NYSERnet in New York State
SURAnet in the southeastern United States
SEQSUInet in Texas
BARRnet in the San Francisco area
MERIT in Michigan
(There are others that are currently being constructed.)

These regional networks all hook into the NSFnet backbone, which is a network that connects the six supercomputer centers. For example, a person at Kansas State University can connect with a supercomputer via MIDnet and the NSFnet backbone. That researcher can also send mail to colleagues at the University of Delaware by using MIDnet, NSFnet and SURAnet. Each university has its own local computer network which connects on-campus computers as well as providing a means to connecting to a regional network.

Some universities are already connected to older networks such as CSnet, the ARPAnet and BITnet. In principal, any campus connected to any of these networks can access anyone else in any other network since there are gateways between the networks.

Gateways are specialized computers that forward network traffic, thereby connecting networks. In practice, these wide-area networks use different networking technology which make it impossible to provide full functionality across the gateways. However, mail is almost universally supported across all gateways, so that a person at a BITnet site can send mail messages to a colleague at an ARPAnet site (or anywhere else for that matter). You should already be somewhat familiar with this, but if not refer to; "Limbo To Infinity" (Phrack Inc., Volume Two, Issue 24, File 3 of 13) and "Internet Domains" (Phrack Inc., Volume Three, Issue 26, File 8 of 11)

Computer networks rely on hardware and software that allow computers to communicate. The language that enables network communication is called a protocol. There are many different protocols in use today. MIDnet uses the TCP/IP protocols, also known as the DOD (Department of Defense) Protocol Suite.

Other networks that use TCP/IP include ARPAnet, CSnet and the NSFnet. In fact, all the regional networks that are linked to the NSFnet backbone are required to use TCP/IP. At the local campus level, TCP/IP is often used, although other protocols such as IBM's SNA and DEC's DECnet are common. In order to communicate with a computer via MIDnet and the NSFnet, a computer at a campus must use TCP/IP directly or use a gateway that will translate its protocols into TCP/IP.

The Internet is a world-wide computer network that is the conglomeration of most of the large wide area networks, including ARPAnet, CSnet, NSFnet, and the regionals, such as MIDnet. To a lesser degree, other networks such as BITnet that can send mail to hosts on these networks are included as part of the Internet. This huge network of networks, the Internet, as you have by now read all about in the pages of Phrack Inc., is a rapidly growing and very complex entity that allows sophisticated communication between scientists, students, government officials and others. Being a part of this community is both exciting and challenging.

This chapter of the Future Transcendent Saga gives a general description of the protocols and software used in MIDnet and the NSFNet. A discussion of several of the more commonly used networking tools is also included to enable you to make practical use of the network as soon as possible.

The DOD Protocol Suite

The DOD Protocol Suite includes many different protocols. Each protocol is a specification of how communication is to occur between computers. Computer hardware and software vendors use the protocol to create programs and sometimes specialized hardware in order to implement the network function intended by the protocol. Different implementations of the same protocol exist for the varied hardware and operating systems found in a network.

The three most commonly used network functions are:

Mail -- Sending and receiving messages
File Transfer -- Sending and receiving files
Remote Login -- Logging into a distant computer

Of these, mail is probably the most commonly used.

In the TCP/IP world, there are three different protocols that realize these functions:

SMTP -- (Simple Mail Transfer Protocol) Mail
FTP -- (File Transfer Protocol) sending and receiving files
Telnet -- Remote login

How to use these protocols is discussed in the next section. At first glance, it is not obvious why these three functions are the most common. After all, mail and file transfer seem to be the same thing. However, mail messages are not identical to files, since they are usually comprised of only ASCII characters and are sequential in structure. Files may contain binary data and have complicated, non-sequential structures. Also, mail messages can usually tolerate some errors in transmission whereas files should not contain any errors. Finally, file transfers usually