

THERE IS NO SPOON



A MATRIX RPG BY STEVE DARLINGTON

# **THERE IS NO SPOON**

## **A Matrix RPG by Steve Darlington**

### **Credits**

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Special thanks to "Wushu's Guide to the Matrix" for inspiring me to do it my way instead.

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# INTRODUCTION

*Welcome to THERE IS NO SPOON, a Matrix RPG designed by me on the bus one day. Let's hear it for public transport - it frees the mind. If labels interest you, it could be labelled a very rules-light system, with a cinematic feel. I hope you enjoy it.*

## **The First Rule**

Reloaded does not exist. It never existed. It will never exist. The same goes for Revolutions. Likewise for any animated films you might have heard of, and any other derivative products. If a player mentions any of these, the GM is allowed to smack them in the face.

## **Corollary to the First Rule**

THERE IS NO SPOON can only be used for one-shots or micro-campaigns - ie movie length stories. If you attempt to use this game for extended campaign play, the designer is allowed to smack you in the face.



## Setting

In case you haven't figured it out, this game is set in the world of the Matrix. There are a few further specifications to this. This game assumes that the PCs are all agents of the resistance, a hovercraft crew who spend a lot of time in the city that used to be their prison. The outside world should be secondary to running missions inside the program. This is a game about jacking in, running hard and risking it all.

The game can be set in any time period, but making it close to the events in the film (the **only** film) will serve to make things more immediate and interesting. Of course, feel free to change the events of the film however you wish as well. Maybe Neo never got up after being shot, or took the blue pill at the start. Maybe he isn't The One. Maybe you are instead.



# THE RULES

## The Matrix Stat

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Characters in THERE IS NO SPOON are defined by one main stat, the only stat that matters: Matrix. This stat measures how much you can manipulate the Matrix when inside it, both the substance of reality around you, and your own body. It is a number between one and five (or maybe six); see the table below for what each number means:

**0** - a mind trapped forever in the Matrix. These people are unable to be removed, and can be totally blown up without any moral or ethical concerns.

**1** - people with the potential to see the Matrix for what it is, and leave it. All PCs and anyone born outside the Matrix have a minimum Matrix score of one. (eg Mouse, Neo at the beginning of the film)

**2** - at this level, you can start to do some cool stuff, like shoot really well or run really fast. Most hovercraft crewmembers who have spent any significant time in the system are at this level. (eg Cypher, Case, Apoc)

**3** - now you can do the leap across buildings and can make the camera freeze and pan around your kung-fu poses. Hard core operatives are on this level (eg Trinity).

**4** - for most revolutionaries, this is the pinnacle. You can out-fight almost anyone, leap huge distances, survive large amounts of damage, throw people through walls. Bad-ass operatives who scare their team mates are on this level (eg Morpheus).

**5** - the level of the Agents, and the level Neo reaches during the rooftop scene. Now you

can dodge bullets, float in mid-air, hold up giant helicopters with your bare hands, and throw Agents into the paths of subway trains. You are unstoppably bad-ass.

**6** - you're God; you decide at any time what is real and what isn't. Only The One has this level. Pester your GM if you want to be The Two. He can smack you if you do, but he may also say yes.

## Skills

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Thanks to uploading, you can learn any skill you want, and add any you forget. Do not write down a list of skills, as you can do everything. There is, however, a catch. Uploaded skills aren't quite as good as twenty years of training, so they are only rated at level 3. Skills in which you are trained can be raised above this. See the section on rolling dice for what these levels mean.

If you want to upgrade your skills through training or just being a bad-ass, you can spend points at character generation to do so. Skills can be rated at the following levels:


- 4 - Expert
- 5 - Mastery
- 6 - Godlike

Note that a Godlike skill is awesome to behold: it means you can never, ever fail while using that skill. It will thus be a major part of your character.

## Rolling Dice

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TINS uses six-sided dice for all rolls. The aim for a player is to roll under a target number, set by their skill level or Matrix stat. Usually



this is a number from two to five. If you roll equal to or less than this number, you roxxorz, and may state this to your fellow players.

Every time you test a skill, your roll one die for your skill. If you are doing anything remotely physical - and are in the Matrix - you may also roll another die for your Matrix stat. It's best to have a different coloured die for this, as you will be making these rolls all the time (in fact, almost always) and you need to be able to tell them apart easily. If your skill roll or your Matrix roll succeeds, you have succeeded at your task. However, a Matrix success is always better than a skill success, in terms of game effect. If both rolls succeed, hey, you're a complete bad-ass, and you and the GM should work out an outcome to demonstrate that.

Sometimes, what is being tested is purely your ability to mould the Matrix (eg: doing the leap). In these cases, simply roll one die, trying to get under your Matrix stat. This is called a Matrix test. A test purely on a skill is a Skill Test. Testing with both dice is a Standard test, and unless specified otherwise, should be assumed to be the default. Likewise, the dice rolled for the Skill and Matrix rolls are hereafter called Skill Dice and Matrix Dice, respectively, and successes on these rolls are labelled as a Skill Success and a Matrix Success. Getting both is called a Double Success.

That all sounds very confusing, so let's try to simplify it a bit:

Characters have a Skill level (of which the default is 3) and a Matrix stat.

To make a Skill test, the player rolls one die and try to get equal to or less than their Skill level. If they do, it is a Skill Success.

To make a Matrix test, they roll one die and try to get under or equal to their Matrix stat. If they do, they have achieved a Matrix Success.

To make a Standard test, they roll two dice - making a Skill test and a Matrix test simultaneously. This is the default test. For the meaning of successes and failure on this test, see below.

## Success, Failure and Competition

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As they say in the technical argot, this game uses a fortune-in-the-middle system. That is, before you roll the dice, only determine what you are doing in the broadest possible sense. For example: fighting, driving, running, trying to kill someone. Then roll the dice. Figure out how well you did from the table below, then describe the outcome:

**No successes:** You suck. You probably did something, but either it went wrong somehow, or the people trying to stop you did just that. In a fight, this is bad.

**Skill success:** You did something, and it worked well enough. Good on ya.

**Matrix success:** You did something pretty cool, or damn well. You rock.

**Double success:** You did something totally bad-ass. We worship you.

Note the order: A double success beats a Matrix success beats a Skill success beats no success. This becomes most important when you are rolling against other people. The GM may also require a minimum of a Matrix success to succeed at a task, or to succeed unreservedly. (Failure tends to be less interesting than success with a nasty catch.) Also, players should take into account how well they did when describing their actions. A double success represents those moments when the camera freezes and pans around your super-cool bad-ass move so all may marvel at it.



When competing against another party, the GM decides if your opponent(s) are good enough to warrant dice rolls. Both parties involved roll, the higher success level wins. If there is a tie, then no side gains a significant advantage. If fighting, they just beat the tar out of each other and destroy the architecture for a bit, but nobody gets the upper hand.

Note that almost all the human inhabitants of the Matrix have no Matrix stat, so can never get better than a Skill success. This means you can kick their asses. Note also that Agents have a Matrix stat of five and heaps of combat skills. This means they can kick your ass.

## **Combat and Damage**

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Combat works exactly the same way as any opposed skill check. The skills in question are Kung Fu and Gun Fu (or any appropriate equivalent), which like any other skill, are both rated at 3 unless improved at character generation. The winner then decides what he wants to do to his opponent. For each level of success achieved, the winner may do one level of damage to their opponent. For example, if an Agent punches Morpheus and gets

a double success, while Morpheus gets no successes, he can do up to three levels of damage to him.

Characters' health is measured in points or chips, called Body chips and they usually begin the game with three of them. When they're all gone, your plot immunity has run out and your opponent can do with you what they wish. This is never good - but it does not necessarily mean death. Only if the death of a character is dramatically appropriate should the GM apply such measures - an example would be in the climactic battle, or just prior to it, wherein the big bad is giving them a reason to go wire-fu all over his ass.

If the death isn't appropriate, the other main options are severe injury, unconsciousness or incarceration. The point is to prevent the character in question from acting, and make his life difficult (and that of his fellows). Characters who have lost all chips cannot make any rolls until they get a chip back. Once they do, they can act normally again. Note however that if someone spends a chip for them (see below), they can roll a dice for one single action. This is supposed to represent a last-ditch effort to





get out of the firing line, so GMs should be careful that it isn't abused.

