From the creator of CyberHunt and author of "Dream for Me a New World" comes a new work of interactive fiction.

  "Look, this defies common sense! People don't just fall asleep and wake up somewhere else! I'm in bed right now and I'm going to wake up out of this fucking nightmare at 11 AM tomorrow morning. I'll have the mother of all hangovers, but let me tell you, mister, I'm going to wake up!"

Visit a world unlike any you have known.

  "My God, what's that...in the sky?"

  "We call that the 'sun'."

A mysterious alien landscape sprawls before you. You'd swear you'd never been here, but yet there are things that seem so familiar...

  "If it doesn't fall apart within a week then it's probably Japanese."

  "Hey, look, this isn't Burger King: you don't get it your way. If you have to ask where we get the meat, you're in the wrong city, friend."

Become a vagabond from our world, tossed into another realm by forces you cannot understand.

  "You learn to adapt, you know? I mean, it's not all that different. The place is run by a bunch of weird orange-skinned tight-asses that won't give you the time of day. There's these gangs running around in their armored cars blowing shit up. The
food's kinda spicy. It's New York, man, the whole planet is fucking New York City."

Once a peaceful world, it has become ravaged by prejudice and impending civil war.

  "You have been caught practicing the dark arts of magic and Lakruulian technology. For this you shall be cast out from among us and your name forgotten. This is the fate of all Shun-Gede!"

Here technology runs the gamut from ancient to beyond the pale...

  "Honey, I'm packing a plasma caster. Why don't you just put the sword down and we'll discuss this like sane human beings. Okay, okay, sane BEINGS!"

"Wait a sec, you mean to tell me that all of THIS is in your CAR?!"

...and magic has been discovered by those who risk their souls to find it.

"Talk to him? TALK to him? The man is breathing fire and you tell me to TALK to him?!"

You may find life comfortable under an alien sun, but there are those who have rebelled against their mysterious displacement.

"I'm talking roads, I'm talking street signs, I'm talking strip malls, I am talking the works! We might be stuck here for the time being, boys, but we're going to be stuck here in STYLE!"

Some more violently than others.

"...And when that day arrives, a black dawn will greet the eyes of these pitiful creatures. For on that day, brothers, Chaos will ride forth and all in our path shall speak the language of lamentation!"

Prepare for your journey, for the time of departure draws near.   Whatever the lot cast for you by Fate, you will soon be learning to survive in...

"Well, the natives call the place 'Geda.' But we... well, we've given it a more appropriate name. We call it

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Elsewhereville. Population: Variable. Welcome to Wherever You Are (watch yer sorry ass). The city of box-like pre-fab buildings appeared to have been discarded in the middle of this wasteland. It was a bleak oasis from the harsh landscape the planet offered humans. Eventually everyone managed to wander their way into Elsewhereville. It was a city of vagabonds, the displaced, all looking for something to buy. Any artifact from the old world would be a welcome treasure. A can of sardines. A pair of Reeboks. Marlboros. Cigarettes had become currency they were so rare.

Walker Cincinnati flicked a half-smoked cig onto the sidewalk, some part of his mind knowing that some poor schmuck would come along and pick it up, smoking it down to the filter. He had enough to spare. It was a symbol of power and wealth to actually smoke what you owned.

He leaned back against the wall of Villa Pucci, his rough hands taking inventory of his black leather duster's pockets. Wad of barterscrip in the left, semi-automatic pistol in the right false pocket, strapped to his side in a spring release holster.

Walker scanned the crowd, steel blue eyes shifting under the low brim of his beaten fedora. Yoshi said he would send one of the familiar couriers. Antonio or maybe Shida. Walker didn't see either among the blur of the sidewalk community, a floating collection of desperate humanity that was always moving but never seemed to end up anywhere.

"Mr. Cincinnati." The voice deep and bemused. To his right. Walker spun in that direction and wondered how he had missed seeing the tall, broad-shouldered oriental leaning against a defunct lamppost. Black suit. Black sunglasses. He had an air of lethal certainty.

"I have a message from Yoshi," the big man said as he reached inside his coat.

What should Walker do? Should he dodge into the doorway? Try to lose himself in the crowd? Maybe he's faster than the guy; maybe he can draw his pistol in time and blow the man away. But maybe the guy isn't reaching for a weapon. Should Walker keep his cool and see what happens?

These are questions that are never asked during the course of a story, novel, play or movie. As a reader or audience member, you are never offered an active role in the outcome of the story. You have no say as to what the characters will do next.

But what if you *did* have that option? What if you could decide the path the plot would take? How would this change your experience as a reader? How would this change the author's role?

These are the questions asked and explored by a media genre called "Interactive Literature" or more specifically to the case in point, "Interactive Fiction." The premise is that the author of the story creates the basic framework for what is going to happen, but allows for areas in which the action may branch in a new direction. The decision as to which path the story will take now falls into the hands of the reader. The reader is now no longer coming along for the ride, but instead has the role of a navigator while the author drives through the landscape of the story.

This is not a new concept. To understand my project, I ought to familiarize you with a bit of the history of interactive fiction. I would like to examine interactive fiction in its three main forms: as a print medium, as a social medium, and as an electronic medium.

The first real mainstream appearance of interactive fiction in printed form can be said to be the "Choose-Your-Own-Adventure" style of children and young adult's books. The first of its kind, *The Cave of Time*, portrayed you as the protagonist who happens to stumble across a magic cave which allowed time travel to different historical periods. What distinguished the book from all others was the fact that at certain key locations, it would give you an option in the following format:

If you would like to look down the left passage,
          turn to page 15.
If you want to find out what that weird blue glow at the end
        of the right passage is, turn to page 23.
If you think you better just leave the cave and go home,
          turn to page 56.

You would make a choice and turn to the respective page where the story would continue from where you left it. Sometimes a choice would lead to an ending. Sometimes there were over 20 possible different endings. Some were "happy" and you ended up saving the world, getting the treasure or some type of reward. Others were not so happy and you ended up with a dissatisfying conclusion which often involved your failure or even death.

The path-like nature of the books offered a sense of re-readability. You could read the story over and over and have it end a different way every time. But since the book was comprised of pre-written scenes and you had only several choices which the author thought to give you, the books remained limited in how much true interaction you could have with the story. As long as the medium remained static and finished, there would always be that limitation.

In the '70s, a man by the name of Gary Gygax created a sort of formalized make-believe system with rules. This became known as *Dungeons & Dragons*, a game still immensely popular to this day. Gygax has been credited as the person who single-handedly created the genre of "role-playing games" that exist today.

The typical role-playing game involves a "Dungeon Master" or "Game Master" or "Referee" and the players. It is the Referee's job to be familiar with the rules of the game and how the game universe works. For instance, if the game has a fantasy setting, the Referee needs to know how the feudal system of the land works, how magic works, what type of monsters roam the night, what gods rule here and how are they worshipped. Once the Referee or Game Master knows the basic framework of the world system, he can create "adventures" for the players. These adventures can also be purchased as pre-made "modules."

The players create characters who are their alter-egos in the game universe. In a fantasy setting, a player might play the role of an elven magician or a dwarf warrior. The player plays the role of their character much in the same way an actor plays his role on the stage. But here, the stage exists only in the consensual imagination of the Game Master and the players.

In this context, the Game Master is the author of the story and the players are the readers. The text exists in a spoken rather than written form, harkening back to the days of oral tradition. The Game Master presents situations to the players and they react appropriately. Using a combination of the pre-created rules and his own good judgment, the "GM" resolves the actions of the players and relates to them the results.

Here is a brief excerpt of how a fantasy role-playing game might go:

GAMEMASTER: Okay, you've made it to the edge of the clearing. You are still within the shadows of the forest, so you might not be seen. Ahead of you is a small stone tower. This looks like the place the crazy old man back in the tavern described to you. What do you want to do?

SEAN: How tall is the tower? Are there any visible windows or doors? How about guards? Are there any of those nasty orcs around?

GM: The tower looks to be about 100' tall. There are windows at the very top, but none near the middle or the base. There is a large wooden door facing you, though. You don't see any guards right now.

MARIE: Okay, I want to have my character Nightblade sneak as quietly as she can to the door and listen.

SEAN: Gardon covers her with his crossbow. If anyone pops out of there or

from around back, I want to peg them with an arrow.

GM: Mark, what about you? What is Syllphas doing?

MARK: Syllphas is preparing a fireball spell so it will be on hand in case things turn ugly.

GM: Okay...
   The Game Master would then determine the results of the character's actions. The GM knows that there is a horde of goblins hiding inside the tower, just waiting to burst out and cut the heroes to ribbons. Perhaps Nightblade hears them snickering behind the door and warns the others. Perhaps the goblins burst out and Gardon picks a few off with his crossbow. Pretty much anything can happen within the context of the game rules and the abilities of the characters.
   Here the interaction is much less restricted because the players are not always limited to a pre-designed choice of options. The story is not static, but is always in the process of being written, minute by minute, by the GM and the players. Of the three forms, my project is closest to the social medium of a role-playing game. But unlike an RPG, I do not have an elaborate set of rules, tables, dice and points for determining outcomes.

   One of the limitations of an RPG is that everyone involved has to find a convenient time when everyone can get together and play. A typical session can last from a few hours to several days (for the hard-core players).
   Over a decade ago, before the advent of personal computers, Will Crowther wrote a computer program that attempted to simulate the role of a Game Master while the user of the program was the player. Don Woods helped expand this program into a game called "Colossal Cave" which is more commonly known as "Adventure." Like *Dungeons & Dragons*, this game created a genre that is still with us today: the computer adventure game.
   Adventure combined the prose quality of a book while the primitive (by today's standards) text parser served as a referee, interpreting the player's actions. Back in those days, the processing power of computers was very limited. When playing the game, the user was limited to two word entries: a verb followed by a noun.
   Typical actions would be GET AXE, LOOK AXE, GO NORTH, THROW AXE. The program had a limited vocabulary and input such as FONDLE AXE or JOG NORTH would often be met by "I DO NOT UNDERSTAND THAT" or some similar message. There was only so much a computer could do.
   As computers got more powerful, the quality of these games improved as well. When Infocom (now owned by Activision) burst upon the scene, they basically took over the adventure game market. Their first game, *Zork* was a take on the standard *Adventure* but the storyline was much better and the prose was written by professionals. Not only that, but its parser accepted

full sentences rather than the verb noun construction of previous programs. Now you could GET THE AXE AND LOOK AT IT THEN GO NORTH AND THROW IT AT THE DWARF. You could also SAY TO DWARF, "HELLO, HOW ARE YOU?" and the dwarf would respond appropriately.

   Today, the text adventure has been pretty much obliterated by the high budget, high tech multimedia extravaganzas like *King's Quest* and *Ultima*. These games sacrifice complex interaction for ease of use and snazzy graphics and music.

