

DEATH AND CHAOS

Things really got cooking in 2010–2018. We had a virtual alphabet soup going on: VITAS, UGE, NAN, and so forth. Between the epidemics and the resurgence of magic in the world, there were many who thought that the Apocalypse was on its way and that we ought to be kissing our collective backsides goodbye. It wasn't the end, but it sure was a whole lot of change—and it wasn't quiet.

VITAS

Virally Induced Toxic Allergy Syndrome (VITAS) first appeared in New Delhi, India in 2010. It spread terrifyingly fast, striking down approximately 25 percent of the world's population. Those areas worst hit were China, India, many African nations, some Third World cities, and outlying areas due to inadequate or nonexistent medical care and vaccines.

Still, no one was safe, and a lot of fear and paranoia followed in the epidemic's wake. In Mexico City, for example, the locals called it "Terror Time," and as the dead piled up in the streets, Citizens' Action Committees (otherwise known as organized mobs) burned whole sections of the city. It should come as no surprise, then, that in January, 2011 the Mexican government dissolved, sending thousands of refugees across the border into Texas. This would have significant repercussions later on.

THE AWAKENING

As if a prelude of what was to come, suddenly a percentage of children all around the world were born "deformed." Many people called these babies mutants; others called them elves and dwarfs, for that was exactly what they resembled. The scientists, however, called the phenomenon Unexplained Genetic Expression (UGE). Though we have better ideas these days about what may have triggered it (magic, of course), we're not much closer to an in-depth explanation than we were before. Now all you elves and dwarfs out there know where you came from. We're just as mystified as you are.

The real kicker happened December 24, 2011. What was previously known as the Year of Chaos became the Awakening as simultaneous events spectacularly ushered in the Mayans' Sixth World: the appearance of the great dragon Ryumyo over Mount Fuji, witnessed by hundreds of Japanese passengers on a bullet train, and the Native American prophet Daniel Howling Coyote leading his followers out of the Abilene Re-Education Center. Camp guards swore that no shot fired at Howling Coyote touched him; some sort of "glow" stopped them. Ignoring their captors, the Native American walked through the gates and out into the storm surrounding the camp, with no trace found the next morning to mark their passage.

Elsewhere, weather patterns were changing, as were geographic features—some to catastrophic effect. Australia experienced the first of many violent "mana storms," which swept through the Outback, killing hundreds. Western forests in Ireland began growing rapidly, and the long-forgotten slighe roads returned along with peat bogs and cairn lines. Stone circles and standing stones erupted along known ley lines in Britain. The Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and Denmark experienced a flood that left toxic sludge in its wake when the poisoned North Sea pushed into the mouth of the Elbe River, destroying

many dikes and dams. Floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, and more (un)natural disasters followed all over the world.

Dunkelzahn Explains It All

While many were preparing for a religious Apocalypse and others were simply learning how to deal with the enormous chaos and uncertainty, a certain dragon decided to take matters into his own talons. On January 27, 2012, the great dragon Dunkelzahn made his first appearance at Cherry Creek Lake in Denver. It was a media frenzy. Reporters were fighting for exclusives while the military was trying to seal the area off. In the end, however, Dunkelzahn granted one Holly Brighton the exclusive interview that made history: twelve hours and sixteen minutes of questions about Dunkelzahn and the turmoil happening to us that was dubbed the Awakening. For whatever reason (some say to help us out), the great dragon explained it all in that marathon interview.

In simple terms, magic had returned to the world with a vengeance. You can imagine how simultaneously scary, exhilarating, and disappointing that was for many people; it certainly blew my twelve-year-old mind. Scientists had a really difficult time coming to grips with it, not knowing how to classify it (if they were even to accept its existence at all). Out of the blue, some people were now able to incinerate others with a thought (even if it knocked them on their keisters afterward). That could be scary for someone who didn't want the ability, scary for those who couldn't and didn't want to understand how it could happen, exhilarating for those who did want the ability, and disappointing for every loon who'd pretended to be a great magician and who was now revealed as a complete fraud.

NATION BUILDING

The death of the United States of America, and the birth of the North American crazy quilt we all know and love, began in 2014.

The Native American Nations formed in 2018 with the Treaty of Denver—a conciliatory gesture by the United States and Canadian governments following a protracted guerrilla war with Native American forces led by Daniel Howling Coyote (remember him?). The U.S.-Canadian forces tried to pass the Resolution Act that would have exterminated all the Amerindian tribes for good, but needless to say the Natives were having none of that. The war culminated in the Great Ghost Dance, a massive magical ritual that Howling Coyote and his followers used to shake up the North American landscape by blowing the tops off several volcanoes (Redondo Peak in New Mexico, along with Mount Adams, Mount Hood, Mount Rainier, and Mount St. Helens in the Pacific Northwest), not to mention causing freaky weather and other disturbances at military bases and supply dumps connected with the Resolution Act.

The Treaty of Denver, among other things, recognized the sovereignty of the Native American Nations and ceded most of the western portion of North America to them, while allowing the U.S. to retain most of California and maintain Seattle as an extraterritorial extension. (Now you know why the Seattle metroplex is more or less a screwed-up frontier town). The NAN, governed by a Sovereign Tribal Council, included: the Salish-Shidhe Council, the Sioux Nation, the Pueblo Corporate