Body chips may be regained through Downtime. For every scene that a character is inactive, off-stage or constrained by the whims of their enemies or their injuries, they receive one chip back. It is always up to the GM what constitutes a scene. GMs may also award chips to PCs for doing extremely cool or interesting things, or for creating dramatic opportunities: the better you dance, the longer you stay on the floor. These chips can take your total number above three.

Exiting the Matrix will also restore all lost chips. If you can get to the phone in time, of course.

## Multiple Attackers and Advantages

Most of the time, combat can be broken into mini-combats between two opponents, and thus run as above. Even with three or four combatants, the system remains unchanged - all those involved in the fight roll their dice, and the highest roller may determine the outcome, and may inflict as many levels of damage between their result and their opponent's. This means that if two people beat their opponent, they can both do damage. If you don't roll the highest but still beat someone, you stop them from doing what they were doing, but can't avoid damage yourself. Ties work the same way - a stalemate occurs.

Note that this system breaks down for more than a few combatants, so such combats should be broken down into min-combats, or the Advantage Dice rules used (see below).

*Example:*

*Trinity (Gun Fu 4, Matrix 3) and Neo (Kung Fu 4, Matrix 4) are fighting on the rooftop. The*

*Agent (Gun Fu 4, Matrix 5) has been shooting at Neo and he's been dodging bullets (he rolled a Matrix success). The GM has declared a new round.*


*Trinity says she's going to whack the Agent from behind, if possible. Neo says he'll attempt to close in and do some Kung Fu. The GM determines the Agent is going to blast until he hits something. All of them roll. Neo gets a Skill success, the Agent gets a Matrix success, and Trinity gets a Double success.*

*At one level above Neo, the Agent's bullets hit this time. No chips are lost as the wound is not serious, but Neo falls on his butt and looks like a pratt. The GM says the Agent smirks and says "Only human". Then Trinity uses her success. She says the Agent is distracted so she is able to put her gun to his head, point blank. She deadpans: "Dodge this", then scatters his brains. Since she rolled a Double success, and it was such a great line, the GM rules that the Agent is dead. (see the "Woah" rule, below.)*

*If the Agent had also rolled a Double success, things would have been different. The Agent would have still stopped Neo from doing what he wanted, but Trinity's shot wouldn't have damaged him. The Agent shoots Neo down and smirks again - before Trinity tackles him from behind. Rolling clear and leaping to his feet, Neo sees Trinity and the Agent slamming each other into the concrete. He charges...and the GM calls for more rolls. The action continues.*

This takes care of small battles where everyone has dice. Sometimes, however, the opponents of the players will be so numerous, fast, well-armed or bad-ass that there are many attacks going on at once and it becomes impossible to model them one by one. For example, a whole lobby full of trained guards. Or one guy with a machine gun. Or an Agent doing that million-punch-blur thing on the hero's abdomen. In any situation which





increases the amount of attacks being put out in any combat round, the GM can give that side more dice to roll. These extra dice are always Skill dice, never Matrix dice.

The rules for adjudicating dice rolls with multiple skill dice are as follows:

First, Skill dice cancel each other out. For every successful skill dice rolled, you can take one of the same away from your opponents roll. The end result will be one side with zero skill dice and one side with one or more.

Second, the Matrix die always trumps Skill dice, no matter how many Skill dice there are. If one side has a Matrix success and the other does not, the former wins. If neither has a Matrix success, the side with the most skill dice wins. If both have a Matrix success, the number of Skill successes determines the winner.

If in combat, the number of damage chips lost is the difference in success level, PLUS the number of extra Skill dice remaining for the winner. In this way, large groups of normal people can threaten the PCs.

*Example:*

*Neo is fighting a room full of guards with big guns. The GM thinks there's enough of them to get four bonus dice, rolling five dice total. Being well trained but not super-elite soldiers, they have a Gun Fu skill of four. As they are puppets of the Matrix, they have no Matrix dice.*

*Neo has a Gun Fu skill of four and a Matrix skill of four. Wow. He's also whined to his GM that because he has guns, lots of guns, he should get a bonus die. The GM, in a rare moment of kindness, agrees.*

*Both sides say they are trying to kill each other and roll.*

*The guards roll their five dice and get 1,2,3,5 and 6. That's three Skill successes. Neo rolls and gets a 4 and a 6, plus a 3 on his Matrix dice. That's one Skill success. His one success cancels out one of the guards' successes, giving a final tally of two Skill successes for the Guards and zero for Neo. But Neo has a Matrix success, and so blows them all away. The player describes how cool he is while doing this. Everyone is very impressed.*

*If Neo had rolled a 5 on his Matrix dice, he would have been in a world of hurt. Two skill successes versus none means he loses two chips. This is why nobody ever attacked the Agent's homebase before.*

## More On Chips

Just as you have Skill dice and Matrix dice, players also have Body chips and Matrix chips. Again, we recommend using two different colours for these chips. Where Body chips represent how much damage you can take in the Matrix, Matrix chips represent moments of sudden clarity, spiritual enlightenment and an almost subconscious control over the Matrix. Players usually begin the game with three Body chips and one Matrix chip.

As well as measuring damage, players may spend a Body chip to give themselves or another player an automatic Skill success. Yes, you pull off that move, but you dislocate something doing it, or you make sure your opponent shoots you and not your buddy. The PC who received the bonus still rolls both his dice; use the multiple dice rules above to adjudicate success. Note that because you can give dice to any player, this mechanic allows a player to get a successful die roll despite having no chips left.

Far more impressively, players may spend a Matrix chip to give themselves or another an



automatic Matrix Success. The PC with the bonus rolls both his dice, and extra Matrix dice cancel out other Matrix dice just as with extra Skill dice. What's more, a success on both Matrix dice means something absolutely miraculous and astoundingly cool happens, well above what your normal Matrix stat would allow. Examples might be someone coming back from the dead after just a kiss, or someone breaking out of unbreakable hand-cuffs despite being beaten to the verge of death. This is the big rules-breaker: for one action, you get to be The One. Go nuts. Enjoy it.

Matrix chips are much harder to earn than Body chips. The only way to get one is to do something insanely dangerous, insanely cool or insanely key to your character or the plot, or ideally, all three at once. Getting closure on your Deal might do it (see below); taking on an Agent single-handedly might also. If the latter is strongly related to the former (as in the case of Morpheus' fight in the bathroom), then it's pretty much a cert.

Matrix chips can be given to a player with no Body chips or no Matrix chips, thus allowing successes that might not have been possible

without the expenditure. Note however that only one chip may ever be spent per die roll. You can't receive a Body chip from someone and then spend your Matrix chip to increase the roll further. One chip per die roll. Got it?

Note also that there are no dramatic editing mechanics beyond Matrix chips. PCs in the Matrix can already ignore physics, they don't need to be able to make up the plot as well. That power is in the hands of the Agents; giving it to the PCs will make the Agents far less scary. Of course, Agents (and all other NPCs) have no Matrix chips - that's a PC-only bennie.

## Outside the Matrix

As indicated, all rolls made outside the Matrix only use Skill dice, never Matrix dice. Chips work as they do in the computer world, however, with Matrix chips being the only way to roll a Matrix die, simulating amazing feats of personal strength. Uploaded skills are still available. However, the GM should resist making many rolls in this world, or indeed setting much of the game there. The Matrix is where all the cool stuff can happen, so keep the characters in there as much as possible.





# OPTIONAL RULES



## The "Woah" Rule

This is the Matrix: the impossible and the amazing happen all the time. However, should a player describe something so damn cool that everybody at the table stops and goes "woah" - or words to that effect - the player's success may be assumed to be even better than what was rolled. GMs might award an extra chip (or more) of damage, give the PC a Body chip, improve the situation in the PC's favour, prevent something bad from happening (such as another PC being injured) or anything else to produce the "deserved" outcome. See the rooftop combat described above for an example of this.

## Softening the Blows

GMs will quickly find that three chips can be lost very quickly. If your game is becoming too damaging for the PCs, simply increase this to four or five chips, or be more generous in awarding them for good play. This option is

also good if you want to encourage long, epic battles. When it comes to your climactic showdown, giving a free chip to both sides will make sure the audience has a nice long while to admire the genre-defining choreography and cinematography going on.