   Over the years, hybrid combinations of the three mediums appeared in an attempt to overcome the limitations of one form and adopt the appealing features of the other.
   Steve Jackson combined the "Choose-Your-Own-Adventure" text format with aspects of role-playing in a series of books. Each book allowed you to create a character just like in a regular RPG and you rolled dice to determine the outcome of certain events. The books were still limited by the predefined number of options, though.
   On the Internet, role-playing games and electronic social interaction have joined forces in programs called M.U.D.S. (Multi-User DungeonS or Multi-User DimensionS). These are basically elaborate computer adventure games which allow many players to participate at the same time (some of them have 50 or more people at once!). Players can wander about and meet other people and talk to them. The presence of other people lends a sense of reality to the fictional world that exists there in cyberspace. Indeed, some people are known to prefer their fictional persona to real life and spend lots of time on M.U.D.S.

   My project incorporates all three mediums. It has the prose element that you would find in a book. It has the social and open-ended elements of a role-playing game because there are over 20 other people participating. And it has the electronic element because it exists on the VAX through e-mail.
   Basically, I would write a section of prose similar to the section at the very beginning of this paper and send it as an e-mail message to the player controlling the character (in the example, Walker Cincinnati is controlled by Tom Chiarella). They would read the message and then write a response, telling me what they would like their character to do and/or asking questions about things they are unclear on. I would then determine the outcome of their actions based on the context of the situation, the character's abilities, common sense and what I think would be an interesting and realistic result. This would continue back and forth, the character progressing through the story by a chain of actions and results.

Neverworld Original Concept

When reading a good science fiction or fantasy novel, especially one that is part of a series, I always notice the depth to which the fictional world has been developed. Some authors go so far as to draw maps of their world, write entire histories, develop the cultural background of the inhabitants and invent fictional languages for the characters to speak and write.

I wanted to do something similar for a story of my own. I thought I could create a whole planet and people it with an alien race. I would develop a history and a culture for them. I would think of a bizarre new ecology and strange but realistic animals. As my project progressed, I found that it was pretty damn hard to do all that in the time I had.

A lot of what went into the final world which I designed came from ideas I have had for stories over the past several years. When I was in high school, I imagined a world where everyone was black or at least the same race. I wondered how people would treat each other in such a world; whether new kinds of prejudice would appear. This idea was the seed for creating the Geden, the natives of the planet Geda.

Having attended a Christian high school, some of my story ideas are influenced by Biblical, spiritual and/or metaphysical subject matter. At one time I began a story about Biblical events from the perspective of Lucifer, but angel stories had become so cliche in the Christian fiction genre that I gave it up to look for new subject matter.

Ideas like these helped form the religious mythos of Geda. The "gods" that rule the planet, Gede and Gesta, are actually the angels assigned to guard the Garden of Eden mentioned in Genesis. They abandoned their post and as punishment, God told them they would have to guard the garden forever. He removed the garden from Earth and flung it into a parallel dimension where it grew into another an entirely new planet.

As on Earth, a race of humanoids developed. They were known as the Geden. Gene Roddenberry, the creator of Star Trek, had a rule about any alien races that were created for the show. He said that they must always be humanoid and their faces may not be totally obscured. He wanted the aliens to retain a semblance of humanity so that the audience could always relate. This was my philosophy with the Geden. I didn't want them to be too bizarre, otherwise the readers/players would find it difficult to relate to them.

So the Geden were like humans, but they had orange skin, uniform brown gold-flecked eyes, four fingers and toes, and they had better hearing and vision. To make them a bit more interesting, I also gave them telepathy, the ability to communicate thoughts and emotions without speaking. This was also a useful device that explained how they could talk to humans without knowing English.

Some time later I realized that the Geden seemed similar in appearance to the protagonists in the Pini's comic, *Elfquest*. It was completely unintentional.

Almost as a whim, I decided that the average Gedan lived to the age of 40 spans (a span is not quite as long as an Earth year). Around the age of 40, they underwent massive brain trauma and almost always died. Those that survived were viewed with special awe and they went on to live for 40 or more spans. This little detail developed into what the Geden call the Change. A major plot line developed because one of the players, Professor Istvan, wondered if there were a way to avoid the Change.

So I started with these vague ideas of a planet and an outline for a race to live there. But this was not interesting enough to me.

I have been fascinated with the idea of blending different genres into a single fictional world. There is a role-playing game called *Shadowrun* which combines William Gibson's cyberpunk dark future with fantasy creatures and magic from *Dungeons & Dragons.* This concept is also played out in many post-apocalyptic literature and films. People living in squalid huts, hunting like primitives, yet their clothes are decorated with transistors and diodes. They could have a spear in one hand and an old automatic pistol in the other.

I went for a similar blend of contrasting genres in Neverworld. The Geden were on the technological level of the Romans, but they also used hover vehicles and rifles which they obtained from the humans.

I thought it would be interesting to have humans from earth living on the planet. Somehow they had been whisked away from their own world and deposited on Geda where they had to make a new life. How did they get there, though? My original idea was that Lakruul, the evil son of Gede and Gesta, had maliciously created dimensional holes in the time-space continuum through which people from earth could be sucked through.

This was too simple. As the story progressed, I developed the idea of how humans came to live on Geda. In earth's future (around 2050), a megacorporation known as TimeCo begins to conduct experiments with time travel and travel through other dimensions. In a drastic temporal mishap, the entire facility, along with the city of Washington is transported to Geda. This accident sends ripples backwards through time as far back as 1830. These ripples cause openings in time-space to appear. I came up with different events that could trigger the activation of one of these openings.

I thought it would be interesting to explain the mysterious disappearance of planes and ships in the Bermuda Triangle as temporal holes that led to Geda, the Neverworld. But I never really implemented that in the story.

People that suffered great trauma or went into comas could also be transported to Geda. Professor Dave Herrold (he teaches ceramics) got his hand caught in a clay blender and blacked out because of the pain. When he woke up, he was in Neverworld. Troy Cummings was hit by a car on his way home from the Center for Contemporary Media and went into a coma. While his body remained in Putnam County Hospital, a solid psychic representation of himself went to the other world.

The nuclear detonations on Hiroshima and Nagasaki opened huge rifts,

drawing everyone who died there into another world.

Meanwhile, TimeCo is busy trying to discover a means that will allow them to return to Earth. All of their experiments have failed, but they usually result in people from Earth being mysteriously displaced from their ordinary surroundings.

The Geden didn't take too kindly to their world being invaded by humans, so they usually treat humans with dislike and mistrust.

I had the beginnings of something here. An interesting world to explore and develop. There were possibilities for all sorts of tensions and plots. But I didn't know what to do with it yet. I didn't know how to make it live and move.

The following sections contain my notes on different aspects of the world I made and the story that took place in it.

The History of Geda

<u>In the Beginning</u>
Then the Lord said, "Now that the man has become as we are, knowing good from bad, what if he eats the fruit of the Tree of Life and lives forever?" So the Lord God banished him forever from the Garden of Eden, and sent him out to farm the ground from which he had been taken. Thus God expelled him, and placed mighty angels at the east of the Garden of Eden, with a flaming sword to guard the entrance to the Tree of Life.
   Genesis 3:22-24

And so Gede and Gesta were commanded to stand guard at the east entrance to the garden and allow no one to enter. At one time, Adam, tired from his labor, attempted to return to the garden, but found the angels there. They would not let him pass, so he went away. No one came back for a long time.

Gede and Gesta grew weary of standing guard and saw little point in it since no one was trying to get in. After much deliberation, Gede decided that he would leave his post and go before God to ask how long they must remain at the entrance of the garden.

When the angel appeared before God, the Lord became angered at Gede for leaving his post without permission.

"Your time in that place was to be short," God told the angel. "I would have honored you with a great reward for your devotion to Me. But you have chosen to disobey My command and thereby deny yourself the reward. Now you shall never leave the garden."

Gede was greatly troubled and he prostrated himself before God, begging for mercy. God saw this and his heart was moved.

"I shall give the garden to you and put it under your care. It shall become

a seed which will bear a new earth as its fruit. You shall be the guardian of this new world. Because Gesta conspired with you and stood along side you, she will be your companion and also guard the world. But even so, neither of you shall leave the garden until the fullness of time."

   And God lifted the garden from the earth which He had made and breathed upon it the breath of life. Then He hurled it from the heavens and Gede and Gesta with it.

   The garden grew, forming land and sea. It brought forth all manner of bird and beast and creeping thing. Gede and Gesta named the world Geda -- the seed of Eden.

Geden

  Among the creatures arose a race that were like the humans of earth. They grew and prospered and spread over the planet. Gede and Gesta grew fond of the Geden and thought of them as their own children. But they were not like the angels and could not commune with Geda and Gesta in the same way.

Lakruul

   Missing the company of their fellow angels, Gede and Gesta joined together to create another being like themselves. They combined the essence of the humans created by God and that of the Geden on the planet below. They lent this being some of their own essence and power to make it like an angel.

   But the creature was willful and had no desire to be in the world. The creature moved among the Geden, corrupting them, inciting them to assert their will also. Gede and Gesta took the creature and flung it into the deepest ocean, causing it to fall into a deep sleep. They knew that one day it would awaken again and have the chance to decide its fate once more.

   They named the creature "Lakruul", the Disobedient One.

[Up until the time when the story begins, Lakruul has been in a dormant state. He is not responsible for many events blamed on him including Lakruul's Havoc.]

[Lakruul is a character in the game. He is half-Human and Half-Gedan. He is washed up on the shore of Gesta-Lee without any memory or knowledge of who he is. In order to bring about the salvation of the Geden and circumvent the Change, Lakruul must journey to Caiden and fulfill the prophecy.]

The Golden Age of Geda

   In the early years, the Geden prospered. They learned to harness the resources of the planet for their needs. Gede and Gesta themselves walked among the Geden, helping them grow and advance. The Geden constructed

homes in the freej. Then they learned to build houses by molding the glaztone.

TimeCo Arrives
  In the Earth's far future, a megacorporation rises to the forefront in time travel technology: TimeCo. Through a freak accident, a large section of the TimeCo research facility from the corporation's past, present and future are torn from their respective times and moved through space to re-appear on Geda. The humans find they are trapped there for the time being until they can develop a trans-dimensional gateway to return them to Earth. In the meantime, they set about to terraform Geda.
  Gede and Gesta were immediately aware of the humans' presence. They were surprised at their arrival, but then glad because they now had God's humans to interact with the Geden. The two gods informed the Gedan population of the humans and prepared them to interact with each other.
  The humans met with the Geden. After initial trepidations had subsided, the two races found they had something to offer one another. The Geden offered a knowledge of the planet and use of its resources. TimeCo offered technology. Through this cooperation, the Geden acquired vehicles and more efficient tools to construct buildings.
  As TimeCo began to expand and the Geden continued to receive new technology, there were those among the Geden who wondered if this was such a good thing after all.

