUD thinks he can impress this down-home pistol of a programmer with his GUIs and shell scripts, but NANCY decides he is a puffball poseur and falls instead for a phone-line repairman who lost his job in a downsizing and whom she met teaching an ATM training workshop for workers made redundant by Signaling System 7. She

is smitten with this man who is really good with hardware and knows how to work with his hands.

€ RIMBAUD asks ANA out on a date. Things are going great until he offers to demo Aldus Freehand for her!

€ HOWARD falls for JEANINE, an airy ethno-musicologist brought in to do human-factors consulting at Universal Galactic. Despite the attention she pays him, she blows him off when her contract is up. HOWARD seeks consolation in loyal ROSE, who is, of course, a much better match for him. But HOWARD sees her merely as one of the boys. ROSE, meanwhile, is dismayed to discover that the luthier HOWARD was so enamored of didn't even know how to send a fax!

€ Attack of the Flesh-Eating Andromeda-Strain Trojan Horse Worm Viruses! HOWARD accidentally releases diseased intelligent agents into the Net. Showing up unexpectedly at the girls' apartment with two pizzas and three six-packs of Jolt, he orders them to turn off their computers with nervous urgency. But it's too late: the agents get out of control and into his friends' computers!

€ ALICE gets into a flame war with OLIVER STONE on America Online!

€ VICTORIA and ALICE are online. The news is that ARNELL's daughter LISHA has created striking but disturbing images using Photostyler on her school's Mac IIcx and mailed them to VICTORIA via Prodigy. VICTORIA is torn between showing the images to ARNELL, or respecting LISHA's privacy and keeping them to herself. Moral quandary! ALICE tells XENIA about it, and XENIA suggests printing the images at a local service bureau and showing them to a gallery owner she knows. VICTORIA is horrified, and they argue; both women say they have LISHA's best interests at heart.

€ A Russian genius software programmer whom ALICE meets on the Internet wants to come stay with the girls! And on the weekend he is due to arrive, XENIA's mother, who still thinks of Russians as Godless Commie Bastards, is planning to pay a visit!

€ Techno-celebrity ESTHER DYSON visits the girls because of their shared interest in software - and kooky Russian programmers!

€ RIMBAUD is interviewed by Scottish babe ALISON for a joint ITV/Discovery Channel documentary on RBOCs in Hollywood, called "From LATAs to Lattes." ALISON is thrilled with RIMBAUD's insider knowledge of multimedia convergence on the infobahn, and it looks like she's in love!

€ Oops! XENIA's Modern Primitives dist list and Object-Oriented Primitives dist list accidentally get linked on her hard disk. A hilarious mix-up ensues!

€ Uh-oh! Federal agents pay a visit to our girls because of erroneous tips about XENIA's expertise with guns and love of paint-ball war games! JEREMY, recognizing a narc car when he sees one, comes to the girls' rescue - but not before RIMBAUD scrambles the signals coming into the feds' cell phones and all the data on their laptops! PIXIE gets into the act with some serious barking, scratching, and nipping, and it takes some doing to unscramble the confusion.

€ On a trip north to attend a Digital Queers benefit, BOBBY meets a hunky guy, BRIAN, who writes optimizing compilers for SGI and collects Star Trek slash memorabilia. But the affair is nipped in the bud when BOBBY finds out that the hunk is obsessed with a Howard the Duck game that he plays endlessly on his beloved Packard Bell! What's more, BRIAN has a redwood burl coffee table and likes Billy Joel!

€ XENIA decides to help her Adult Children of Alcoholics home meeting compile a phone tree, but runs into problems when her database program won't override the last-name field she needs to leave blank! What to do? HOWARD could help, but he just doesn't understand why XENIA won't ask her friends what their last names are! Harks back to earlier episodes: the time when HOWARD asked XENIA what the bottle of Zoloft left out on the kitchen counter was for, or when he asked her why her skinny friend SANDY wouldn't stop throwing up!

€ When ALICE and XENIA team up to try to make a simulation game about AIDS, CLAUDE uses his Wall Street contacts to introduce the girls to venture capitalists! Guest appearances by true-life VCs ROGER McNAMEE (a real cutie-pie!) and DAN LYNCH; Dan asks both girls to join him in the hot tub at his Los Altos Hills estate! This is a two-part episode. In the second installment, real-life CEO JEFF BRAUN of Maxis is brought on board to evaluate the girls' project. He

compliments them on their work, and promises to check back in a year when they've either worked out the bugs or turned them into features!

€ PEGGY gives ROSE a beauty makeover, the better to ensnare HOWARD! So just what does today's girl nerd do to entrance the guy nerd of our dreams? You may be surprised!

€ XENIA traps HOWARD into helping her set up a Web server distributing Discordian resources, but the scheme backfires when they inadvertently link its home page to a PeaceNet server!

€ ERIK ESTRADA makes a guest appearance as an information superhighway patrolman who tries to recruit HOWARD to join the force. HOWARD is torn, but Electric Frontier Foundation co-founder MITCH KAPOR, in a cameo login, reminds HOWARD of his cypherpunk roots and deep-seated belief that information wants to be free!

€ Former comp lit major ALICE decides to write a novel called *The Bridges and Routers of Madison County*, about a handsome Certified NetWare Engineer from Iowa named Mark who travels to Minsk as part of a technology-transfer program. There, he meets Franka, a former tractor plant manager being trained in Western computer technology; when their eyes meet over a jabbering node, they know it's true love. Mark returns to his system integrator's business in Madison County, and Franka tries to keep the flame alive by sending e-mail about her problems bridging Token-Rings over Russian dial-up lines and trying to tunnel IPX packets through IP routers. ALICE can't make up her mind if the lovers should be reunited or remain forever torn apart by duty!

€ Season Finale. ANA is asked to stage a fashion show benefiting earthquake retrofitting required for the San Francisco Presidio's military-to-civilian conversion. (Think Andy Hardy movies....) JEREMY contributes tapes of traditional Hmong music he smuggled out of Laos in 1969, which XENIA samples and overdubs with traditional women's bawdy harvest songs from medieval Latvia. ALICE trips through the Net to find archival photographs of as many earthquake-stricken buildings as she can (good visual use of World Wide Web and Mosaic possible here), to be blown up and appropriated, collage-style, as backdrops. To enhance the overall sonic environment, CLAUDE calls on some of

his former OSS buddies to contribute oral histories of secret wars they have known. HOWARD wires up the models with electronic sensors that create virtual-reality projections on the walls as they strut down the runway. BOBBY calls on his friends in Hollywood to come up with actress-models (great walk-ons possible here!) for the show. ROSE designs C++ party-favor giveaway software that throws customized runes for each attendee. PEGGY acts as the stage manager and dresser, and VICTORIA will wear the smashing bridal gown that concludes the program. The episode ends with a sudden power failure!