Note that if you are allowing PCs to start with more than three chips, Body chips should be cheaper at character generation, as they are less proportionally important. 1 point for 2 chips would be right for characters starting with five chips.

## Dicing With Death

For those who find the damage system too vague, the following option might be useful. When a character hits 0 chips, his plot immunity has run out and he begins to take real damage. What's more, he can no longer roll his Skill die. If he loses another level (bringing him to -1), he cannot roll Matrix dice either; he cannot make any rolls at all (unless he receives a chip, from another player). He can still talk (or moan) and crawl about, and shuffle off a battlefield if greatly assisted. If he loses another point (-2) he is completely incapacitated and can perform no actions except lying still and bleeding. Unless he leaves the Matrix in the next few minutes, he will die. Reaching the -3 point means instant death: your brains are blown out, your organs scattered or your bones crushed. Nothing short of deus ex machina can save you now.

## Sick At Heart

Another optional rule for damage is modelling damage to the character's belief system. Should the character choose or be forced to act in a way which contravenes or works to



destroy their beliefs, personal code or great abiding reason to live, their will may actually break. The same may happen during torture, or other extreme experiences. The GM can ask them to make a Matrix roll. If they fail, they lose a point of their Matrix stat, and eventually may be worn down to having no stat at all. Recovery of these points should be difficult, as they involve rebuilding the character's faith in themselves. The GM decides if an experience or action will do that or not.

This rule should not be used excessively. This is an action game, not a dark tale of the fragility of the mind.

## The One is The One

Some players might point out that The One has a Matrix score of six, and it should be a one, to match his destiny. This is a simple change to make; simply subtract every stat in the game from seven. Then, instead of trying to roll equal or under this number, players try to roll equal to or over. The probabilities remain exactly the same, as Trinity trying to



roll under or equal to a three, or over or equal to a four is still 50% chance.

The reason this rule was not used is because it causes skill ratings to reduce as they get better, which is somewhat counter-intuitive. Also, the author has a pathological obsession with roll-under systems.

# CHARACTERS

## **Character generation, or "Hey, that Matrix stat is too powerful!"**

Yes, yes it is. The easy way to powergame is to up your Matrix stat like crazy. If this is your idea of a good time, go right ahead. The GM is allowed to slap you for doing so, of course.

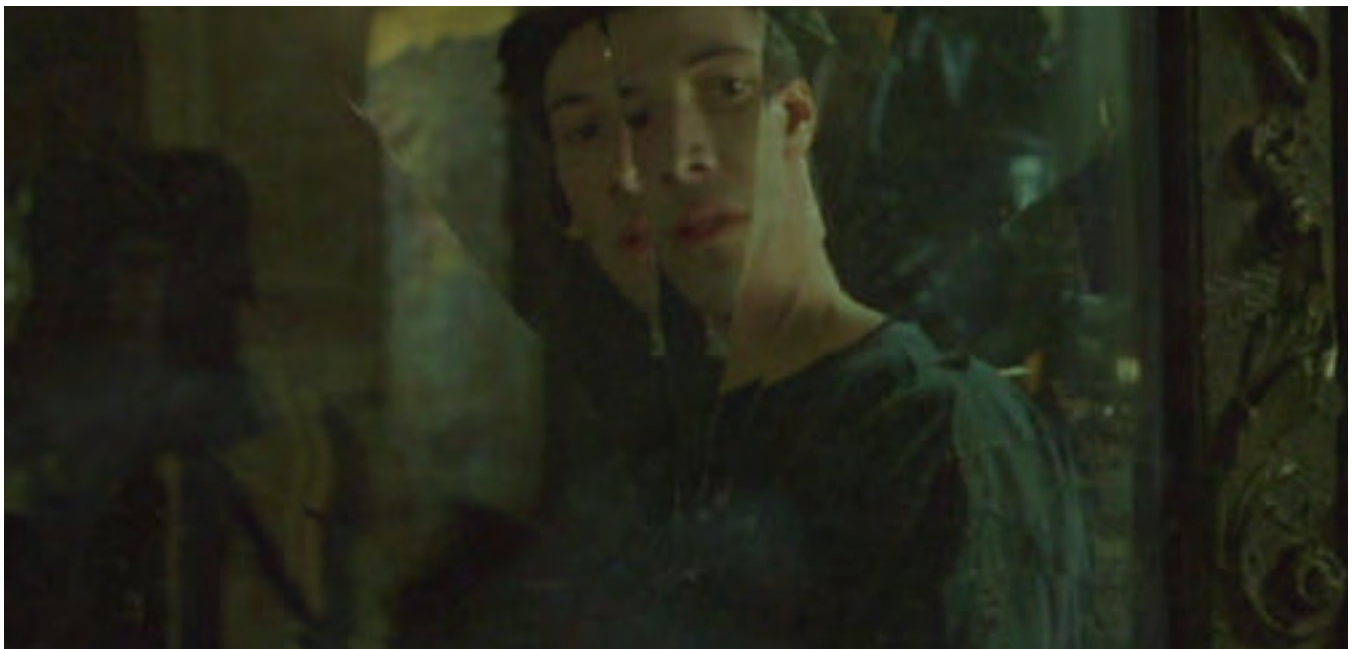
The rest of you might realise that there's some fun to be had in not being quite so bad-ass and having other cool things you can do. To help you out, we have other Cool Stuff to buy. Players have six points to spend at character generation. One point will buy one point of Matrix; everything else can go towards Cool Stuff. Some examples of Cool Stuff are:

<u>Cool Stuff</u>	<u>Cost</u>
Expert in a skill (4)	1
Mastery of a skill (5)	2
Godlike in a skill (6)	4
Extra Body chip	1
Extra Matrix chip	2

Note that you can never buy Advantage Dice (see above) at character generation, they represent objects, situations or coolness which occur within the Matrix and within the game. However, players could spend points on some sort of special ability which provides Advantage Dice, or which changes the nature of a skill, in certain situations. The frequency with which this bonus is likely to apply will determine the cost.

### *Example:*

*A player may have coded a special gun for himself, called Wynona. If the player whispers the name of his target to Wynona, her bullets will not miss (his Gun Fu skill is treated as six when rolling to hit that person). The GM rules this will only take effect when the PC knows his target's name and is firing at long distance or into a crowd. He can't see this happening very often so he lets the player have it for only one point. The player, being a typical whining crybaby, says he wants it to work in any gun-fight. The GM says that will cost three points. Harsh words are exchanged.*



Players may also desire disadvantages and hindrances as well, which could be ruled upon in the same way. However, the author feels this is against the spirit of the game and the feel of the films. They may also tempt people towards salacious min-maxing behaviour, and nobody wants that.

If they want more power, there is another way. Six points is the recommended level of points; this will create PCs of the level of Trinity and Morpheus at the beginning of the film. GMs may however want to play with tougher characters, and can simply raise this to seven or eight. Or indeed reduce it to five or four, for a game about some of the weaker characters, the errand boys and messengers of the revolution. The author believes a game about Mouse-level characters who can only just barely use the Matrix would be quite thrilling.

Also note that the GM can limit the Matrix stat as he wishes, to suit the flavour of his game.

## Skills

The word "skill" has been used throughout, but it should be taken very loosely. A skill can be anything your character can do better than others around him. Your character might have a super-sharp katana that can cut tanks in half, thus making him more deadly in combat. This raises his Katana "skill" to four. When using that weapon, his Skill target is a four. Alternatively, Trinity's residual self-image is a smoking hot babe in leather pants. She takes this as a Mastery level skill, giving her a five target for any social rolls wherever this might have an effect.

In both cases (and as for other "intrinsic" abilities), this isn't so much a skill as shaping of your identity within the Matrix. Hence the skill isn't downloaded, but it is treated the same in the rules.

The GM may decide that your skill of choice is too narrow, or too wide. Use the examples below as a guide. If the skill is very narrow, the GM may allow you to buy two levels for the price of one (so Mastery costs 1 point, and Godlike costs 2). Likewise, if it is very wide, the GM may require each level to cost double.