Lakruul's Havoc
  While getting on good terms with the Geden (trading beads with the natives, as some put it), the technicians at TimeCo were beginning their attempts to open a trans-dimensional portal back to Earthspace.
  Their first dramatic failure opened a gate to an Earth-like world. They managed to displace a huge section of land, in the center of which was Castle Chaos, home of the Brotherhood of Chaos. The Brotherhood was not surprised by what had happened, they being aware that the universe is in the hands of unexplainable Chaos.
  Successive experiments created rifts in earth's time-space fabric which would randomly displace people to Geda. TimeCo was able to narrow the focus of their gates so that only the years between 1830 and 2050 were affected.
  Early on, displaced humans would appear en masse, but since then TimeCo has tweaked their instruments to stop generating the rifts. Many rifts still exist and they are beyond TimeCo's control. Humans from different times continue to appear on Geda, but at a very low rate.
  The sudden appearance of the humans greatly disturbed the Geden. The humans were confused and angry. Some of them were violent. Occasionally the Brotherhood would mount a random attack for no particular reason. The Geden began thinking that perhaps the humans were not so great after all.
  Gede and Gesta were aware of the rifts, but did not know where they came

from and could do nothing to fix them. They appeared to the Geden, explaining that the appearance of the humans was the doing of Lakruul. He was trying to usurp the serenity of Geda, they said, by bringing the humans here and causing violent change. The Geden ought to cease relations with the humans and their technology.

   This planted the seed in the Geden that would later grow into a fear of change, technology and new thinking.

<u>The Humans Spread</u>

   The humans spread to regions south of the Gedan capital and neighboring cities. They occupied a band of relatively desolate land that stretches from the Gesta-Lee to Castle Chaos in the east. In between are cities like New Washington, Motz and Elsewhereville and assorted nameless towns. TimeCo was largely responsible for building these cities. It was part of their efforts to establish the human presence on Geda. Several of the cities fell into disrepair due to lack of funds and general disinterest. Elsewhereville almost collapsed, but rose again as a haven thriving with commerce of all sorts.

The Planet

   Geda is a planet about one half the size of Earth. Its days are 18 hours long and its years (spans) are about 274 days. It revolves around an hourglass shaped sun that turns in on itself as the year passes, becoming eye-shaped (why? why not?).

   There is one main continent surrounded by a crystal clear ocean. The surface of the planet is principally scrubland. The two other biomes are the plateaus and the *freej*.

   Most of the rock formations are made of *glaztone*, the most plentiful raw material on the planet. Glaztone is an amber-colored marble-like substance with special properties that react to certain sound frequencies. When subjected to intense sound waves, the material becomes pliable and can be molded into another form and allowed to harden. The Geden construct their dwellings this way, scooping out the insides of rock formations with sonic drills. Their dwellings resemble stone igloos, melding together like soap bubbles. The Geden also fashion weapons and tools out of glaztone.

   The freej are what pass as tress on Geda. They are immense, mushroom-like plants, the smallest being as thick as a California redwood and several stories tall. The outside skin of the freej is covered by a thick moss. There are no limbs on the trunk of the freej, except just below the giant cap at the top. The Geden build cities in the freej forests using glaztone struts to support platforms and bridges between the closely spaced plants.

I didn't really develop the climate and weather conditions on Geda because I really didn't want to worry that much about it. The story takes place within the period of about a week, so there would be no seasonal changes. I guess it probably rains there, but I doubt it snows. It's pretty comfortable and idyllic most of the time.

Also rather undeveloped is the fauna. I decided that there probably weren't a great variety of animals on Geda. The animals are fairly Earth-like, perhaps a variation in color or size. I also wanted there to be dinosaurs, but I never let their presence be known very well except in one situation where two of the characters rode a herd of them to town.

The Cities

CAIDEN: This is the Gedan capital city. It is situated near two long plateaus which flank it to the north and east. This is where the Regents have their seat of power. The Regents are a board of several Geden, most of which have survived the Change. They oversee all other Geden cities from here. Currently their main task seems to be rooting out elements of the Shun-Gede from within their ranks. The Shun-Gede are Geden who have been swayed by Lakruul or human ways to pursue a lifestyle contrary to the age-old Geden ways.

I wanted Caiden to be a sort of culminating point of the story. I wasn't sure what I wanted to happen there. I imagined the humans rallying together and storming the city, but I didn't know to what purpose. Instead, I made it the goal of a holy quest. In the city is a temple dedicated to Gesta. In one of the courtyards is a rope which hangs in midair by some mysterious force. Legend has it that some day, one would come who could climb the rope and one they reached the top, let go and fall *up* into the heavens. This individual would be the one who could right the wrongs of the day. Many had tried and failed, so the rope became more and more of a novelty rather and the legend became less spoken of.

GAN: This is a city built in the freej. Freej cities like Gan are constructed from glaztone which has had its molecular composition specially altered to be lighter but still very strong. It is the same process used to forge weapons out of glaztone. The upper branches of the freej and implanted glaztone struts are used to support the smooth, spherical habitations. Buildings begin about halfway up the trunk of the freej and reach up to the underside of the caps. There are a few completely open to the sky.

The buildings are arranged in clusters. There is a central freej (usually an abnormally large one) in the middle of the cluster called the hub and about five or six other freej surrounding it called nodes. The nodes are connected to the hub and to each other by bridges and walkways. The central hub is

equipped with grav lift elevators which move people from the ground to the upper levels where they can then travel to connecting nodes.

   Some Geden avoid the waiting for an elevator and use personal grav vehicles to hover up to wherever they need to go.

   Gan served as the home for two of the Geden characters and when Troy Cummings and Professor Herrold were captured by the Geden, they were held prisoner here. Otherwise nothing much came of this city.

FEDDAG: This is a city that is near the shores of Gesta-Lee (Gesta's Tears). About three-fourths of the city actually stretches out ♦over the water, supported by glaztone piers.

   This is the home of Zenda and Garion, played by Nadine Farid and Riley Chiorando respectively. Feddag is the Geden city farthest to the west of Caiden. As one gets further and further from the capital, the Geden become more and more relaxed in their attitudes towards humans.

TARG: Another freej city to the east of Caiden.

DANFEG: A city to the south of Caiden. A haven for merchants.

   The far southern region of the continent lie the secret bases of the Shun-Gede. The Shun-Gede are Geden who have been cast out of Gedan society for pursuing the forbidden knowledge of technology, magic, higher learning, interaction with humans and other things that bring change. From these bases, the Shun-Gede gather resources to defend themselves from attack while they conduct their experiments in biology, chemistry, physics, technomancy and genetic engineering.

SECTOR GREYSHADE: This was the home of all the Shun-Gede characters in the story. Greyshade is a massive underground complex concealed beneath a nondescript canyon. Long ago caverns and passages were tunneled out and fortified. The base is arranged in levels connected by lifts and elevators. There are different levels for housing, food and clothing distribution, vehicle maintenance, scientific research, etc.

   I wanted to establish the place as a home for the characters and inspire them with a sense of duty to protect it and all of its inhabitants. I don't think there was enough time to form a bond with the place. In the story, Sector Greyshade is discovered by the Brotherhood of Chaos and overrun. I don't think there was as much of a sense of loss and tragedy as I had hoped for.

SECTOR DARK: Located several hundred miles to the east of Greyshade, Sector Dark is another underground complex built in the bottom of an abyss. Here the Shun-Gede practice the magic arts and conduct experiments in Genetic Engineering in the hopes of one day creating a Gedan race that can

survive the Change. So far the experiments have resulted in the brutish mutant warriors known as the Bargeden, the Dark Geden.

   I was hoping that some of the characters would get to visit this place, but the story took such a turn that it became impossible for them to ever visit. Also, I never got to implement the Bargeden. I don't even know what one looks like.

SECTOR BRIGHT: This is the headquarters of the Shun-Gede high command. It's location is secret to most everyone except those who actually live there. The base is hidden inside a massive glaztone plateau to the southwest of Greyshade.

   The humans had their own cities too.

NAGASHIMA: Located to the north of Caiden at the base of a plateau, Nagashima is the only city built by the Geden for humans to dwell in. When the Japanese arrived on Geda in a massive transsubstantial exodus, Gede and Gesta took pity on them and instructed the Geden to accept them into society. The Japanese are treated by the Geden as a race separate from the humans.

ELSEWHEREVILLE: This city is modelled after a combination of Chiba city in Gibson's *Neuromancer* and Bartertown in the film *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome*. It looks like a cross between a suburb of New York city and Cairo. The buildings are prefabricated apartments that have fallen into disrepair. The floor level of each building has been converted into a shop or bar or restaurant. Everyone has something to sell. Anything can be had in this place for the right price.

   This city forms a nexus in the story. Eventually everyone ends up here. It was a convenient meeting location and it is literally in the center of everything else, so it's a great staging area to prepare characters to move on to another city.

   One can visit the "Glass Condom," which is a bar that appear recurrently in most of my stories which take place in a city. It's sort of a trademark thing.

NEW WASHINGTON: This is the city of Washington transported from the year 2050 by a freak temporal accident. The jump through dimensions blended together different versions of the city ranging from 1980 or so up to 2050, forming a strange collage of varying architecture and technology.

   This is the seat of the human government, TimeCo. They are basically a useless bureaucracy that is trying to bring back a semblance of order to Geda that no one really asked for. TimeCo wants to build interstates and strip malls and the like in an attempt to terraform the planet.

   The city represents the most technologically advanced area on the planet.

Their factories can build and synthesize practically anything. I used New Washington as an excuse to get away with introducing all kinds of fun technological devices and weapons into the story.

MOTZ: This is another technologically advanced human city. It is a pleasure city like Las Vegas where every vice and obsession can be indulged. Motz is also the headquarters of the Yakuza (the Japanese version of the Mafia), masterminded by Akira Matsushima.

FRISCO: This is a coastal city on the southern shores of the Gesta-Lee. I never really developed it much since it didn't look like anyone was going there.

CASTLE CHAOS:
This isn't really a city, but a small barony to the east of the other cities. It is the home of the Brotherhood of Chaos, which will be discussed in a later section.

The Inhabitants

The Geden

Gedan (*GHEE-dan;* plural Geden *GHEE-den*)

<u>Appearance</u>
Geden resemble humans in most anatomical respects.

Height (adult): 5'-6'
Weight (adult): 120-220 lbs.
Hair: Black, Dark to Reddish Brown, Bleach Blonde to White
Eyes: Brown with flecks of gold A Gedan's eyes reflect orange when exposed to   direct light.
Skin: Dusky orange to bronze
Geden have two arms and two legs.
On each hand they have three fingers and an opposable thumb.
Their fingers are slightly thicker than that of a human's.
On each foot they have four toes.

<u>Physical Characteristics</u>
Body. Geden appear very lithe and small of frame, but most of their body mass is composed of compact muscles. It is rare for a Gedan to be fat. They posses strength and dexterity above the average human's.

Hair. Geden hair is usually a single color, though there are some who have streaks of other colors. Geden hair does not change as a Gedan grows older. The Geden never lose hair to the aging process. The only exception is that a Gedan who survives the Change (see below) develops a bald spot surrounding the expanded frontal lobe.

Eyes. Their eyes are of uniform color (brown with gold flecks) distinguished by shape, which may range from wide and round to slant, almond-shaped. Geden possess the ability to see in the dark, or at least at very low light levels. In total darkness, they are just as blind as a human.

Hearing. A Gedan's hearing is more sensitive than a human's and can register frequencies a few steps above and below the spectrum that a human is capable of. The range of their hearing is also expanded.

Special Abilities
Telempathy. All Geden have the ability to mentally transmit thoughts and emotions to each other and read these same thoughts and emotions in other Geden, humans and some animals.

