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From: chip (Chip Morningstar -- "Software Without Moving Parts")  
To: sda  
Cc: chip  
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I spent the morning talking with everyone involved and here's where we are:

Randy managed to perform a miracle and implement a fix for the communications protocol problems in record time. He got it working on Friday and Janet immediately uploaded it. She is now distributing disks to people internally at Quantum for testing purposes. Randy has now resumed work on the new businesses for the improved downtown and is making good progress. We seem to be about 70% done there.

Aric is also plugging away on realm generation. He wants to know how much of his time he should be devoting to working on the realm editor tool, since that will likely become an official project at some point. I told him to feel free to tinker with it, but that his first priority should be world generation. He agreed.

Janet says she is having some problems with the host-based memory-capacity management software that she is still diagnosing. Other than that she is aware of only "minor problems". I asked her what these were and she said that they were so ephemeral that she hadn't even wanted to concern us with until she had more concrete information. I told her that we'd prefer to get the vague information up front, even if it's not very useful, since we may recognize things that she does not. She said "OK", and proceeded to give me a list of minor glitches that testers had reported observing. Most were what she perceived them to be -- fleeting glances at problems that may or may not actually be there. One, however, turned out to simply be a user who misunderstood part of the user interface and was actually doing something wrong. I asked where we were with respect to beginning beta test; she said she didn't want to commit to any date right now, but that she would feel more confident discussing the matter when she figured out why her capacity monitor was broken. I reiterated that she should not hesitate to call on us for anything that we could do that might help move things along at their end.

I also talked to Randy Bennett. I complimented him on the cover letter for the beta testers (which I really like, by the way). We discussed materials for distribution to them. He thought that a hardcopy of the first Rant was probably a good idea. It occurred to me that a sort of generic first edition might be suitable for inclusion in the release package as well and he concurred. I also suggested a keypad overlay and a map. He thought that a keypad overlay was a good idea, but doing on a separable page in the manual that users could cut out with scissors would be the most cost-effective medium for such a thing for beta release. A more substantial overlay, such as they distribute with QuantumLink software, will have to wait for final release. He asked if we expected them to do this thing or if we would provide the artwork. I said we would provide it, since I think I can whip the thing out using MacDraw more quickly than I can describe it to them. He wasn't so sure about the map, since they want the beta tester's experience to mimic that of actual users as closely as possible. Thus, we should only include a map if we intend to include a map as part of the release package as well. Putting a map in the release package probably won't work, unless the map is very vague and general, since we don't know where a particular user will wind up in the world until he actually logs in for the first time. On the other hand, the beta testers ought to have additional information to compensate for the fact

that there won't be experienced users online who they can ask questions. I mentioned this to Randy, and he said that was a good point, but that there would be the beta-testers' message board to fulfill that function. He said he would discuss the idea with the other folks there and get back to us. We agreed that I will try to get him the latest rev of the manual, the artwork for the keypad overlay, and the copy for the first issue of the Rant, to him within the week.