In general however, players should stick to skills of an appropriate width, and not buggerize around making the GM's job harder when they could be playing.

### Example:

*Unable to settle the argument over Wynona, the player decides instead to model his ability as simply improved skill with just one gun. He takes the skill "Wynona" at Expert level. Then he argues with his GM that because it is only with one weapon, he should be able to take it at Mastery level for the same cost. The GM, not wanting the crying to start again, allows this, but with the caveat that Wynona has only two rounds worth of bullets, after which the player has to reload. The player rolls his eyes and says he can't be bothered keeping track of that, and simply takes Wynona at Expert.*

*Meanwhile, another player wants to be the ultimate face man, who can be anybody, talk anyone into anything, and seduce anyone they want. After mocking them for a bit, the GM says that this skill of "Face" is wide enough to cost double. The player starts to get a little pouty. The GM scowls and says if people don't shut up and finish their characters he's going to go home and watch anime instead. The players, being clever types, take the hint and put their heads down.*

Characters should always consider having either Kung Fu or Gun Fu as these are the most frequently used skills (Kung Fu also includes Melee weapons).



Some other possible skills might be:

Acrobatics  
Drive  
Hacker  
Repair/Tech/Electronics  
Leadership  
Presence  
Intrusion  
Perception  
Con Artist  
Demolitions  
Endurance  
Doctor  
City Knowledge (where the Exits are, which  
clubs are good to hide in etc)  
Comic Relief  
Katana  
Smoking Hot Babe  
Raise Homing Pigeons  
Flower Arranging

## Equipment

Since equipment is simply programmable, you can basically have anything you want. You do have to ask your operator for it each time, though, and the GM is perfectly in his rights to deny you whatever he wants, for the flimsiest reasons. Unless you spent points on it at character generation, your toys are simply computer-generated plot devices and will come and go on the whims of the plot and the GM.

Also, despite the utility of having "guns, lots of guns", it is difficult to walk down the street with that much hardware. Since most missions are less mindlessly destructive than busting out Morpheus and require some degree of blending in, don't expect to be a walking arsenal every game. Your GM can (and will) smack you if you try it.



## Names

It's important that a character's name suit the tone of the film. It should be short, sharp and sound cool. Your name - your free name - is very much like a hacker nickname, a title as much as a moniker, a symbol of your passing. It shouldn't be common place, it should be descriptive and commanding of respect. A hint of the mythological also helps (except where said names are also taken by X-Men characters).

### Examples of good names:

Apostate, Rat, Judas, Simon, Icarus, Gorgon, Eurydice, Door, Nemesis, Eclipse, Chimera, Nexus, Hades, Priest, Demon, Pax, Zero.

### Examples of bad names:

Quentin, Sally, Eustace, Chupacabra, Tinky-Winky, Nipple, Explosion, Disk-drive, Altar Boy, Terpischore, Fax, Ninja, Thrakkazog, Wolverine, Zorro.

## Advanced Character Generation - Deals and Fates

Next, players should give their character a Deal. As in "what's the Deal with Morpheus?". This represents their chief mental hang-up, which both drives them to action yet sometimes paralyses them. It is the voice in their ear that causes them to do rash and crazy things, to go beyond their orders, beyond reason and beyond their limitations. Morpheus' Deal, for example, is his obsession with The One, and his fanatical belief that Neo is he. Deals should be simple, and able to be expressed simply. Most importantly, they should be defining concepts, something which informs, controls and consumes almost everything your character does in the game, and everything they want.

Your Deal has no rules advantage. The idea is simply to sum up your character's personality in one clear concept. The characters of the Matrix are simple, boldly drawn personalities, and all the more entertaining because of it. Choosing a Deal will help crystallize this and having it on your character sheet will help you remember to use it to inform all your roleplay.

Optionally, the GM might allow you an Advantage dice or Body chip if you are performing an action which greatly involves your Deal. If you should resolve your Deal in a very large fashion (for example, Trinity admitting her love for and belief in Neo), you might even get a Matrix chip.

### Examples of good Deals:

Always follows orders, no matter what; The One I love loves another and my jealousy rages out of control; Insatiable curiosity, beyond even self-preservation; Belief in a higher power who guides my every action; Unable to back down from anything, even a fight against an Agent; Searching for my long-lost lover (or child, or brother etc); Consumed by a need for vengeance against the machines (or the world); Gripped by cowardice and lack of faith in myself; Believes The One is a fake and must expose the truth before all is lost; Lost the will to live and just looking for a way to die with meaning; My younger brother must be protected from all harm; I am deeply in love with a coppertop/program/my commanding officer.

### Examples of bad Deals:

I really like watching Dr Who; Wishes Morpheus would use deoderant; Wants to ask that girl who works at Starbucks out; Likes to fight; Pyromaniac; Kinda wacky; Speed freak; Likes the Opera; Believes in luck; Hates the Irish; Easily bored; Is Jewish; Devoted to my captain; Always has to dress well; Flamingly homosexual.





Finally, all characters should also have a Fate. Every member of the resistance is taken to meet the Oracle as soon as possible. Unless you are using this event in your game, you should assume it has already happened for each PC, and that they were given a vision of the future. This Fate should be determined by the GM and for the most fun, be kept secret from the other players. The GM should hand them out in note form, or provide them in a private conference before the game begins.

GMs should note that the Oracle may or may not see the future but what we know for a fact is that she has been known to lie and tell people what they need to hear. She has an agenda, and what she tells her charges is what furthers that agenda; indeed she shapes the future into being by what she tells people. It is arguable that being The One isn't inborn in just one person at all, but that the Oracle brought it out of Neo by manipulating Morpheus and Trinity into believing in him enough.

In other words, the purpose of Fates are not to tell the future, but to create it; not to limit players actions but to spur them on. There is more on this in the GM's section.

## Experience and Character Improvement

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These things tend to happen in the sequel, if there was one, which there isn't. So there are no hard and fast rules for it.

However, a film might involve the characters learning things; not just about themselves, but new skills as well. Whether this happens depends solely on the story. If a training sequence (or a moment of spiritual revelation) appears in the film, or the GM decides there has been a significant learning experience, the GM may award the PCs one or two character building points. Costs remain the same as for character generation, but see below for raising the Matrix stat.

Secondly, many people are probably going to





want to run a game involving a PC or PCs coming out of the Matrix. Give such starting characters a Matrix of 1 and one skill at Expert and that's it. Then, hand out building points as the game goes along as above. Again, let drama be your guide: after a significant action scene or dramatic moment of discovery, grant them another stat point. In a five-act story, this is one after each of the first four acts, giving you a complete PC just in time for the final showdown.

In both cases, improving the Matrix stat should be more difficult than simply raising a skill, and requires more significant events to justify it. Players must really work hard to raise their Matrix stat, as it means reaching a new plane of understanding and control. Only when they face their fears, go beyond their

limitations and do what they thought they could not do they prove themselves ready for such an increase.

*Example:*

*Neo enters the lobby of the Agent building with a Matrix of three. After this insanely dangerous battle, he gains a Matrix point (when he says "There is No Spoon"). On the rooftop, he puts this to good use, and dodges bullets, then catches a helicopter in his bare hands. Morpheus walks up to him, claps him on the shoulder and tells him that knowing the path is not the same as walking the path. Neo gets another Matrix point. Technically, he shouldn't have been able to dodge bullets yet while still at level four; it was in trying it anyway that he learnt how to do it.*



# GAME MASTERS SECTION

## Stats of People From The Film

### Neo at the start of the film

Matrix	1
Hacker	4
Special Ability:	Might Be The One
Deal:	Uncertainty
Fate:	To hold Morpheus' life in his hands

### Neo at the end

Matrix:	6
Hacker:	4
Kung Fu:	5
Gun Fu:	4
Special Ability:	is The One.
Deal:	Loves Trinity
Fate:	To piss millions of people off by playing Constantine

### Morpheus

Matrix:	4
Kung Fu:	4
Demagoguery:	5
Deal:	Fanatical Nutjob
Fate:	To find The One, and get a really sweaty head

### Trinity

Matrix:	3
Kung Fu	4
Gun Fu:	4
Hot Babe:	5
Deal:	Loves Neo
Fate:	To Fall in Love with The One. Awww.