A Gedan may broadcast a thought telempathically or direct it at a single individual. It is difficult to do anything in between, like sending a message to three particular Geden in a crowd of five. There is a chance the other two will hear as well.
When "speaking" telempathically, this allows a Gedan to communicate with any intelligent being without having to know the recipient's language. They are communicating on a very basic level which the recipient's brain translates into the appropriate language. The effect is similar to hearing a voice in one's head.

A Gedan cannot read anyone's mind. If an individual is not directing thoughts through telepathy, they are private.

Humans may direct thoughts to Geden by concentrating on them. This is not a special ability possessed by humans; the Geden have the ability to receive such mental projections.

A Gedan can sense and project emotions from and to anyone whether any party wants to or not. Some Geden have developed disciplines which allow them to block out emotional noise, mask their own emotions and even project false emotions. Those who practice the Dayin Ways possess such emotional control.

A Gedan cannot speak and communicate telempathically at the same time.

<u>The Change</u>
Geden measure years in "spans." A span is roughly equivalent to 274 earth days.

Geden enter maturity around 10 to 12 spans.

The typical life expectancy of a Gedan is 40 spans, or about 30 years.

The time near the 40 span mark is called the Change. Around this time, a Gedan experiences a drastic cerebral restructuring. The onset of this is characterized by headaches, poor memory, and a "fuzziness" in their telempathic abilities.

The Change almost always ends in death. Without pain-killing drugs, the process becomes an agony beyond description. The Geden usually leave the dying alone in a drug-induced bliss.

The few who happen to survive the Change go on to live for as many as 80 more spans. These Geden develop a pronounced cranial lobe (sort of like a Klingon).

Survivors of the Change are revered and respected as "chosen" or those "touched by Gede." Often the sages and regents in Geden cities are those who have survived the Change. The wisdom and ways of the Geden people can be trusted to them for they will outlive most others.

It is rumored that surviving the Change gives some Geden heightened mental powers.

It is rumored that the Shun-Gede are working on a way to circumvent the change, allowing all Geden to live longer.

The Shun-Gede

  The Geden live in a somewhat idyllic, utopian society virtually free of want. Everyone has enough of everything they need. Through past encounters with the humans, the Geden have learned to avoid any human-influenced pursuits or technology that would introduce an imbalance in their society.
  There are those among the Geden who feel that their brethren have fallen into an intellectual rut. They desire knowledge so that their civilization can progress. They see humans as misunderstood creatures with something to offer which might benefit both races.

Geden of this mindset are viewed as dangerous to traditional Gedan values. They are known as the Shun-Gede, the Geden who have turned from the ways of Gede. The Caiden Regents send out their Inquisitors to root out potential Shun-Gede factions within the cities so that they may be put on trial. Those convicted of "serving Lakruul" and following the ways of the humans are deemed Shun-Gede and are cast out of the city to wander in the wastelands.

Groups of Shun-Gede banded together and formed outposts and waystations in the southern areas. Eventually the groups became more organized and constructed secret bases to live in and work on furthering the Shun-Gede cause. By bartering, stealing and scavenging, the Shun-Gede were able to collect a great deal of equipment and vehicles to furnish their bases.

Recently, the Shun-Gede have been trying to find a way to bypass the aging Change. They hope to use this discovery as a bargaining chip with their Gedan brothers to allow them reinstatement in society.

The Japanese

The Japanese 'arrived' on Geda about 200 spans ago. They believe that they are on a spiritual journey that spans different worlds. These worlds are not places in a physical sense, but dreamlike dimensions. As they pass through each dreamworld, their reality gets more and more substantial until ultimately they arrive at the True World and the journey will be complete.
 For most of the Japanese, the most recent dreamworld has been a place called
"Earth." All of the Japanese that arrived on Geda from this journey lived in either the dream city of Hiroshima or Nagasaki. There were other cities on "Japan", but it is uncertain if they contained real people or if they did, they might have moved on to a different world.

The Geden are usually distrustful of humans, seeing them as dimensional interlopers and bringers of change and chaos. But they took pity on the Japanese, believing that they had been sent to Geda by a cruel trick of Lakruul, the god of change. Gede and Gesta, the "good" gods had sent the Japanese into the care of the Geden.

The Japanese are accepted in Gedan society and have taken positions as servants, artisans, artists and the like. The Geden also helped them build their own city, Nagashima, to the north of the Gedan capital of Caiden. Some of the Japanese have rejected their past traditions and their belief in the Journey and moved to human cities to pursue other paths.

TimeCo
This is the bureaucracy/megacorporation I mentioned before.

The Displaced

The Displaced are all of the humans accidentally abducted from Earth through time rift anomalies. They usually end up in cities like Elsewhereville.

The Brotherhood of Chaos

Chaos Warriors are a standard part of most British fantasy role-playing games. They are usually portrayed as fearsomely armored knights with 5' long serrated swords that roam the countryside and commit unspeakable acts of evil. I combined this idea with the punk/post-apocalyptic roar warrior genre to get armored knights riding motorcycles while wielding swords and laser rifles.

I thought it would be interesting if the Brotherhood were not just mindless killing machines, but were actually sophisticated and had a code of honor of sorts. I developed a philosophy system for them based on the science of Chaos theory and the pseudo-religion of Discordianism.

They view the core of reality to be a seething mass of inexplicable Chaos. All events are the results of minute interactions occurring all the time. It's the butterfly flapping its wings in Tibet causing the rain in Central Park kind of thing. In essence, since everyone and everything is at the mercy of Chaos, nothing really matters. So the Brotherhood is known for its acts of random violence and aid, helping someone here and then laying waste to a city there.

The Brotherhood reside in Castle Chaos to the extreme east of Caiden. There they launch their random raids on human and Gedan alike. They have recently received some sort of vision which told them to go out and take over the planet. Having nothing better to do, they comply.

The Characters

To participate in the story, each player needed to create a character, or alter ego in the game world. Role-playing systems usually involve rolling dice to determine attributes such as Strength and Agility. I wanted to stay away from the numbers and charts that restrict creative freedom, so I opted for a simpler method of character generation. I borrowed a format employed in *Ultima*, a computer role-playing game. When you create a character, the computer presents you with a series of moral dilemmas. The way you

answer the question determines which question it asks next. You follow a chain of questions to discover what sort of character would be appropriate for someone of your mindset.

I first asked whether the player wished to have a human or non-human character. Choosing human would lead to a question regarding whether they wanted to be on Earth when the story started or already living in the Neverworld. This led to more specific questions which determined the exact nature of their character. Players had the option to create a completely fictional persona or play themselves in real life.

The other branch of the original question would let the player choose between being a Gedan or a Shun-Gede. Under each subheading they had a choice as to what sort of profession their character was (these ranged from merchants to warriors to biologists to weapons manufacturers).

All the players then "fleshed out" their character, describing what they looked like, what sort of personality they had, their background, etc. Some players were very creative and wrote a whole page of description while others were satisfied with the basics of their character's profession and appearance.

As the story progressed and the characters developed, other characters were created by me for the players to interact with. Soon there was a dazzling array of supporting roles ranging from friends and family of the characters to their enemies. To get an idea of what I had to keep track of, I have included the master list of characters below. Granted, some of the characters appear only in passing, but for a moment they exist and add more life and detail to the world I made.

Master List of Neverworld Characters
(Players are shown in parentheses)

Geden

Andrumed - See "Chang-Fortusma"
Antares - Inquisitor for the Caiden Regents. (Bill New)
Arraumai - Librarian at Great Library in Caiden. Mother of Ardura. (Istvan)
Ardura - Spy for the Regents. Daughter of Arraummai. (Beth Kieffer)
Bogan - Friendly Gedan who takes Hudan and Bishop in from the cold.
Garion- Profiteering merchant of Japanese art (Riley Chiorando)
Graed - Young, power-hungry Regent-in-training.
Grand Regent - Corrupt Geden in power in Caiden.
Magdeg - Mate to Arraummai and father of Ardura. Died of the Change.
Shalundar - Regent of Caiden.
Sherna - Nosey friend of Zenda.
Zenda - Female art shop owner. (Nadine Farid)

Shun-Gede
Bellshire - Systems analyst, engineer, electrician. (Greg Stephan)
Chang-Fortusma - A Shun-Gede leader of old. Previously known as Andrumed. His name
   means "The bell that rings destiny."
Danx - Coordinator of Intelligence Operations.
Dlareme - Warrior/Mage. Brother of Gemoduna (Scott Thornberg)
Gemoduna - Warrior. Brother of Dlareme. (Jon Clem)
Hanify - Smuggler. Tekumel's father. Known to Antares.
Jakratha - Weapons engineer/specialist. (Ryan Houlette)
Juleva - Intelligence agent. (Josh Vaughn)
Lareesh - Strong-willed female medic/warrior. Potential love interest for Gemoduna.
Mateg-Matek - Operations commander of Sector Greyshade.
Ralen - Genetic engineer. (Dawn Gauthier)
Tamak - Inteligence agent. (Jim Basney)
Targur - Intelligence agent and vehicle expert. (Eric Amidon)
Tekumel - Gedan under interrogation by Antares.

Human
Andert, Ken - Student at Notre Dame. Beth Kieffer's fiance. (Ken Andert)
Bella, Corina - Waitress at a truck stop. (Jessica Rios)
Bishop - See "Master Gamesman."
Bumba - Tommy Pucci's huge bodyguard.
Cazador, Ricardo - Spanish New York cab driver. (Rod Musser)
Chantal - Nice young girl (Gene DeClark)
Cincinatti, Walker - Badass (Tom Chiarella)
Craft, Byron - Friend of Troy Cummings.
Cummings, Troy - Student at DePauw University. (Troy Cummings)
Donna - One night stand for Walker Cincinnati.
Es, Sean - Former public relations consultant. Now a fence in Elsewhereville.
   (Chris Gottbrath)
Farland, C.S. - Medical intern (Kim Hemmerlein)
Hellfist, Thyraxxis - Lord of Chaos.
Herrold, Dave - Art professor at DePauw University. (Dave Herrold)
Hudan - Self-given name of half-Gedan/half-human. He doesn't realize he is actually
Lakruul.

Kayne - Battle General of the Brotherhood of Chaos.
Martin, Kerry - Friend of Troy Cummings.
Matsushima, Akira - Yakuza boss in Motz.
Nowhere - Dimension-wandering vigilante.
Kieffer, Beth - Student at DePauw University. Ken Andert's fiance.
Powers, Madeliene - British cellist and high school German teacher. (Anna Klump)
Pucci, Tommy - Former Italian mob boss. Elsewhereville fence. Owns "Villa Pucci."
Pung-Lao - Japanese dwarf that works for Walker Cincinnati.
Retsel, Tevlev - Degenerate noise musician (Les Longino)
Scholar, Lora - Female body-builder (Mark Seketa)
Waltman, Kevin - English major at DePauw University (Kevin Waltman)
Yoshi - Ex-member of Yakuza on Earth. Freelance fixer and gunrunner.

Other
Dylan - Immortal vigilante.
Gede - God of Geda.
Gesta - Goddess of Geda.
Lakruul - Son of Gede and Gesta. God of change and chaos.
Master Gamesman - Interdimensional game master. Currently known as "Bishop."
Pif - Shape-changing sprite. Dylan's companion.

