

# THE END OF THE MATRIX... ...AS WE KNOW IT

The year is 2064, and all is not well. A struggling megacorp makes a drastic decision to stave off impending doom. A psychopathic artificial intelligence thought to be dead rises again, attempting to take over the entire Matrix. And behind the scenes, apocalyptic terrorists prepare to strike at key points around the world, completing their first steps towards a vision of Armageddon. Across the globe, shadowrunners find themselves caught up in these events—how will their actions impact the Sixth World?

**System Failure** details the events leading up to and following these dramatic, world-shaking events. In addition to in-depth treatment of the three main plotlines and adventure frameworks for involving the runners in each, it also details numerous aftershocks and spin-off events, with scenario suggestions for how runners can play a role in the years to come. For use with Shadowrun.



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# System Failure



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**SYSTEM FAILURE**

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# INTRODUCTION

*System Failure* puts the smackdown on the world of *Shadowrun*. As the last sourcebook for *Shadowrun, Third Edition (SR3)*, we felt it best to go out with a bang. The events in this book are the culmination of years-worth of ongoing plots—both blatant and simmering beneath the surface. Three of these plotlines converge in a fantastic conflagration that culminates in the crash of the world-wide Matrix. These circumstances, and the aftershocks that follow, allow us to tie up numerous long-running plot lines as well as setting the stage for the technological re-vamping of the Matrix that was necessary for *Shadowrun, Fourth Edition (SR4)*. This is not the end of all ongoing plot lines, of course—many still continue on their courses, perhaps nudged or even redirected thanks to the events. Other plotlines will arise from the seeds planted here, growing to life as we continue the world in the year 2070 with *SR4*.

Like all previous *SR3* sourcebooks, *System Failure* is presented as a series of electronic documents posted by Captain Chaos, sysop of the vast Shadowland archive and data haven—the number one source for shadowrunners on what’s going on in the world of *Shadowrun*. The documents come from a variety of sources, underground and mainstream, but are directed towards an audience of shadowrunners. These sources are each unique in outlook and perspective, influenced by their own particular prejudices and interests. Each article is marked up with a running commentary by shadow denizens who add to, revise and contradict the original post. These inserted comments add innuendo, allegations, opinions, rumors, misconceptions, misinformation, lies and sometimes even the truth to the information presented. It is left up to the gamemaster to decide what information is correct and which is just filling, as appropriate to his or her game.

*System Failure* also presents a number of fiction pieces, describing many of the ongoing events through the eyes of direct participants, whether they happen to be innocent bystanders, minor pawns, or scheming major players. These accounts provide a ground-level viewing of many happenings, which gamemasters can use as guidelines when creating the atmosphere for their own related adventures.

The first chapter, *Forewarning*, sets the stage for the dramatic events that follow. It is here that we first hear the impressive news that the megacorp Novatech has been forced to go public. We also get a glimpse of the catastrophes on the horizon, as seen through the murky omens perceived by seers and others who closely watch the world’s patterns for hints of the future. We also discover that the artificial intelligence (AI) known as Deus has finally completed its effort to compile, as originally described in *Threats 2*. And here we also see the first stirrings of Winternight’s agenda, as unseasonably cold weather grips the world, and the Corporate Court gets a lucky clue that the apocalyptic cult is up to something.

The second chapter, *Critical Error*, is primarily composed of fictional accounts of the various events that lead up to the Crash of ’64. It ends with both long-term and short-term timelines, so that gamemasters can accurately follow the sequence of events.

The *Novatech Goes Public* chapter is the first “plot track” of *System Failure*. It describes in detail how an IPO works, and in particular what the ramifications are for a megacorp the size of Novatech to go public in the world of *Shadowrun*. Novatech has been weak ever since its formation during the recent corp war (described in *Blood in the Boardroom* and *Corporate Download*), and has not fared any better due to economic warfare raged by Novatech arch-nemesis Art Dankwalther (see *Threats 2*).