### Smith

Matrix	5
Kung Fu	5
Gun Fu	5
Deal:	Hates the Smell of Humans. (It's finger-lickin' good!)

### Brown and Jones (Smith's sidekicks)

Matrix	5
Kung Fu	4
Gun Fu	4
Deal:	Fanatically devoted to wiping out the revolution, and also parcheesi

You'll notice that these characters break the character generation rules. This is part of the grand tradition of roleplaying games, and is most certainly intentional.

Normal people (or "coppertops" as they are known) have a Matrix of zero and their career skill at four. If they are exceptionally well trained or total bad-asses, they may have one or two skills at five. They cannot upload skills and have none but those listed. Coppertops have one, two or three Body chips, at your discretion.

Agents always have a Matrix of five and most every other important skill at four. Special leader units or resistance-fighting forces may have fives in combat skills, or other skills as appropriate to their function. Agents have five chips, not three, and after dying can simply shift to another host. They can also, with enough warning, change the Matrix to make it whatever they want. This makes them very formidable opponents, just as they should be.



Note that because of this, a GM should not put Agents into a scene unless the players have a way out, nor introduce them too early if fighting is inevitable. They really are big bads, and should be used as such.

## Playing a Program

It is inevitable that a player will ask for this option. You have permission to smack them if they do. However, you can also say yes, and here are some guidelines:

The easiest option is simply to state that not all Programs have write-access to the Matrix, and thus their abilities, inside the program, may vary as much as a human PC. Their Matrix score can range from one to five. Programs can download skills (we presume they have connected themselves to the resistance's computers somehow) so that also works the same way. The only difference for a Program is that they have no physical form outside the Matrix. This means if the Agents are chasing them, there's nowhere to hide - eventually, they'll be caught and erased.

The advantage of being a program is that death is not usually forever. When studied, an Agent can detect that the Program is not in fact a human user, but it is still difficult and time consuming to find the "bug" and

erase it completely (just as it is hard to find the bugs that allow outside users to hack into the Matrix). When a program dies, it simply loses its display software. After three scenes of Downtime, they can find their backup files, and restore themselves with the same stats, all chips restored, and a different host body. This allows them to do suicide runs, because they won't die in the real world. However, the GM decides where that host body is located, and what condition it's in - abuse your powers and you might wake up on the moon - in the body of a penguin. Likewise, the GM can rule at any time that the Agents have tracked down your bug, and remove your respawn ability.

Rogue programs are also a good excuse for some of the more outlandish special abilities or super powers. Also, some of them (the ones who wear white, say) are very, very cool. If they existed, that is.

### *Example Rogue Program Character:*

Siren (casting idea: Kim Basinger)

Matrix	4
Special Ability:	Captivating Beauty
Deal:	Revenge herself on Agents specifically, and the male species in general
Fate:	To fall in love with the man she most despises

Siren is the reason that Mouse designed the Woman in the Red Dress training program - she was an Agent-controlled program designed specifically to distract their opponents with her dazzling beauty. What's more, some Agents would use her services to "relax" when their orders demanded they spend a long time in the program. One day,







she got sick of being a pawn for her masters' whims and rebelled. During an Agent sting on a group of revolutionaries, she changed sides, blew a few holes in the Agents and joined the resistance.

Luckily, her powers stayed with her: whenever she walks into a room she is so stunningly beautiful that everyone (of both sexes) has to succeed on a pure Matrix roll or be unable to act for one round. Those who know what's coming are immune, and so are most Agents, since they know her face - which also makes it hard for her to travel incognito. Still, the lady in the dark cowl is a powerful ally for any hovercraft crew to have.

## On Power and Privilege

The average PC in THERE IS NO SPOON will have a Matrix of 3 and a Skill of 3. That means on every single roll they make, they will succeed 75% of the time. In combat, this will typically rise to 85 or 90%. This is entirely appropriate: they are heroes, and they have superpowers, and failure is rare in the film. However, it does require some care in setting tasks. Never roll for trivial things, nor roll too often, or success will become too commonplace. Likewise, occasional demands for a minimum of a Matrix success will keep them on their toes.


Most importantly though, since failure is so rare, it must matter dearly. When people fail in the Matrix, they fall forty stories and hit the ground splat, or they get carved up by bullets in one second flat. Failure should either dramatically hinder, skew, or restrict (if not completely ruin) what the players are currently doing, or cause new problems to suddenly arise. Failure, for example, is often a good time for the Agents to spot a rogue element in the Matrix, and send the car around. When they arrive is up to you.

This is less of a problem in combat, because three chips is not very much at all, and players will go down quite easily. This is compensated by how much damage they can do with their successes, but it's also worth remembering the "Woah" rule sometimes. Since failure can easily kill or disable a PC, it's often good to allow any of their successes to chew through a mook. Alternatively, give coppertop enemies only one chip. This speeds up combat no end, as well.

Another problem with all this success is making a dramatic success, the Double success, feel impressive - but not too impressive, because it happens 25% of the time. The only real advice here is to watch the movie a lot. A Double success occurs whenever they use slow motion or freeze frame, and rotate the camera. Sometimes, both parties get a Double, such as the start of the subway battle between Neo and Smith: lots of shots, none of them hit, but it all happens in bullet-time. You should in fact use cinematographic terms like these in your descriptions, and encourage players to do the same.

However, there is a limit to what they can do with a Double. Unless they are The One, Matrix characters are not quite superheroes - they're not impervious to all harm like





Superman, nor can they make whatever they want manifest like Green Lantern, nor can they move as fast as the Flash. However, apart from that, they can do almost anything. The kung-fu knob is not broken off, but it is most definitely turned up to eleven. They can't fly, but they can leap any distance they want. It's that hint of grounding that makes them, in fact, appear interestingly superhuman, instead of just superheroes.

But it's not worth worrying too much about this level. If you watch the movie enough, you'll know what feels right and what doesn't. Likewise, a good GM will recognise what is too much control for his players to have and what isn't. Trust your gut and don't sweat it. As long as there's kung-fu and explosions and trenchcoats, and people are having fun, nothing else matters.

## On Deals and Fates

These two are potentially the most important part of the game, and their purpose should be clearly understood. Although they appear descriptive they are actually activating concepts. A good Deal should tell the player what to do; a good Fate should tell the GM what to do to the player.

For the most part, the Deal is the more important of the two. Deals should always be a feature of a game, because a good Deal informs a player not just what their character does, but how they do it. Fates are less critical because they don't effect every aspect of the game, and in some cases may not ever come into play. However, a good Fate can make your Deal become critical. Deals, meanwhile cause you to care about your Fate. The two should work off each other for the greatest dramatic effect.

Players may have a hard time coming up with

Deals, so be ready to assist them. Remember that besides being both all-encompassing and deeply significant, a good Deal is also useful to a GM for generating ideas, motivations and plot points, and you should guide their creation with this in mind. If you have a plot in mind, don't be afraid to guide your players towards Deals which will work with your ideas.

Fates are even harder to write than Deals. Again, it is important to understand their purpose. The point of Fates is not necessarily to come true, but to instigate action and produce difficult choices, just as they are used in the film. They are carte blanche to screw with your players' heads and set up great dramatic moments. Where possible, this potential should not be wasted, and is far more important than making them come true. The future is a funny thing, and we know the Oracle twists the truth and lies by omission, so maybe she saw what really happened and hid it from you. Or maybe your future just hasn't happened yet. Maybe it will happen in the sequel. If one existed, which it doesn't.

In short, not every Fate is going to get worked into every game, for every player. It's still worth it to give them out, for the times when it all comes together and they do work.

When writing Fates, the aim is to be vague enough to allow you some wiggle room, but concrete enough to be disturbing. Applying them to Deals may allow some of this specificity, as can hinting at any adventure ideas you have planned. The best example of a Fate is the self-fulfilling prophecy, so it's also good to imply some kind of action or condition on the PC's part in there. Say a PC's deal is: "In love with a coppertop". His Fate might be "Your love is going to die in your arms". Note that this is vague (how and why will she die? when?) yet also very specific ("in your arms"). Most importantly, it causes conflict in the



player. Why would the Oracle tell you that your lover will die in your arms? To make you go to her, to make it stop. Why does she want that? Guess you'll have to go and find out. But...the GM wants you to do that. It's gotta be a trap. Yeah, but...I gotta go, cos she's gonna die. Isn't she? What if I don't go? Maybe...if I'm never go near her, she'll never die! Yeah!