The Story

  Here I have included excerpts from the story. Since the story is told from
the perspectives of each different character simultaneously but in different
places, it is impossible for the story to be linear. It has a unique format
which I'm not sure can be experienced in its entirety. It is made of
fragments, the experiences of each character relayed in bits of prose, the
result of which is greater than the sum of its parts.
  To each player, the story seemed to be about their own character and the
other characters they happened to be with. A lot of them had no idea of the
scope of the story and what was occurring to the other players. Only I had
an overall view of what was going on.
  This raises a question: Who is the author and who is the reader?

  To understand the excerpts from the story better, I have included a
message I sent to everyone describing certain etiquette I expected from
them.

Okay, things are off to a shuddering start, but I am happy with
the progress so far. There are currently 28 players, 15 of which
have actually begun the game. The others are either waiting to
start or finishing their character.

I want to take this time to clear up some confusion and lay down
some ground rules.

Writing Actions
----
1) If your character is alone (that is, not in another group of
characters), then all messages you write will be to me. You must
write in first person and I will respond in second person.

Me: "You see a big red button that says 'Don't Press Me!'"

You: "I go ahead and press it."

2) If you are in a group of other characters, then you write to
your group in third person and I will respond in third person.

You: "Chad walks up to the red button and examines it closely.
He wonders if he ought to press it."

3) If you are in a group and you wish to perform an action
secretly, then write to me in the first person.

4) If you want to whisper something to another character or
otherwise communicate in a way that only that character is aware
of it, write in first, second or third person, depending on the
context and your preference.

First Person: "Charlie, I think you ought to be the one to press
the big red button."

Second Person: Chad slips over to you and whispers in your ear,

"Charlie, I think you ought to be the one to press the big red button."

Third Person: Chad walks over to Charlie and whispers ...

Do you see the difference?

IMPORTANT: In ALL instances involving character communication, you must send a copy of the message to me so I know what the characters are talking about.

5) If you want to communicate as a player to another player, just write to that other player. You need not inform me about it.

You: "So, Jon, what do you think we ought to do about the red button? I know Andre is just waiting to blow the shit out of our characters if someone touches it. Let's just forget it and leave the room."

You: "Hey, we're having pizza over here in Hogate tonight. Why don't you stop by and we talk about what's going on in the game?"

Etiquette

Some of you may be familiar with the game CyberHunt that I ran last year. In that game, I forbade people to discuss what was going on in the game with other players and not to let anyone know which character was yours.

The element of secrecy was important for that environment, but it is counterproductive to Neverworld. This is a project in interaction between people. Communication between participants is the key factor.

I would like to encourage all participants to talk about the story amongst yourselves, whether it be through e-mail or actually face to face. If you are in the same group, find the other players and talk to them about the situation. Not all events need to take place in e-mail. If you see me or some other participant walking around campus, feel free to ask questions and maybe even resolve situations there and then.

Although I want people to talk about the story, there is one

thing I would like to limit. It is bad etiquette to reveal key
scenes in a movie or story to someone who hasn't seen the movie
or read the book yet. This also applies to Neverworld. I think
it is poor taste to reveal information to players whose
characters are in a different city or location or would
otherwise have no access to such information. Keep in mind that
some players' characters may turn out to be the enemies of your
characters.

Jurisdiction of the player and author

Unlike other stories or games of this type, I am allowing the
participants to add their creative input to the environment
which I have designed. With each message, some new facet is
developed because of something a player wrote or did. I think
this is exciting and it gives new life and direction to my
original vision.

But there are some limits to what the participants can and
cannot do.
1) I am the author of the story. Never write or create something
that drastically alters the plot or the situation at hand. For
instance, you could never say "The Geden have the ability to
transform into scaly flying lizards."

2) You are in control of your character and no one else's. Never
manipulate another player's character or a character controlled
by me. Never make a character suddenly appear in the story:
"Suddenly a group of Chaos Warriors appear on the horizon,
bearing down on the group."

3) When in doubt, ask me. Before you attempt to make your
character perform some action, you ought to be sure that it is
reasonable within the context of your character description and
in the context of the story.

That's all I have to say this time around. If anyone has any
questions, please feel free to write me or call me. My phone
number is 658-5369.

Story Excerpts

The Shun-Gede Storyline

The safety of Sector Greyshade* moves farther and farther away. The midday sun, the heart of Gede, beats down upon your grav-skimmer* as you hum along the barren plains. Targur, the young scout is at the helm, his glance shifting between the open space ahead and the readings on the radar next to him. Bellshire was the engineer who tweaked the black box to pick up the particular readings that now guide the group. The Shun-Gede stands in the cargo bed, gripping the rail, the wind whipping through his black, grey-flecked hair.

Gemoduna, the warrior, leans forward over Targur's shoulder, peering into the horizon as though anticipating what might await there. He has a glaztone sword strapped at his side and a twelve-plug mass caster rifle* slug over his shoulder.

Jakratha, the weapons expert huddles in the back of the skimmer, looking back at the base the group calls home. He seems unaccustomed to such outings, but Mateg-Matek, the section commander, requested that he go along to identify potential weapon sources.

Word came through the network about half an hour ago that the Brotherhood of Chaos and the strange, technologically advanced human group referred to by the Shun-Gede as the "Hiddomasq" (Those who keep secrets) had met in battle once again. Intelligence has never been able to determine why the two groups fight, only where and roughly how many.

Desperate for spare parts and unique alien technology, the Shun-Gede send out clean-up squads to scavenge equipment from the battlefield. This is almost always a race against time as one or both of the two warring groups return to recover what they can. The Shun-Gede cannot afford to lose any new weaponry in such a confrontation, so the grav-skimmers are lightly armed and lightly manned. No one ever says "expendable," but it is understood that the cause comes first.

Some twisted wreckage appears on the horizon. The battle site. Targur eases the skimmer down, cutting the engines down, but leaving them running. Looks like the Brotherhood lost a light assault car and a battle van. Bellshire's eyes fix on two other metal lumps. The Hiddomasq lost two skybikes. A rare find.

  [*Sector Greyshade is one of the secret Shun-Gede underground bases. They are like miniature cities under the ground. Sector Bright is the main base.

  *Grav-skimmers are sled-like skiffs used by Geden and Shun-Gede alike. They are lifted off the ground and propelled by powerful subsonic wave generators.]

  [Here I pass control of your own characters to you. Remember to write to the distribution list SHUN.DIS and write in third person when doing something obvious to the other members in your party. When you want to ask me something, write to me. When you want to talk to a particular player as a player instead of your character, write to the player's username.

  Bellshire is played by Greg Stephan GSTEPHAN
  Gemoduna is played by Jon Clem JCLEM
  Jakratha is played by Ryan Houlette RHOULETT
  Targur is played by Eric Amidon EAMIDON   ]

From: TIGER::JCLEM
To: @SHUN.DIS

CC:
Subj: It begins

Glancing at the radar, and then scanning the horizon, Gemoduna leaps from
the skimmer and begins a systematic search of the perimeter for possible
survivors and cover for use as defensive positions (if need be). He is always keeping one
eye on the horizon. If there is no sign of danger, he motions the others to come join in
searching the site if they have not already done so.

If a preliminary search shows no apparent danger, then Gemoduna takes up a defensive
position at the perimeter to scan the horizon for possible
interlopers. If they happen to be the Brotherhood or Hiddomasq then he will
fire at will.

Gemoduna will try to disable whatever enemy vehicles if at all possible. He
realizes that the groups safety relies on their speed to return back to Sector
Greyshade. So a quick disable is preferable than trying to destroy, unless
that is at all possible. What are the ranges of our weaponry? More
importantly what is the range of their weaponry?

From: RHOULETT

Jakratha slouches in the back corner of the skimmer. "Bellshire, why don't
you go ahead and take a look at the wreckage. Call me over if you need
me for something. I'll stay here and watch over our transport."

From: TIGER::GSTEPHAN
To: @SHUN
CC:
Subj: game in progress

Bellshire nods agreement to Jakratha and moves quickly to survey
the wreckage. He sees that of the two skybikes on the ground, only one
is undamaged enough to salvage any components from. The accelerator
chamber and the flight control computer assembly seem to be intact.
To remove them, the entire remnants of the wrecked frame must be taken
back for disassembly. Not only is removal of these particular devices
an intricate task, but a hazardous one as well and there is always a chance
that some other item may be found not noticeably obvious at this time.
Although the bike itself is not too heavy for Bellshire to lift, the wreckage
is awkward and he signals Jakratha to come over and help put the bike
in the skimmer. Time is critical because Gemoduna has sounded an alarm that two vehicles
are approaching on the horizon.

   Here is an example of a player asserting a little bit too much creativity.
Greg made all that stuff up about the accelerator chamber and the flight
control computer assembly. That was okay since those details were
essentially harmless. But saying that two vehicles are approaching from the

horizon is outside of his control as a player.

Antares the Gedan Inquisitor (Bill New's Character)
(This part below is mine)
   Yellow is the light of inquiry. It is this light that falls in a focused cone from the hovering glow globes upon the form of Tekumel. He stands on the <Gestaraz>, the platform called Gesta's Gaze. The whole chamber of regents is modelled after the landscape surrounding Caiden, the capital city. The six regents sit behind raised glaztone tables, representing the two plateaus that flank the city to the northwest and northeast.
   The city and the two plateaus fall into the area known as Gesta's palm, for there is the seat of knowledge and wisdom. And here, in this modest model, the chamber rests in Gesta's palm, her gaze looking down at her outstretched hand to see if justice is being served in the city which she has blessed.
   Whether Gesta is paying any attention to this inquisition seems of no interest to Tekumel. His thoughts radiate haughtiness, a boredom and a sense of pity for all those who came to attend his trial.
   You note these impressions as you pace along the sloping walkway that runs around the Gestaraz, forming a breach between the platform and the tables, between the accused and the judges. In between lies the domain of inquiry and this is the path you tread.
   Earlier today, your suspicions about Tekumel's covert activities were confirmed when your spies confirmed a transaction he made with a Shun-Gede smuggler. The item in question was a piece of human technology, a "radio." You dispatched guards without delay and had the young man brought in. Arranging the trial was a matter of formality, your reputation being what it is.
   And now you stand before the regents once more, ready to excommunicate another Shun-Gede. You "look" about at the crowd of men and women seated in the raised benches surrounding the chamber. Through the sharing of other nearby minds, you have a consensual vision of the world around you, a synthesis of perspective your blinded eyes could never offer you.
   The Grand Regent nods at you to begin the inquiry.

(This is Professor New)
As I walk the Path of Questioning, time slows, arching back into the
Before that none who watch me can ever know. I feel their impatience,
their anticipation, as if all the counted in life was that which was
yet to be. Fools. The request of the Grand Regent that I begin now,
on his time, I let flow past me, allowing only its echo to return to
him, evacuated of sense and rhythm. I know how the steps the Grand
Regent climbed to become so grand and he knows that I know. He will
not challenge me.

