The widespread availability of low-cost modems, and in particular the advent of cheap, mass-produced personal computers with modems and modular jacks built in (such as the Amiga and maybe the Phillips) suggests a number of interesting possibilities for multi-player computer games over the phone.

Consider a game like "Empire". In many ways each player is independent. If each started the game on his own machine, but all players shared some common, mutually agreed upon random number seed to create the world, then each could play along with only occaisional contact between machines to synchronize their world states, conduct combat, transmit diplomatic communications, etc. The architecture of the communications pattern is problematic, but a single machine serving as a centralized host seems like the most reasonable solution.

A more grandiose scheme, which I have been thinking about for quite a few years now, is to have a large (i.e., unbounded) universe with worlds, star systems, alien races, different types of technology, and well-defined physical laws. Players would buy a program in a local store to run on their machine. Each release copy of the program would have its own serial number to provide each player with a unique identity from the moment he first boots it up. All the extant copies of the program would communicate with a single large centralized host (like a VAX) over the phone or Telenet or whatever's cheapest and most convenient. When the player starts the game, he finds himself in much the same situation as you do in "Empire": in an expanse of unowned wilderness, with a relatively primitive state of development and some standard amount of starting resources. He would then expand from there, developing his world industrial base, moving into space, encountering other players and generally having a grand old time.

The difference between this game and "Empire" is that it would support a much larger number of players (thousands) in a much larger and more diverse and open-ended universe. The universe would have its own abstract existence independent of the players. The system administrators (i.e., *us*) could liven the game up ala D&D by placing alien artifacts, non-player characters and races, inhabited but unclaimed worlds, and so forth in the universe for the players to discover and interact with. In addition, we would be able to devote the player's whole home machine to information display and control functions, making the game more interactively fluid and more visually and aurally stimulating than "Empire".

The difference between this game and similar services offered by Compuserve and others of its ilk is that we would be dedicated to the game. We would not be offering a general purpose time-sharing system. We would be communicating with computers running software of our own devising rather than with terminals. This means that the level of interaction that we would have to support would be much more distributed. Players' computers would correspond with the host in relatively infrequent (i.e., a few times a day) bursts of high information density exchanges. The level of support for dial-ups (i.e., the number of ports) would be correspondingly less and the host system could be optimized for handling the game. This all means that the level of hardware resources and consequent support overhead would be less, user connect time would be much less (per user), and we would therefore (I hope) be able to charge the players a LOT less than Compuserve or its brethren (I think we'd produce a more interesting game too!) We could call it "Lucasnet".

Ideally we would want a game that could be played at a variety of different levels depending upon player inclination and sophistication: as a zoom-thru-space shoot'em-up, as a game of exploration, as an economic simulation, as a diplomacy game; as a serious effort or as a light-hearted romp; as an occaisional weekend diversion or as a full-time obsession.

I’m sure we’re not the first to have this idea, but I think we are uniquely qualified in terms of our talent, imagination, vision and resources to do it right and to be successful at it.

Goals:

- open-ended
- large-scale
- low cost to play
- permits people with varying time commitments to play
- ability to rejoin if you get wiped out
- SF/interstellar theme
- distributed processing on home machines
- permits different levels of interest and ability