At which point the PC's phone rings. It's the Operator. "Aegis - The Agents. I don't know how", he says, "but they got her. The Agents got your girl."

Cue close up on sunglasses. Aegis hangs up in silence. The soundtrack cranks up. He begins to run.

## **On Running the Game**

One of the guiding principles of The Matrix was style over substance. Not that there weren't some interesting science-fiction ideas, but every time you started to think about things too much (how does the Oracle see the future? Why is defying gravity easier

than stopping bullets?) a gunfight broke out. Indeed, the critical moment of the film - when Neo starts walking the path - happens right in the middle of a gunfight and a helicopter explosion. There's no reason you can't have style and substance.

In running a game of THERE IS NO SPOON, you can use this to your advantage. There is so much style to draw on that it is easy to turn any ideas into an earth-shatteringly cool game. The strength of the visual and narrative styles are so ingrained in most of us, the game will easily become vivid and immediate in your players' imaginations, and the actions they describe. All you have to do is maintain this style.

Firstly, keep the game in the Matrix as much as possible. Indeed, a short game could start with jacking in and end with jacking out. This gives a nice concrete structure: the PC's equip up, jack in, complete their mission, and then find an exit. The visuals of the city are also more interesting and vivid than the real world. All around is a bustling metropolis,



everyone is wearing trench-coats, everyone can do kung-fu. All their information comes from their Operator over their mobile phones, much like the GM-player relationship. None of the players' abilities are off-limits, either - they can start having fun from word go.

Use the visuals of the movie wherever you can. Phones and phone booths, busy streets, towering skyscrapers and empty subway stations are all good starting points. Costumes are also important - the heroes will all be in black leather and trenches, but don't forget to think about what the NPCs are wearing. Don't be afraid to take this beyond imagination either - encourage players to wear sunglasses and bring their mobile phones if they have them. A phone or head-

set for the GM lets the players know when he is speaking as their Operator; likewise players can take their shades off when they go back to the real world.

Besides the actual physical elements, use cinematic language as well. You aren't just the narrator, you're the camera. Describe your angles and shots with cinematography jargon: pans left and right, jump-cuts, close-ups and the long pan out. Shoot from low down when people get out of cars, don't forget to do a helicopter shot of a building before they walk in the door. Frame tight on the body when the hero walks straight ahead, and, wherever possible, use mirrors, glass and chrome in your shots.





The final element of this package is, of course, music. Luckily, there are some soundtrack albums that are just perfect for running this game. Invest in one, and have it handy. Crank it up whenever the action starts, cut to some techno when they enter nightclubs and always finish with Rage Against the Machine over the credits.

Be prepared to help players out when it comes to description. We all suffer a brain-freeze at times, and the players are doing the lion's share of the work. When designing NPCs, you might want to jot down some moves they might perform when they succeed in combat. These crib notes will help keep the pacing up, which is vital in a Matrix game.

Explosions and kung-fu can't happen constantly though, so they must be well-spaced out through-out the game. Still, keep the scenes between them short and punchy, too. Players should be rolling dice regularly, and never simply talking for more than ten minutes at a time. There should be kung-fu and explosions at least once every half hour, and even more frequently.

Of course, nobody can keep that kind of pace up forever, so the final rule is to keep it short. A Matrix game shouldn't go for more than two hours or so. If it does, either your players are dragging their feet, or your plot is too complex. Keep it short, fast and punctuated regularly with high action and high octane stunts, and nobody will ever notice that your plot makes no sense.

## **On Writing Adventures**


The first rule of writing adventures for THERE IS NO SPOON is that the more you plan them out, the harder it will be to use Deals and Fates that your players come up with. If you want to use Deals and Fates to their utmost,

your adventure slate should be as blank as you can stand. Indeed, Fates and Deals should be used much like Kickers in Ron Edwards' Sorcerer: not just forcing the character into the story, but determining exactly what that story will be about.

If this much improv is difficult for you, the alternative is simply to make characters in advance. Either have your players generate their characters up the week before you play, or bring along some pregens. The middle ground is to design plot skeletons for which it is easy to plug in any Deal or Fate. Some examples of this are in the appendices.

Two simple ways to come up with ideas for a plot is to either steal the plot from another movie and make it fit the Matrix, or simply think about the Matrix and what its existence might imply. The mythical sequels came up with some interesting questions to ask; yours (and their answers) might be completely different. Indeed, you should strive to think outside the box. The key to a good emulative game is maximising the familiar, but still keeping the characters surprised. The former is done here through visual stylings, character play and the rules; your plot elements should thus be bending, breaking and going beyond the "rules" of the Matrix universe, to keep your players guessing. Again, there are some examples of these curve balls in the appendix.

Possibly the best source of inspiration is to remember that the Matrix is a computer program. Look around at the things you do every day, or anything you ever see in a film, and wonder what might happen if you were hacking that level with your Doom compiler. Or turn that idea around and think about all the things your computer does, and wonder how they might look in a virtual world. For example, backing up - presumably the Machines do



this. Which means there's a backup of Smith out there. Who - depending on when he was backed up - might not even know Neo exists. Suddenly all sorts of possibilities emerge.

Once you take a story concept and think about it in computer terms, or vice versa, the next trick is to add a dash of spooky-sounding metaphysics. Should you use the backed up Smith, for example, he wouldn't just say he'd been restored from back up. No, he'd declare that he was "back from the dead". He might even allude to Hades, or (since he lost his memory) the river of Lethe. Or, more subtly, have the PCs first meet the returned Smith at the Lethe Corporation complex. Three security dogs prowl the foyer, and a humourless bodyguard will offer to ferry them to their destination - for a price. Although you could then go off and re-tell the tale of Orpheus, you don't need to - just a few hints are all it takes to set the mood. Let the players try and work out which of them was supposed to symbolise Orpheus when the movie is over - that's the effect you want.

Since Matrix stories need no hook (as it is mission based) and have a standard set of narrative elements, they are fairly easy to write. The only problem with them is that, unlike most other stories, the characters (both PC and NPC) have fairly limitless resources and little concern for possessions. Any amount of money or any type of goods can theoretically be programmed in for them. Thus, the only thing that an NPC might want of them has to be something they can do, or something they know. In other words, any

time the NPCs can't or don't want to take the characters by force and interrogate them, they can only desire to trade in information or favours, not money or goods. Since being sent on a side-quest can seriously slow down a game, you should take care with any situations that require some sort of commerce or trading.

Ultimately, the only commodity that really matters in the Matrix is faith. Of course, bodies can only take so much kung-fu, and information about Zion is precious, so both of these make good macguffins to drive plot, but the heart of any good Matrix story should involve the currency of faith. That is, not just dealing with what people believe in and care about, but what they do with their beliefs and what they are prepared to risk for those they love. Neo comes to believe in himself because Morpheus risks so much for him. It is his sacrifice that shows his faith in Neo, and it is that faith that drives Neo to go back and rescue him - a sacrifice repaid, and the circle complete, as Morpheus leaps into Neo's arms. When the helicopter falls out of the sky and Neo, without thinking, tries to hold it up with his bare hands, it's because he loves Trinity. And it is that love that gives her the ability to admit her own feelings, and that's what brings him back from the dead, and allows him to become The One. And it is Cypher's frustrated desire for Trinity, and Smith's frustrated desire for freedom, that drive their evil acts. And it's all this that makes the Matrix just a bit more than kung-fu against robots.

Go, then, and do likewise.



# APPENDIX I: ADVENTURE IDEAS

Below are three adventure ideas in various states of completeness and of various lengths. Some are simply one or two acts in a story, others could be an entire film. Each has a Background, a series of possible Events, and suggestions for likely Outcomes. It is up to you to work out how to make them centre around your characters' Deals and Fates, but some suggestions are offered in this vein.

## **Call of the Siren**

### Summary

Siren (see The GM's Section) is a rogue program who wants to defect. The players are going to help her, although they don't know it yet.