I continue to pace, pushing my memory-sight deep into the Before.
Though it was nearly thirty years ago, I still remember clearly the
day that Tekumel's father came before me. My audience that day was
smaller - just a clerk and a guard - and the setting less grand and

less public than the Gestarez - a half-lit dusty back room in a
provincial courthouse. Hanify was accused of smuggling electronics
out of human camps and selling them on the blue market to whomever
would pay the price. Mostly Shun-Gedens, since the electronics were
easily available through official channels to Gedens, at least to
official Gedens. I knew then as I know now that there were others
besides the Shun-Gede with an interest in such contraband. Of course,
the existence of such people continues to be denied by the Council,
for their own not so mysterious reasons. Hanify was not, to say the
least, a political animal. He had no idea what the Shun-Gede stood
for, or what they would do with the goods he sold them, and he cared
less.
His people came from a remote and unattractive corner of the World,
plagued by armies of orange gerbils that scurried between your feet
wherever you stepped and an endless alkaline wind off the potassium
flats that seared your throat with every breath, where the traditions
that we take for granted here in Caiden are only rumors. Hanify's
demeanor matched exactly his son's today: indifference. All I could
do to him, he well knew, was take his money and this was nothing more
or less than the cost of doing business, a cost he covered in the
prices he charged for his goods. As for excommunication, that was a
joke for someone from beyond the dry lands - they were excommunicated
from birth and saw no reason to grieve this status.

No, the Regents want some kind of confession from Tekumel, coaxed or
cut from him by some clever trick of the Dayin Way they know I
practice. They want an excuse to exercise one of the new penalties.
I will have to disappoint them. Turning my face toward Tekumel I feel
his disdain descend on me. His thoughts remain unclear to
me, hidden behind this emotional wall he throws up against me. When I
could see like others, my only weapon against such defenses was
verbal, to trick the prisoner with words, to use the logical traps my
father had taught me. But now the words are no more than a diversion,
an amusement for me, a deception for my interlocutors. I project toward
Tekumel a vector of confusion, to make him feel strong, to uncover
himself in this illusion of strength. Peripherally, I feel the
disappointment of the Regents as they sense this confusion, and this
disappointment veers back toward Tekumel, causing him to relax
further.

I see his mind now. It comes slowly into focus, a map of emotion and
memory and desire spread out for my inner eye. I say, "Tekumel, I
knew your father once, when I lived in Far Leffelim where your people
dwell. He was a man of some wisdom." I watch my words slide through the
structure of Tekumel's mind, their seeming naivete - nobody had ever
taken Hanify for a man of wisdom - corroding his defense, opening up
the rooms and halls behind. And as Tekumel considers how best to
express his lack of respect for me and my question, I slip behind his
disdain, looking now for a particular face, a face perhaps now older

than when I knew it in person, but I am sure recognizable still. The
face of the man from whom I learned the Dayin Ways, in the Before,
high priest of the Shun-Gede. But as I peer around another doorway,
drawn by a familiar but still vague shape, Tekumel speaks....

(Me Again)
   "Go on, Antares, walk the path dictated to you by the regents," he sneers.
"Look, they're holding up a treat for you: another victory, another Shun-
Gede to add to your roster of victories..."
   "Silence, worm!" Graed, one of the younger power-hungry regents yells,
leaping to his feet. "You've just passed sentence on yourself with such
talk, you traitor!" Hatred and bloodlust emanate with raw undisciplined
energy from Graed. You wonder why such hotheads are allowed to become
regents.
He is actually a regent in training, but Graed has already gained much
popularity amongst the Gedan youth to question his getting a seat.
   "Graed," murmurs the Grand Regent. Graed looks at his superior, obviously
receiving a private directed thought from him. Graed scowls at Tekumel and
retakes his seat.
   The lone Gedan smirks.
   "Puppets, all of you," he states as though it were a fact rather than a
remark of derision. "You too, Antares. A puppet. Feared and respected, yes,
but still an tool in the hands of inferior Geden. Go on with the trial,
my father taught you nothing."
   Tekumel's thoughts are laced with bitterness, yet you sense a kind of
sadness, a pity? For himself? For the regents? For you?

Walker Cincinnati (Tom Chiarella's Character)
(Me)
   White cheerless blades of sunlight slide through the slats in the venetian blinds, creating a
fence of shadows across the sheets. 'My God,' you think, 'I've slept through half the
morning.' There is the sour taste of sweat and deals gone bad in the back of your mouth.
Your hand finds your pack of smokes on the night stand. Marlboros. You know people in
Elsewhereville that treat cigarettes like expensive cigars rolled on the thighs of beautiful
Cuban women. But in your business, you can afford to smoke half a pack a day.
   The tastes mingle in your mouth familiarly. Through the smoke and bleariness of too
much sleep your eyes focus on the curving spine of naked back as Sherri (was it "Sherri?")
bends at the edge of the bed, pulling on her
stockings.
   You vaguely remember last night. She was more like some kind of machine fastened
around your body than a woman. A disinterested, mechanical kind of sex. She gave you
the squid. That's what those who pass as your friends call it: "the squid." The cold fuck.
   "You awake?" she asks the wall. You don't answer. She looks over her shoulder at you,
eyes like a deer. Her lips are full, but wrong somehow, like she has two lower lips. Her
short hair is wet and slicked back. Must have just showered. She blinks and her lip
twitches almost imperceptibly. At that moment you decide that Sherri ("Sherri?") is actually
rather ugly.
   You take another drag and wonder if you have any phone messages.

"There's this guy," she says, pulling on a purple tee shirt. "A scientist guy..."

   Swinging your legs slowly over the edge of the bed, you stretch and begin a visual hunt for your clothes. Shirt, pants, socks. Where's your other shoe?

   "Anyways," she says. You look back at her, your eyebrow arching slightly, a token gesture of attention.

   She seems to read the disinterest on your face and stiffens. Sherri bites her lower lip before saying "Get out." A low breath. You rub one eye and stand up, collecting your shirt. Maybe you ought to go pay Tommy Pucci a visit. See what kind of scam he's running now.

   "I said get the fuck out!" Her arms cross in front of her as though holding her ribcage together. Her lip is trembling again. On someone else it would have been sexy.

   You're not moving fast enough for her. She stalks around the bed and grabs the rest of your clothes, shoving them into your hands.

   "Get out! You never gave a shit about me! Get out!" And she's probably right. No, she's absolutely right. You never gave such things consideration.
She's suddenly hysterical, slapping your chest, pushing you. You grab her arm and fling her onto the bed. She doesn't get up. Her face tries to dig a hole in the sheets to hide from you. Choking pathetic sobs silently wrack her body.

   You finish dressing, grab your pack and leave the room. You descend the rickety stairs of the apartment. As your foot hits the last stair you are struck by a thought.

   Donna. That's who it was: Donna.

   Not Sherri at all.

   You push open the outside door and walk into the side lot where you've
parked your car.

   [What kind of car would you like, Tom? Nothing too fancy. Personal vehicles are rare.
Whatever you have will be armored and probably armed.]

   [What would you like to do now? Go somewhere? See someone? Have any questions you
want answered?]

From: TIGER::TCHIAREL   "TOM CHIARELLA 658-4672"
To: TIGER::MONSA
CC:
Subj: RE: here we go, boy

Cool. Frankly I would have tried to bang her one more time, THEN left, but
c'est la vie!
Who is Tommy Pucci.

I think I will go see him. I'm feeling a little hungry too, is there
someplace I could grab a bite to eat , someplace on the street? I'd eat anything right now,
fish even.
[money? how does it work? how much do I have?]

I'd like to have a late model car, a shitty Chevy Nova type of thing.
Armored is good, bad muffler, very fast. I'd like to have weapons of all
sort hidden throughout, and a serious alarm system too.
Also I always carry a gun, although you didn't mention that when I was
gathering my clothes at Donna's place. It' the best weapon you can get on this planet;
A browning 32-HMA, semi-automatic, laser sighted handgun. It's light, small
and hold 32 rounds per clip. I have a little Japanese dwarf who makes the clips for me in
bartertown and he has adapted the gun so that I can switch to
automatic at any time.
Right now my priorities are this.
1) I want to get to a bathroom so I can wash my dick off
2) I want some seafood
3) I want to see Tommy Pucci (potential video phone call)
4) I want to send Donna some flowers, she seemed like she knew something...
5) I want to go someplace (to eat) where I can find out what the word is on
the street...
6) should I check my appointment book?
oh. I guess I will check my phone messages too.....

From: TIGER::MONSA   "Artiste of the Slightly Funny Deal"
To: TCHIAREL
CC:
Subj: stuff

  Tommy Pucci is ex-mob boss from New York. Now he lives in Elsewhereville.
He's set up an Italian restaurant, "Villa Pucci," which is sort of a front
awning to his back room where he runs another type of business. He organizes
the sale of drugs, rare food, cigarettes and small arms to humans in town
and other towns including Motz and New Washington. He is openly anti-Gedan
and anti-Japanese. His only real rival is Akira Matsu-something in Motz.
He is leader of the yakuza. Actually, Tommy wishes he was like Akira: very
successful. He also fears you. You can pretty much ask any favor from him.

   So, you could go there to his place and eat, but he doesn't serve fish.
The only food from Earth is synthesized stuff that comes out of New
Washington.
Everything else is made from Gedan approximations of Earth food.
The thing about money is this: There isn't any. All dollars and credit cards are
useless here. Everything is in trade. Goods or services. From this came the
use of barterscrip, which is basically coupons you can only use at the
establishment that prints them. For instance, there is scrip for food
warehouses, for drug makers, for mechanics, etc. It's sort of like money,
but more limited.
  Let's say that you've got a big wad of scrip for various services. Also
there's the simple fact that you're Walker Cincinnati, which is as good as
money to many people. You just run up a tab. In this world, money is
worthless, but resources and influence are gold.
  The car sounds fine. You can make up the weapons as you go along.

The gun you described is probably the one you would own, but it is far from being the most powerful weapon on the planet. The hardware out of New Washington or the stuff the Brotherhood of Chaos packs makes automatic weapons pale considerably.
  No video phones. You and Tommy both have cellular phones.

  Sending flowers to Donna could be a pain. Nothing grows out here. It is all imported. Flowers would have to come from one of the Gedan freej forests. Freej are basically giant 5 story-tall mushrooms that pass as trees on this planet. You'd have to have someone drive all the way out there, evade patrols, pick some flowers and drive back.

  I don't imagine that you'd have an appointment book. You may have seven deals running at the same time, but you'd keep all that information in your head and laptop.

  You pull out your phone and enter the security sequence and check for messages.
  There is only one message. It's from yesterday: Monday.

  "Hey, Cincy. It's Yoshi. Haven't seen you for a while, man. Why don't you stop by my place some time and have a drink. I can tell you about a line I got on this new comm tech. Very sexy. We might not be talking with these cheap phones anymore. Anyways... keep it slow and low."

  Yoshi's a good guy. He's your inside man in New Washington. He usually gets the line on new equipment being developed by TimeCo. Sounds like he's heard about some new communications technology.

  [So what are you going to do? You want to go see Tommy Pucci and have something to eat or what?]