*Singularity* covers the next plot track—the return of Deus (originally detailed in *Renraku Arcology: Shutdown and Brainscan*) and its attempt to achieve apotheosis in the midst of the Novatech IPO, taking advantage of the unprecedented levels of Matrix traffic the IPO inspires. It also details Deus’s conflicts with other AIs (Megaera and Mirage), as well as the efforts of others to foil its plans.

*Midnight* introduces the unseen threat in these affairs—the uneasy alliance between Winternight and Pax’s Dissonant otaku tribe (described in *Threats 2*). Winternight sees the destruction of the Matrix—which they view as the tool of their enemy Loki—as the first step towards their fabled Ragnarok. Together with Pax’s otaku, they seed a Dissonance-fueled worm throughout the Matrix, timed to activate during the IPO—and also when Deus makes its move. While Pax and company view this as a way to get back at their former AI master and re-make the Matrix to their own liking, Winternight has other plans. Not trusting the worm alone, Winternight also pursues a plan to strike at critical Matrix junctures with magically-modified EMP nukes.

The *Crash 2.0* chapter describes the exact effects this Matrix Crash has on the world at large. It also covers Winternight’s EMP nuke attacks in detail—including how many were foiled, but also the effects of those that detonated. This chapter also hints at the fate awaiting many of those who are trapped online when the Matrix crashes. Finally, it narrates the last stand of long-time shadowrunning commentator and guide Captain Chaos, as he rallies a fateful effort to alert the world to Winternight’s threat and defend Shadowland against the worm.

*Aftershocks* examines many of the resulting upheavals that occur as a result of these affairs. These range from an attempted coup in the UCAS to the fall of Islamic leader Ibn Eisa, and from the liberation of Poland to the fall of the corporate-backed regime in Tsimshian. It also describes how the Crash and IPO change the balance of power in the megacorporate world, and many of the maneuverings that follow.

The *Matrix 2.0* chapter introduces the underpinnings behind the new Matrix that the corps are already building on the shell of the old—particularly in regard to its capacity for wireless access and augmented reality. It also touches upon a new generation of people whose minds have been undeniably altered due to being online when the Matrix Crash occurred—and the new powers these are exhibiting.

# FOREWARNING



October, 2063

Miles Lanier hadn't seen Richard Villiers this drunk in a long time. Not since his divorce from Samantha.

Villiers' personal assistant, whose name Lanier could never remember, called him around midnight asking him to come talk Villiers off the proverbial ledge again. Villiers had a habit of going into downtown Boston bars incognito, getting cut off by the bartender, then clearing the place out with a wave of his credstick and a quick hundred thousand nuyen transfer to the bar's owners. As of late, Lanier wasn't sure if Villiers did this because he preferred to be alone or because he couldn't stop drinking. He was starting to fear it was the latter.

The vast nightclub was as silent as an empty cathedral, with darkened chairs and empty tables instead of unfilled pews. Villiers sat at the mahogany bar on the far side, watching the nearest trid. The Red Sox were playing the Yankees in the ALCS for the fifth straight year, ahead in the series three games to none, but behind by one run in the ninth inning.

Villiers was a Yankee fan, probably the only one in Boston. It occurred to Lanier that perhaps this was another reason Villiers had cleared the bar out. He cared deeply about these games in a way few if any Bostonians would understand.

"Boy do I know what that feels like," said Villiers, pointing to the trid as Lanier walked up. "The Red Sox shouldn't win. They don't have the power hitters, the pitching, the payroll, anything." Villiers reached over to a set of five tequila shots lined in a row on the top of the bar and killed one. He placed the empty glass next to five of its compatriots in a scattered pile on his right. "The one thing they do have is our number."

"How many have you had?" asked Lanier, nodding toward the four remaining shots on the bar.

"No idea," said Villiers. "It doesn't matter. Here, take a look at this." Villiers flipped a handheld toward Lanier, who caught it easily with an overhand grab.

Lanier observed it for a minute, paging through the data with one hand. "Hm," said Lanier. He sat down at the bar next to Villiers and unexpectedly helped himself to a tequila shot. Villiers' assistant, whatshername, was fond of saying bad news and alcohol went