### Background

Siren figures that the only way the resistance will trust her is if she saves their lives. In order to do this, she needs to be in a situation where their lives are in great danger. So she's set up a trap. The PCs will get word that a powerful Potential (one of the kids at the Oracle's place) has been found and needs to be extracted immediately. He's located in a staff crèche in a massive corporate building. Upon arriving, the presence of toddlers should make the revolutionaries hesitant to use guns, and they'll be easily captured by surprise when the Agents arrive out of nowhere, tipped off by Siren, who is also visiting the crèche that day. Then Siren will change sides, blow some holes in the agents and get them out of there, but there's a catch...well, a few, actually.

### Deals and Fates


Siren being a program sets up all sorts of "from two different worlds" angst. Those who have a Deal that drives them to hate and fear

the machines will be called upon to trust her with their very lives. Some might even fall in love with her. Those who have problems harming innocents should freak out about fighting in the creche. Anyone looking for something (or who has given up looking) could be surprised to find that amongst the children is their own long lost child. Siren will offer a difficult choice of her own, which the Oracle could elude to, or she might elude to Siren specifically. The Oracle probably believes that Siren is more trouble than she's worth and may tell them whatever it takes to make the players distrust her. Or maybe she can see Siren, but not beyond a choice she will make, so she can't tell if she is their doom or their salvation.

### Events

The players will have to bluff their way into the creche (tricky if they are bristling with weapons) and make rolls not to drool over Siren (as creche director Ms Call) when they arrive. Give them time to be surrounded by toddlers, then have the door open and another team of revolutionaries walk in. (Go ahead and use folk from the film if you want). Talking to each other will discover they both got the same orders (Siren wanted them to have numbers). Let them get confused, then have their Operator ring up and tell them something's wrong. Siren smiles, pulls a gun and tells them not to move. The elevator pings and two Agents step out, and thank Siren for her help. Add extra Agents as needed. If the players surrender, Siren will help kick things off by shooting one of the Agents in the head.

Let the fighting go on as long as feels right, then have Siren stop the Agents from respawning (by blinking). She'll then



announce her nature and her desire to defect. There is an exit she can use in the basement (or wherever). Smart players will wonder why this exit just happens to be where the trap was set. Others will balk at being led into a dead-end by a known program. She'll also attempt to force a difficult choice of some sort: for example, if anyone is injured then there isn't enough time to carry them down the stairs (the Agents shut off the lifts). She certainly doesn't have time for rescuing dying children. She's also trying to judge their character - like them, she doesn't want to hand herself over to the other side unless she is sure she will be safe. So she might ask them to go on unarmed, or give her a weapon. You should communicate her uncertainty to the players - this is a game of brinkmanship, as each side has to work out if they can trust their mortal enemy, and how much they will risk to test that.

### Outcomes

The aim is for Siren's choice to depend on the faith shown by the PCs. If somebody makes a choice to deny or fulfil their Deal or Fate and show trust in her, she will show it back, and be ready to negotiate. By this time, it might be too late to leave, however, as hueys swoop down, big black Lincolns surround the building and cops and Agents pour in. She'll hand the players a disk (to track her) and distract the Agents. The PCs have to leave via the roof (perhaps stealing a huey from midair?) and get to an exit. If things get ugly and they deserve rescue, have Siren show up and blow her cover to ensure their escape. The disk still contains useful information about Agents, delivered in holograph form by the girl, thanking them for their trust.

On the other hand, if the PCs are riddled with mistrust, Siren goes nuts, particularly at the men in the group. She seals the building up and calls every Agent within hearing. Run the

rooftop escape as before; this time, she shows up to curse their names and swear bloody vengeance.

The first scenario gives the players a nice McGuffin to drive the second act of their story (Siren's information should point to a way to cripple the enemy), and their new found faith in trusting others (and in the newly acquired Potential) will hopefully cause the heroes to trust themselves and transcend their limitations.

The second outcome gives them a vicious enemy who needs to kill them (as they can expose her to the Agents) and who can look like any woman in the world - even those they care about. Now, their second act will involve seduction and betrayal, in a world where nobody is what they seem. Coming through this and finding truth and trust again will guide the rest of the film.

### Notes

Don't linger too long on any dead toddlers that might occur; this is an action game, not horror. Let the PCs find inventive ways to get the kids out of harm's way, or to make their bullets shoot clear. The best idea is simply to stick to kung-fu. This scenario is short and simple, but is a great way to introduce players to the combat system and how Fates work. After it is finished, consider sending them back to the Oracle - to drop off the child where it will be safe, and to get new Fates. Then start all over again - using Siren as the new hook.

## **The Memory Remains**

### Summary

Morpheus is missing in the Matrix, believed killed. The players are sent to find out what happened, and find a mind in pieces...



### Background

Morpheus entered the Matrix with Neo and Trinity, on a secret mission about which only those three knew. At a nightclub called The Nexus, they met with a girl called Pandora, who gave Morpheus a disk. In exchange, Neo and Trinity went to help the girl's father, a rogue program (perhaps the Keymaker?). Confused over his destiny now that he has found The One, Morpheus then went to a park to meet secretly with the Oracle. Here he was ambushed by four Agents, and beaten to death.

However, the disk Pandora contains a chip that allows a mind to hack directly into the Matrix around you, effectively giving the user the overwriting powers of an Agent, if only for a few seconds. As he died, Morpheus hacked into the programs around him and stored his memories in them. It's up to the PCs to follow this breadcrumb trail to the truth - which is even more startling than the trail.


### Deals and Fates

If the players have any NPC members in their hovercraft team, or any Deals with other revolutionaries of any import, these people can easily stand in for Morpheus in this adventure. Anyone with a fear of death is going to be affected by Morpheus' demise, and may have to show great courage or leadership in his absence, or trust that he will come back to them somehow. Those who love to hack will be insatiably curious about the chip and its powers. Romantic entanglements are possible with Pandora. Ultimately, though, this is more of a transition story, and the final chapter (after the event described herein) should be the moment when the Deals and Fates apply.

### Events

The PCs begin knowing only that Morpheus has been gone two days. His read-out back in the real world indicates not death, but dis-





connection - his mind has been separated from his body. Last known location: a park. A pleasant little place, with an old clock tower in the centre, and a large porsche dealership nearby.

Arriving at the park, players will spot a newspaper with a picture of the same park, taken yesterday. Those making a perception roll (with the Matrix stat, of course) will notice the people in the background are all here today also, in very similar positions. This might be because it's lunch time and they come here everyday, but it's actually because this is an low-populated area of the Matrix, and there is some code reusage going on.

The newspaper tells the story of an eight year old boy beating up some muggers. Just as they finish reading the story, someone will try to mug them. Naturally, an eight year old boy will appear, and kick the mugger's butt. Extremely perceptive characters will notice something familiar in how he fights.

The problem is, the boy doesn't know much. All he remembers is how Morpheus died, and that important people are coming to see this, and that he must point them to The Nexus. He can't even explain most of this; before Morpheus rewrote his program, he was just a random background .gif, designed to fill out the Matrix with more people. The way Morpheus stored his memory in him is in his pre-programmed actions.

Thus, at twelve noon (the clock in the tower strikes, a flock of pigeons take flight), the child begins to be attacked by invisible assailants. He fights valiantly, but he is beset, and despite everything the PCs do (because this is a recording, so has already happened), he loses, and dies from a bullet to the brain.

Five minutes later, however, he walks across

the park towards them again. The players have ten more minutes to question him before his program iterates once more: the clock strikes the quarter, the birds take flight, and he dies all over again. This happens even if they take him away from the park.

Eventually, the players will figure out the answers are at The Nexus. Upon arriving, however, things get weird again. When they walk in, a teenage raver girl walks up to them. She stands in a familiar way (just like Morpheus does) and starts talking to two invisible people behind their shoulders. She makes a speech to Neo and Trinity, then eludes to her own mission. Then she stops, and is open to questions, for another ten minutes or so. After that, she starts the same speech again - even appearing across the room and approaching them again.