From: TIGER::TCHIAREL   "TOM CHIARELLA 658-4672"
To: TIGER::MONSA
CC:
Subj: RE: here we go, boy

Ok.
I'll go see pucci, but along the way I want to go to the trouble of sending
some thing to the Donna woman... food... whatever is apropos. Just want her to think twice
about me.

Give me a description of the streets... as I go... I'm hungry and hungover...

I want to know if I can see a list of my resources... what do I won, have, etc
to trade...
Let me go to pucci's, see what he's got to eat and then drive to new

Washington (possible?) to meet with Yoshi, to see this new equipment.
Any chance I would know Istvan's character....? or somebody else?

Troy Cummings
   Troy played himself and wrote his own opening move.

      Okay, here I go...

      It's well after 3a.m., and we've just put our second paper to bed. A
record! Last week we finished at 7:45 a.m., with a phone call from the press
people, who were more than happy to levy a 10-minute ultimatum on our necks.
"Quality Schmality," our editor said, "This late in the game, grammar is
optional."
      Everyone has gone home but Fish, who's sleeping on the couch. I don't
feel tired yet, so I poke around on the mac. Tonight I'm drawing bears. With
a mouse. It's pretty fun, and pretty easy-plus it makes me look like the
conquering her when I make a graphic on the computer. But here's the big
secret: the computer does all the work; I just sit there for a couple hours
and click the mouse.
      By 4:30, the Brick of Exhaustion has hit my spine, and I'm getting
nowhere on my bears. I decide to pack it up and scram.

   Exiting the CCM, you hop on your bike and blearily pedal your way towards your
apartment. When it's this late at night (or early in the morning) there's an unearthly calm
that settles around DePauw. It's spooky if you let it get to you.
   Your bike shudders as your tires rub against the sidewalk. You're so tired that you almost
fell asleep behind the handlebars. You blink hard and pedal on down the street.
   It would be cool if your bike could fly, you think. Like in "E.T." You half-seriously pull up
on the handlebars as though to
leap over this intersection (...what's that noise...) and into the air (...headlights...). It
would be cool to land right in front of (...a car...)

   For some reason you have fallen over and are lying on the street. The silence has been
replaced by what sounds like a factory making pretzels out of sheet metal. You don't
remember what you were doing. There is a bunch of metal tubes between your legs and a
piece of rubber and wire on the street beside you. Nothing feels right. You try to move
your arm, but someone sticks ice picks through it.
   (There is a big car and it's coming RIGHT AT YOU!)
   You don't like the feeling of rough grit against the side of your face.
   (Headlights and shouting coming RIGHT AT YOU!)
   Your mother is yelling at you for something. You were playing in the street or not being

polite or something. She's yelling at you about bright lights.

In the bright lights you can see well enough to draw Count Dracula standing at the base of a canyon. There is base from a baseball diamond at his feet. He is counting. Count Basey, get it? No one laughs but you.

Byron and Kerry aren't laughing. They are looking down at you from the bright lights, their faces white like the lights. You want to tell them you were practicing for Little 5. Sigma Nu's going to win this year, don't you know... wait, you're not in Sigma Nu anymore... yes you are, you're being initiated into the room with all the bright lights and radios.

Bumpy fish wants to know why he's so small. The little chud, you're lying here on some table and he's asking you about such dumb things.

"Troy, can you hear me?"

And the lights are going away...

"Troy! TROY! Oh my God...oh my God..."

and the car is driving away...

"Troy"

Your are jolted out of sleep by some noise. You are in a forest, leaning up against the base of a tree.

Using the tree for support, I pull myself to my feet. I feel so disoriented I wanna puke. Something is wrong here, big-time. I close my eyes for a healthy minute, then shake my head thoroughly. What's going on? What just happened? Am I dead?

I can remember something about my bike....did my life flash before my eyes? If so, then I'm sure glad I didn't re-live the prom...Heh heh. Well, if I can make a prom joke, then I must bo okay. I wander off in any direction, trying not to think about anything in particular, although Freddy Green's name keeps entering my thought.

Lakruul (Chris Schmidt)
  Roaring.

  There is the grit of sand

  Roaring like angry wind

  The grit and roughness of sand against your palms

  and it is a voice

  against your forearms sticking

  roaring like a

reminding you of the time when you

like a

went to the... that place

Did you go? Do you remember?

First you are aware of the particles of sand shifting beneath you, crunching. Your entire body protests the slightest movement, as though you have been in this position for a long time. Heat from the sun (you know it must be the sun; your eyes are closed but only the sun can bake so) ripples over you in waves.

Waves.

There is the roaring of waves nearby. You understand from the slight tang in the air, the tease of moisture on the wind, that you are near a large body of water.

In your mind, like a name you cannot recall, is the sense that some knowledge, something essential has seeped from you. Into the sand, washed away. If you open your eyes, it may never return, but you must open your eyes.

From: IN%"70451.2637@compuserve.com" "Chris Schmidt" 30-AUG-1994 11:17:01.93
To: IN%"MONSA@DEPAUW.EDU" "Andre Monserrat"
CC:
Subj: it began

Blinding, glaring light... I shut my eyes again and get up onto my hands and knees, despite the tearing and pulling at my achy joints. Head bowed, face shielded from the heat of the sun, I open my eyes again, a little, letting them adjust. They ache, right to the back of my head, but I keep going, hoping the pain will subside.

It does, and there on my hands and knees I stare at the sand, my mind coming into gear so slowly, fleeting images as if inspired by the waves or the heat.

"Nga..aARgh!" I shake my head, trying to clear it and open my eyes onto the blinding sands and glinting, glaring reflections from the water. In defiance of the pain I wait for my eyes to adjust, letting the intense headache come.

Something is missing.

The sand, the water, the roar - nothing seems wrong there, but in my mind, something is missing. Like when I tried to remember ... name.

What is my name? I've forgotten before ... have I?

The headache is abating, my eyes have I adjusted. It is time to stand. Quickly, too quickly, I'm on my feet. Ohhh, everything is white again and my ears are buzzing, just a little.

But I don't fall down, I still stand. I think, thought, that has happened to me before, but I just don't remember. My vision clears and I look around, surveying the entire scene.

Drey,

Am I approaching this correctly?

        Chris

  Chris is the only player who didn't get to create a character. He participated in the e-mail role-playing game "CyberHunt" which I ran last year and proved to be an intelligent and reliable person. I offered him this role, informing him that he would have complete amnesia and be told nothing about who he was. He accepted.

  Originally, I imagined this half-human/ha-Gedan character who mysteriously appear to fulfill a prophecy of some sort. As the story moved on, I was struck with a sudden idea: "This character is the god Lakruul *and he doesn't know it!* Apparently he has awoke from his slumber beneath the sea and is being given another chance to decide his fate. He will be tempted to control the world or become its savior. He is being drawn towards Caiden to fulfill the prophecy and end the story.

  These are only a few samples of the beginning moves for a few of the characters. There were about 20 others. The story is comprised of a string of e-mail messages written back and forth between myself and the other players. Imagine writing a message about one fourth the length of one of the openings for about 10 people. Then imagine doing it every day of the semester. It was pretty tiring at times and I fell behind a lot. But I kept plugging away.

Reflections

  When I decided to follow through with this project, I wrote a general invitation to people who I knew were interested in this sort of thing. I also asked them to forward the invitation to their friends and other people who had similar interests. The amount of responses was overwhelming. It was over 30 people. The majority of them were students from DePauw, but I picked up about 6 people from different campuses. I was also pleased to see an interest from some professors and faculty (Tom Chiarella, Steve Timm, Greg Stephan, Dave Herrold, Bill New, and Istvan).

  Once someone responded that they were interested, I sent them some more information to let them know what I expected of them. If they were

still interested after that point, we began the character creation process.

As more and more people signed up for the project, I was excited and challenged on one hand, but on the other I was thinking "Oh shit, what have I done?" I tried to imagine myself writing 30 e-mail messages a day to 30 different people. The concept seemed staggering.

I had a lot of people drop out right away, either in the character creation process or shortly after they began the game. They realized that they were overcommitted. That was okay by me since it cut down on the amount of writing I had to do and I didn't want someone participating half-assed.

Later in the game I picked up some people from the seminar (Waltman, Nadine and Riley). I wanted a few more, but at the time I hand my hands pretty full. I thought it was important to have at least a few people to represent the class in the project, otherwise it would be more difficult to relate this whole thing to all of you.

My first task was to hook each player into the story and capture their interest right away. I made an effort to make the opening message really well written. Each person got at least a page as an opener. I found that I wrote even better for people like Tom and Bill New who I wanted to impress so they would take me seriously.

Originally I had this idealistic vision of pre-writing everyone's messages and running them through the spell-checker and uploading them as polished prose to the VAX. I quickly found myself just trying to keep up every day. With writing of this nature, I didn't have time to go over and over what I had written to revise and correct it. Also, I wasn't focusing on a single course of events, but more like five simultaneously. My writing became more diluted as I spread myself thin, trying to please everyone all the time. There would be days, though, when I could write about ten inspired gems and redeem myself. But for the most part, I just got by. If a player didn't write a move for a day, there was no overall effect, but if *I* got behind or decided I needed a break, the whole world literally ground to a halt.

An interesting phenomena that I observed was how the game became a necessary thing for some of the players. If they hadn't received a response from me in a while, they would complain and wonder if I had forgotten about them. A lot of people actually looked forward to getting a message from me and were disappointed if they didn't find one.

In my initial invitation I requested that people post at least once every three days, ideally every day. I gave the professors some slack because they have a busy schedule. The frequency of posts ranged from one person who wrote at least once a day if not twice to people who responded once a week or longer. Because slow posting would also slow the pace of the story, I found that I could not rely on certain players enough to let them in on a major plot line. They affected the story in other ways though For instance, Bill New posted rather infrequently, but what he wrote was brilliant and I

derived a lot of background information and some plot twists from his prose.

Players that posted very infrequently were phased out of the story. I told them that they obviously did not have enough time to participate fully and they would not be able to have as interesting an experience so there was little point in their continuation.

Playing God

It's pretty damn hard to run a world.

In an ordinary story, the author has complete control over his creation. The characters behave just as the writer wants them to and the plot unfolds according to his master plan. He never has to worry about characters talking back to him or being surprised by their actions. He chooses the focal range of the reader's perception, deciding what goes on stage and what happens offstage. The author is never questioned about the relevance of anything in his work (except by critics, of course).

Not so in Neverworld.

I found myself playing so many roles in the story to maintain a sense of reality. I was the weather. I was the laws of physics. I was the animals. I was the plants. I was Everyone Else: family, friends, enemies, the random person on the street, shop owners, whores, businessmen, the government -- they were all me, running around the stage, changing costumes and personas with the speed of light.

I also had to be the final arbiter of How and Why Anything Happens. Every action taken by a character had to have consequences. I had to examine the situation, note the character's abilities, knowledge and current condition, judge the context in which the action was taking place and then decide what would be the logical result of the action.

I dispensed karma. All the player's characters initially had positive karma because, in a sense, they were the heroes and the story was about them. Hero karma is what prevents Indiana Jones from getting hit by stray bullets and allows James Bond to escape from an exploding building without a singe. I gave the characters the benefit of the doubt. But blatantly stupid actions and outright unwarranted cruelty and/or violence resulted in negative karma: things might not always go the character's way for a while to discourage such wantonness.

