

A New Dragon In Town

Something many had noted about Ghostwalker was his almost uncanny resemblance, at least in draconic form, to the late Dunkelzahn. The resemblance was strong enough that some theorized that he was Dunkelzahn returned, or perhaps a sibling. Either way, Ghostwalker hadn't seemed to like what had been done with Dunkelzahn's will, the items within, and what it boded for dragons. He clearly wanted a reckoning. What that really means for the rest of us is anyone's guess, but I can tell you a few things: when the dust settled, the world is still here; Hestaby is now a Prince in Tír Tairngire instead of Lofwyr; the other wyrms now seem as satisfied as they're ever going to be; Lofwyr retained as much power if not more than he previously had; and many shadowrunners were employed in very lucrative endeavors.

SLASH AND BURN

Smarting from being kicked out of Denver, Aztlan wasted no time in attempting to prove itself elsewhere. Ever since the 2050s or so, when the Campeche district of Aztlan rose up in rebellion, the bloody-minded country had been aching to retake control of the Yucatan and assert its authority. With plenty of recalled troops at hand, the government sent them into the Yucatan to slash and burn everything they encountered, which they did until the environment began fighting back. March 15, 2062 saw an earthquake, tidal waves, and storms hitting the Yucatan, pushing the Aztlan offensive back and touching off warfare between nature and toxic spirits. The Azzies have been squatting and waiting for things to die down until they can go back in, but I have a feeling it's never going to stop until one side or the other is defeated... and I hope for everyone's sake that it'll be the toxics.

MATRIX CRASH 2.0

Let's go back for a moment to 2055. Back then, and for quite a few years, it was never clear how or why the otaku appeared, but they did and adamantly believed in the existence of something they called the Deep Resonance (a Matrix-dwelling quasi-deity or demiurge, in their eyes). These prodigy children were our future (we call them technomancers now), and had a key role to play. In addition to this, unknown to all but a few of us, we had several AIs on our hands: Mirage, birthed from the ashes of Echo Mirage; Morgan, a rogue AI created within Renraku and escaped as soon as she could with a decker named Dodger; and Deus, another AI created within Renraku as an attempt to have a pet intelligence to heel, and built using code ripped from Morgan (who thenceforth became Megaera, poor broken thing).

Now, to most people none of this meant a thing. Like dragons, none of them (otaku, AIs) had really ever touched our lives. They would, however, in a very real and brutal way—not once, but several times—between 2059 and 2064.

DEUS'S AGENDA

In December of 2059, the Renraku Arcology in Seattle went offline for no apparent reason, shut down and otherwise cut off from the rest of the sprawl and the Matrix. Renraku sealed off the area, offering inadequate explanations of malfunc-

tions. As time went by, more and more people (Matrix denizens and regular folks alike) realized that something quite serious was going on in there. It wasn't revealed until later, after General Colloton and UCAS troops were called in to take over and begin liberating the arcology, that the AI Deus had taken control and was busily experimenting upon its captive audience for its own purposes.

It was a long series of ugly, gory, and heartbreaking skirmishes, as well as many a Matrix battle, that eventually saw the end of Deus's stranglehold. Those who wanted to capture him afterward were disappointed, however, to find that he'd slipped their carefully prepared trap. As it turns out, he'd downloaded himself as nodes into the heads of many of his victims, released into the world after they had all been freed. These became part of the Network, which also contained Megaera thanks to the last fight between her and Deus. This would be very important later.

PERFECT STORM

A confluence of actors and events that contributed to the second Crash came together right at the point of Novatech's Initial Public Offering. The corporation, deep in debt and hoping to score big enough to dig out of it, had made all the necessary arrangements for its stock to go public. The Boston Exchange, which had hosted the East Coast Stock Exchange since New York's earthquake in 2005, upgraded itself in order to handle the projected high amounts of traffic on its grids from the IPO.

Deus wanted to take advantage of what would be the highest-Matrix-traffic-event ever (how often does a megacorp take its stock public?) in order to upgrade himself and become a god in the Matrix, purging himself of the remainder of Megaera's code at the same time.

Meanwhile, Pax—one of Deus's former devoted otaku servants—had become twisted through listening to something she'd called the Dissonance, an anti-Deep Resonance phenomenon. She was also undergoing Fading, meaning she was losing her otaku abilities, but she wasn't going to let them go without a fight, willing to sacrifice anyone and anything in order to maintain them.

As it happened, Pax partnered up with the radical Norse cult Winternight, which was happy to help destabilize the Matrix, viewed as the primary tool of their enemy Loki. Not only did they plant a home-grown mega-worm, but also they stole nanotech weaponry from an AA-rated Eurocorp named Zeta-ImpChem for use in their plan to bring down Deus and the Matrix. The stolen nanovirus was accidentally released during infiltration of a Swiss extraterritorial corp zone, killing everyone present but allowing Z-IC to identify the weapon. They also discovered a worm code egg in the nearby mainframe, thus getting the word out regarding Winternight and its potential plans—too late.

Pax and Winternight succeeded. The Dissonance worm triggered on schedule, wreaking havoc as it plowed through the Matrix. The worm's viral tidal wave struck the Boston ECSE shortly after the launch of the IPO—and right after Deus had erupted into the middle of the virtual trading floor and began his aggressive upgrading. Add in a few key EMP strikes on major Matrix nodes to this massive upheaval, and you can see why the whole thing melted down spectacularly and brought everyone