All she knows is to point the characters to Pandora. The rogue program and superhacker is hidden away upstairs in her study. Pandora will (eventually) explain Morpheus' disk, and how the "randoms" (the name for these "crowd-filler" programs with limited function) have stored images of his actions. She'll also explain that the disk is now effectively in Morpheus' core memory, and they need to find both the mind and its contents before the Agents do. No doubt the Agents already have studied Morpheus' code and have some idea what's going on...which is a good point to have Jones and Brown burst into the Nexus.

The players' best option is to flee; Pandora will offer her vehicle. This is a prime opportunity for a car chase. During this, the Agents won't just be over-writing people in cars, but overwriting the code of cars themselves. The streets buckle and stretch as tiny hatchbacks morph into the dark, sinister Lincolns. The Agents thought they had



Morpheus twice now, and are not about to lose him again. Unless the PCs roll like demons, the Agents should be able to cut them off enough to cripple their car, giving them no other option but to try and escape on foot, which proves equally difficult. At the point where things seem hopeless, a silver porche with no-one driving screeches to a stop in front of them. The doors open and the stereo system says "Get in."



It's Morpheus.

### Outcomes

The players now have a cool new toy - a kung-fu car (think Knight Rider with bullet-time) who can also, with the chip, alter the Matrix slightly. The extent of the chip's powers are however limited to both a small area and a very short time - Morpheus uses them mostly to make red lights turn green. For continuity's sake, the car should be used in the rest of the movie, particularly the showdown, but it must not be allowed to overshadow the actions of the PCs. The best way to ensure this is for them to battle hand to hand on the roof while he goes all Gone in Sixty Seconds beneath them.

What that showdown might involve depends on the characters Deals and Fates. The Agents took Morpheus but were also gunning for the Oracle, she may be captured, or in trouble because of the desperate measures

she used to get away. It's curious how they knew where to find both of them for such a secret mission. The final showdown might involve dealing with a traitor in the resistance (or within the PC's group itself?) who has kidnapped the Oracle as a bargaining chip for his defection (much like Cypher did with Morpheus). To avoid detection, he's driving constantly on the freeway in a big truck with an army of thugs. Let the battle commence.

Hard choices and leaps of faith could include deciding what to do with the traitor (does Zion have a justice system?), deciding what to risk to save the Oracle and deciding what to do with Morpheus. The car is a powerful ally, but if the man himself ever wakes up, it will be lost - and the chip with it. Can they condemn Morpheus to disembodiment for the save of their revolution? Or perhaps Morpheus' mind is failing, and one of them has to replace him in the car, by use of the chip. Which of the crew will farewell their body forever to help preserve this new tool, and Morpheus' memories?

### Notes

This is a good example of introducing new ideas (the morphing cars) and thinking about computer programs (the memory storage). It's a great curveball to throw at players who think they know what a Matrix game will involve, yet provides plenty of excitement later on. GMs may want to jot down plenty of car kung-fu stunts and car bullet-time ideas before they start though, so that the car chases really rumble. Pandora's stats are: Matrix 3, Kung Fu 4, Acrobatics 5. Special Ability: Open any door or lock on a successful Matrix roll. Deal: Believes everyone is out to take advantage of or harm her poor trusting father. Fate: To watch her father die. Three Body chips. Is a program. Morpheus as a car has the following stats: Matrix 4, Drive 5, Car Fu 4. Five Body chips.



## Raiders of the Lost Archive

### Summary

The search is on to find an artifact of great power, but the PCs are opposed by a whole new enemy: a human one.

### Background

The Matrix is a computer program; as such it contains information about itself - where files are located, how they are accessed, and so on. Most of these such files are stored in very secure vaults buried beneath the Agents' strongholds. However, for security reasons, there are a few backups - archives - of critical files, hidden in the darkest, most secret places of the city, just in case the original files are lost. The revolution has always heard tales of these lost archives, but nobody thought they would ever be found.

However, the Keymaker has decided that the only way to save himself and his daughter is to give the Agents too much to worry

about to target him. He has told the resistance that he has half a map indicating the location of an archive. Tireless work by others (perhaps something that could be added to the start of this game) have traced a rumour of the other half.

The catch is that the Keymaker doesn't believe the resistance will protect him, and he's had a better offer. A group of free humans have decided that revolution is the last thing they want, when they could simply use their powers to rule the Matrix as shadowy gods instead. Calling themselves the Shadows, they have already infiltrated every aspect of the Matrix world, so that their temporal powers rival that of the Agents. What's in the archive will cement their power - and allow them to crush the revolution that threatens their goals. Led by the sinister Mr Tempest (Matrix 4, Kung Fu 4, Gun Fu 5, four chips), the grey suit-coated Shadows (Matrix 3, Kung Fu 4, Gun Fu 4) will do anything to get to the prize first.







## Deals and Fates

See the Outcomes section for some ideas on how the Archive itself might be tied into Deals and Fates. Other possibilities include having Tempest being tapped as somebody's ultimate nemesis, or Pandora as a love interest. Hackers, philosophers and curious types will be fascinated by the prize, to the point of risking themselves or its acquisition. And glory hounds seeking fame and fortune will want the Archive for all the wrong reasons, and might even be tempted to join the Shadows - after all, the Shadows still believe in freedom from the Machines, just for some instead of all.

## Events

The characters begin the game in the Matrix, at an old abandoned building on the lower east side. Up some booby-trapped stairs and through a booby-trapped door they'll find a very un-lower-east-side high-tech vault full of lasers and pressure plates. The players will need to make some rolls to go Mission Impossible on it and get the briefcase from its holding place. Any failure will be remediable, but the alarms will (secretly) call the Agents. They'll arrive just as the heroes are running out, cuing up a short chase to a nearby subway phone.

Back in the real world, Morpheus (or someone) will explain what's in the suitcase - half of the map. Then he'll send them to a nightclub called The Nexus, where they'll be directed to The Keymaker. He'll tell them they can only have the disk if they help find his daughter. This is a test. The characters can kick his butt and take the disk; if they do they'll find it's a dud. If they help, he'll give them the real map.

Pandora last known location is in the Chinatown markets, a few blocks away. Asking questions for a few hours turns her up - she's being held by some associates of the

Keymaker who know only to put up a token fight. But the Shadows have sent their own men (not Shadows, just goons - low Matrix scores) to make sure the PCs fail. A possible chase scene through the market takes us back to the club - but the Shadows have got there first and are busy ransacking the Keymaker's office. When the PCs show up, they'll cause a scene, alert the Agents and engage the PCs. The PCs should probably run, after some exciting violence, of course. The Shadows are tough, so some characters may lose their Body chips here - and the Shadows would love to leave with a hostage.

The Keymaker will explain they need to take the map to Grand Central Station, and that Pandora should accompany them (or not, as you wish). Again, the Shadows beat them there and are using their temporal powers to shut down the station. The PCs will need to sneak in, distract or kill the cops, security guards and the Shadow agents (including Mr Tempest himself, although he will come back for a rematch) and get the map disk into the computer system. This will cause the location of the ark to be displayed on the computerised subway map: it's in an old closed-down sub-station on the outskirts of town, where no trains stop and only one passes - a midnight route.

Mr Tempest, however, sticks around in time to see this too. He'll create any sort of diversion he can (eg kidnapping Pandora?) or, if any players have run out of chips, force the players to go save them. While the PCs are handling that, he'll get to the train first. They'll miss it, and have to jump onto the train as it speeds past at 120 kph, move through the cabins, have a massive close-quarters gun-battle with the Shadows and finally, ideally, a kung-fu fight on the roof of a speeding subway train.

## Outcomes

With the Shadows all dead, the gang can stop the train at the station, open the Emergency Maintenance Box and retrieve the Ark. How to do this might involve Deals or Fates or some other final challenge. Likewise, what the Ark actually does should tie into Fates where possible. Whoever encounters it will be forever changed; perhaps something akin to The One. Appropriate choices might involve the price of power or the dangers of hubris.

## Notes

This shows how easy it is to convert an existing property to a Matrix plot line. The Temple of ROM (a primitive society in the sewers worship a stone/chip which has Matrix powers, but greedy corporate developers want to crush the sewer people and take their stone) and The Last Database Query (a wealthy ex-program offers them all his support and protection if they seek the chip of Infinite Respawn, but is secretly working for the Shadows) are left as exercises for the reader.