I realized I was deciding what was Right and what was Wrong and imposing my morality on my world. But I had that right and everyone would just have to live with it because I could cause the ground to open up and swallow them or turn all the bullets into butterflies.

On the other side of the coin, I found myself taking a defensive position when someone questioned the workings of some prop in the story world. In any other story, I could throw up a facade of description but never be

expected to explain what is underneath. For instance, I could describe a street scene and tell all about what the buildings look like, but I never have to worry about the exact contents of the buildings' interiors because I never have to make the story go inside. But in Neverworld, everything is fair game. If a character decides to wander into a barber shop, I have to set up the pneumatic swivel chairs, throw some magazines on a low table, scatter hair clippings on the floor, decide what the barber is like and how much he charges for a haircut. None of that stuff would have existed had the character not peeked behind the facade.

When a character came across a certain device, it was not enough to say that they had found a plasma caster rifle. They wanted to know how heavy it was, what kind of power supply it required, how many shots it had, how far it shot, what was the color of the beam, could it blast through steel or just human flesh, and so on and so on. Everything I created was subject to scrutiny and I had to be ready to defend my work at any time.

As I got more adept at pulling stuff out of my ass, I found my knowledge base of the story growing and the structure became more defined. The way certain technology worked and the social conventions of the different groups began to unfold.

Although this was my original concept, the story in its present form would not exist without the role of the players.

Would the Author of Neverworld Please Stand Up?

So who is the author here? I initiated the project and designed the basic world structure and peopled it with characters -- does that make me the author? The players wrote and added to the story, taking things in a direction I had not foreseen. Are they, each themselves the author?

I can say that I am the author when dealing with a player one to one. They are also the author of their own character. But I'm not sure I can say the same thing for the project as a whole. I have a transcript of all the e-mail interaction from day one up to the present time. It's a couple hundred pages long. But that is not the entire story. Neverworld exists in the minds of each participant and each person has a slightly different perspective on the story. There are elements that exist only in the mind of a single individual, stuff I'm not even aware of. I didn't know Bill New's character, Antares, had a son and a grand daughter until he told me. I didn't know that the Change might be averted until Istvan's character hinted at it. The character Hudan has no idea he is the god Lakruul. And only I know that the "gods" Gede and Gesta are really angels.

So much of the story did not exist until I got ideas from what the players were writing. I've never had such an overwhelming sense of something I had made being uncovered bit by bit, surprising me.

Here is an example. In Tom Chiarella's opening move, his character Walker Cincinnati checks his phone messages. If he had not checked his messages, perhaps none of the following would have happened. I decide that there is a message from his friend Yoshi who tells him that he ought to drop by New Washington and check out some hot new equipment he has picked up. At this point I have no idea what this equipment is.

Walker decides to go to Villa Pucci, an Italian eatery and talk with Tommy Pucci. Chris Gottbrath's character, Sean Es, happened to be there. Sean had picked up a new device that worked as an aphrodisiac on the Geden. At the time that's exactly what it did. Little did I know that the device Es had was in actuality a "telempathic modem" which allowed humans to communicate telepathically. It turns out that this is the same device Yoshi wants to show Walker.

Walker and Es travel to New Washington, a city whose details did not exist until the two actually arrived there. During their visit with Yoshi, it is revealed that he has secretly aligned himself with the Yakuza in Motz headed by Akira Matsushima. Akira is planning to join forces with the Brotherhood of Chaos to rule the planet. The Brotherhood, motivated by the secret workings of Chaos, launch a campaign to capture the Shun-Gede to give to TimeCo in exchange for the telempathic modems which Akira and the Brotherhood have fashioned into psychic weapons. TimeCo has worked out an arrangement with the Gedan Regents to allow them to conduct an experiment on Gedan land that might be the key that allows them to go back to Earth. The Regents want the Shun-Gede in order to administer a treatment to them which actually speeds up the Change in order to bring their witch hunt/holy jihad to a head.

Whew.

Most all of that plot material came into existence because Tom thought it would be cool to have a cellular phone and be able to check his messages on it. Checking his messages led to a chain of inspired ideas leading up to the development of some major plot lines.

Determinism Vs. Free Will

Although freedom of creativity was what made the story interesting, it was also the biggest source of problems and frustrations between the players and myself.

Rather than keeping all creative license to myself, I allowed the players to help add things to the world and flesh out some of the background details. This took some of the workload off of my shoulders and spread it around. Plus part of the whole point of the project was to see what the other people had in their imaginations and how it could be integrated into my overall vision.

My rule of thumb was that as long as something didn't drastically clash with the world system I had invented, I would try to work it in. Professor Istvan took this as a challenge to subvert my control. He deliberately sought out "loopholes" in my story construction to exploit. I thought this an amusing game. He attempted to allow humans to visit the Gedan capital of Caiden, which was just unheard of I countered this by saying that they were Japanese and thus okay. His character's attitude spawned a whole new ideology of liberal Geden that treaded the fine line between tradition and the practices of the outcast Shun-Gede.

Bill New invented whole regions of the planet and ancient practices with nearly every message. Tom and Nadine conspired to create what became the prophetic vision of the white buffalo, now irreversibly essential to the main plot of the story.

These new developments to the grand scheme of things were actually easier to deal with than smaller instances of creative freedom gone too far. Certain players would manipulate my characters or create them out of the blue. At other times, players would just assume their characters were successful in everything they did. This is illustrated in the earlier excerpt from the Shun-Gede storyline when Greg Stephan wrote the appearance of enemies on the horizon into the situation when there really weren't any there. Not yet, anyway.

Some of the players thought they should have unrestricted freedom to steer the direction of the story and its ultimate outcome in any direction they chose. This is where I drew the line. I had envisioned several possible endings. They were not necessarily good or bad, but they had a sense of closure to them. If I were to allow everyone to do anything they wanted all of the time, there would be chaos and the story would just wander aimlessly and just sort of peter out with no resolution.

This mindset suggests an agenda and an agenda indicates that I have pre-determined some events that I wish to take place in the story. This raises the question "Do the the characters have any real choice?" Am I funnelling them in a certain direction to achieve my own ends while neglecting their free will?

I got into quite a few arguments about this.

Here is what I think of the whole situation. Without some kind of goal, a character has no motivation. With no motivation, the character just wanders around and although they may have an interesting time, nothing of consequence happens. The project would become an open-ended role-playing game rather than an interactive story.

Think what would have happened in *Star Wars* if Luke didn't want to go fight the Empire. What if he just wanted to remain a farmer boy with Uncle Owen and stay on Tatooine for the rest of his life? Boring! We'd have a whole different trilogy with a more interesting main character.   The introduction of the droids C-3PO and R2-D2 leads to the viewing of Princess Leia's holographic message which leads to the search and discovery of Obi

Wan Kenobi which necessitates the mission to Alderaan and the discussion of the Force (which is one of the main elements in the saga) which gives Luke a whole new sense of purpose that motivates him to leave the planet and encounter all the other characters we know and love. All this happens under the guiding authorial hand of George Lucas, who wants to create an engaging entertaining story. A successful story requires this seeding of events which create motivation for the characters and thus form a plot.

   In the same vein, I needed to introduce motivations that would guide characters onto a certain path that would lead to a plotline. One of the rules to being a good Game Master for a role-playing game which I applied to the story is: Maintain Triple Redundancy of Player Coercion Systems. That is, try to have about three things that motivate a character.

   Continuing with the *Star Wars* analogy, the character Han Solo would never have been motivated to help rescue the princess had he not been a womanizer, greedy and a generally good guy at heart.

   For the Neverworld characters, I tried to motivate them in general by a desire to explore their surroundings. Some were motivated by a sense of duty. Each had personal drives that could be exploited such as greed, lust, scientific interest, a quest, etc.

The Future of Neverworld

   As a result of this project, I have this thesis, my original notes and concept art, a couple hundred pages of text and lots of ideas. That is a lot of raw material to work with. Now that I have a whole world system, I can use it as a background for a collection of short stories, poems or perhaps a screenplay.

   The success of a trilogy or series of books has a lot to do with establishing a believable world which the reader enjoys returning to and is familiar with. Having visited them in books, no one ever forgets Frank Herbert's Dune, J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle Earth, William Gibson's Sprawl, or C.S. Lewis' Narnia.

   I would love to create a world as memorable. Neverworld is pretty rough in the state its in, but it has potential. Maybe I'll return there some time in the future.

   But right now I want a vacation.

Some last minute commentaries from two of the players:

From: Greg Stephan

I believe my frustration comes from my inability to adapt to this type of game.

This is a learning experience on both sides. I have learned that a player in a game such as this (in this case myself) must learn to think in three dimensions, or at least non-linearly. Unlike some of your other players, I

have
not involved myself in this type of entertainment before. And it is entertaining
even if my character is fairly inactive.

I also learned that I responded to your dictums overmy character's response
in some cases with total resignation. For example, in the past when you
dis-alowed my characters actions, instead of trying a differnt tact or a secondary
attempt at the situation, I withheld further actions until the overall scenario
took a turn and the situation was changed or resolved for me. That is so unlike
my real self.

I have learned that it is not as easy for me to communicate to disembodied
personas as it is to speak face to face. That is not totaly true, I have no
problem dealing with people and situations on the phone. But years ago,
when CB radios were all the rage, I, of course had one in my vehicle. I had the
same problem then. I could not easily engage in the friendly banter that
permiated the airwaves. I knew then it was because I was afraid of commiting
a communication fau-pau on the air. The thought of distant unknown criticism
seemed to baother me. So, I became a "watcher". I listened to all that went on
and ocasionally interjected my opinon.

Perhaps this game is similar in ways, I don't know. But, I am enjoying it
and slowly learning how to deal with the cyber situations.
By the way, I think you have done a hell of a job on a monumental task
you set before yourself. You can use any part of what I am sayng here as my
official evaluation of the game.

Oh,yeah, how do you know my character dosen't have a micro laser shoved
up his butt? the brotherhood didn't strip search us did they?

From: Bill New

COMMENTS ON NEVERWORLD PROJECT

First off, despite my erratic participation I have enjoyed "playing"
the game. It was a definite challenge to create a character and
determine her actions in a context in which I did not control any
other characters. Having written fiction before, I found this both a
familiar and unfamiliar position to be in. In one sense, the need to
see the situation and be the character through whom you are speaking
is the same. But in another sense, the frustration in not being able
to determine how character relations would be configured presented a
novel problem. I suppose I set out in some ways to foil the other
characters - who in my case were all controlled by Andre and who had
an antagonistic role in any case. I am not an uncooperative person.
It would have been nice to play with/against other players, but that
is my fault for not writing more...

The suggestions I would make are [a] that the progress of the game as
a whole, what all the players are doing, ought to be more easily
accessible to the players so that they can understand better the tone
and the context of the narrative and [b] I think I would have liked
more comprehensive background information which included some hint
about the current situation in which my character was embroiled.

But in general I commmend you for taking on this enormous task and
making it very interesting to me as a player.

Bill