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What a Tangled Web We Weave

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Developing the internet in Equatorial Cyberspace has been a challenge for both governments and businesses alike as political rivalries and the enduring civil war in Brynania have hampered the growth of the web on the continent. Attempts have begun, spurred on by private enterprises anxious to develop the web for information and e-commerce in the region, to untangle the mass of conflicting laws and

regulations which have impeded the development of the web in Cyberia, but the obstacles are formidable. Thus it will take a great deal of political will to develop the web as a tool for local media, business, and education. As a result of Brynania's off-and-on civil conflicts over the past two decades, telecommunications infrastructure has been slow to develop, especially in the disputed southern and north-western parts of the country. Nevertheless, wireless communications have grown in popularity both in the capital, Hamraville, and in the richer enclaves of the country's port city, McGilldishu. Internet cellphones and PDAs are slowly appearing in many of the Brynania's urban areas. However, the Brynanian government is still divided over laws regulating web access, for fear that the medium could be used to undermine the state, and more conservative factions in the government have proposed setting limits on web access.

This may be a case of too little, too late, however, especially since the number of computers and other communications devices have risen dramatically over the past five years. Granted, Brynania's introduction to the web was a difficult one. After applying to the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) to register the top-level domain suffix ".by" in 1999, the Brynanian government was told that the former Soviet republic of Belarus had already reserved that code, leading to a tractor

embargo between Minsk and Hamraville which continues to the present day. Brynania now uses the internet code .bx for its sites but is planning an appeal to ICANN.

Adding to the complications is the fact that the civil war in Brynania has spilled over onto the internet as well. Information sites belonging to the Brynanian government and the opposition Popular Front for the Liberation of Zaharia (PFLZ), which desires an independent Zaharia, have frequently been hacked, allegedly by each other's supporters overseas. Most recently, the Brynanian government homepage was temporarily shut down by unknown outside forces and replaced with a webpage full of poetry penned by imprisoned Zaharian dissident Zahra al-Zahra. Rebel forces in Zahrville have also called for a separate internet code, .zh, to be the standard for local websites, but Hamraville has refused to accept that distinction.

In 2001, then-Brynanian Minister of Communications Neo Morpheus introduced the controversial Brynanian Internet Regulation Bill, which if passed would severely restrict web access to the public. Local civil rights organisations have complained that the bill represents a challenge to individual privacy and free speech rights, but supporters of the bill in Hamraville claim that the law is necessary to avoid threats to Brynanian security. Others have questioned whether Brynania actually has the wherewithal to create the elaborate firewall technology necessary, especially with foreign wireless industries eying the future Cyberian market.

Elsewhere in Cyberia, the internet situation is quieter but by no means ideal. Concordia, the most economically developed part of the continent, has a small but growing telecommunications sector and hopes to provide news and media services to other parts of the region. In nearby Icasia, local resorts have joint partnerships with foreign firms promote the country's expanded tourist industries online, but the economic troubles of the government of late have put the breaks on other internet-based government initiatives. Udem and Ruritania have also developed fledgling internet-based communications, although in the latter country, net use is still restricted and some regional and international news sites have been blocked. Finally, there is Uqamistan, which has officially declared the internet to be "a revisionist tool of nightmare counter-revolutionary evilness." Access is restricted to the political elites in the country, and all computers have to be registered by the government.

Advocacy groups in Cyberia have called for the eventual joint development of the continent's internet and telecommunications industries to both compete in international markets and provide better services for

the public. Such a pooling of resources may help bring internet-based services to the more remote parts of the continent and, according to the Organisation for Internet Development in Cyberia (OIDC) help heal the political divisions in the region. However, like other aspects of Cyberian relations, online cooperation may be a measured process at best.