

A Wushu Guide to...

The Matrix



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Introduction

I've been running games set in the world of "The Matrix" since shortly after the first movie opened. The setting lends itself well to one-shot, mission-based games, just jack in, kick ass, and run like Hell for an exit! It's popular with new gamers, since they're already familiar with the movie's background and style. My Wushu rules system fits The Matrix like a glove because it's easy to learn, fast to play, and expertly mimics the movie's anime-inspired style.

This role-playing guide explains how the Matrix works (as I see it), gives advice on running Matrix games, and includes the complete Wushu rules system. What it does not contain is information on the "real world." Every Matrix game I've run has opened with the PCs loading up and ended when they hit an exit. The format works great and, quite frankly, there's not much detail on the real world to be found in the movie. (If you do want to run in the real world, I recommend using a more realistic set of rules for that part of your game, maybe Shadowrun or Alternity.)

I suppose I should also state explicitly that this is an unlicensed, unofficial work based on the movie "The Matrix." It is not endorsed by the producers, distributors, or anyone else associated with the movie. It is also not, in any way, a challenge to any of their copyrights or trademarks. I just wanna spread the love, baby.

Finally, be warned that I don't go into ponderous detail on topics that the movie already covers. This guide is meant to fill in the gaps (with my best guesses) and help you run an enjoyable game. If you're one of the handful of Amish people who haven't seen the movie yet, go see it before reading this puppy. It'll make a whole lot more sense that way. Trust me.

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What Is The Matrix?

The Matrix is a communal, interactive simulation based on our world, circa 1999. It runs partially on a machine AI and partially on the cerebral cortexes of the humans connected to it. To those inside, *it is reality*.

In essence, the Matrix is an elaborate diversion. It keeps billions of human minds active and occupied while the machines use them for power, memory, and data processing. Untold generations of human beings have existed this way for over a century. It is their world, the only one they know.

To access the Matrix, a human must be equipped with a cybernetic "plug" which is installed at the base of the skull. Usually, a medical plug is also installed in the right forearm, along with a host of life support plugs all along the body. These implants grow alongside the human's nervous system from infancy and only the machines fully understand their construction. Therefore, humans born in the real world cannot enter the Matrix or use training programs.

Free Minds are humans who were born in a power plant and then liberated from the Matrix. The first few were set free by a man who could remake the Matrix at will; he founded Zion, the last human city, and started the Resistance against the Machines. When he died, the Oracle prophesied his rebirth inside the Matrix, which would herald the end of the war. Hovercraft crews have searched for him ever since.

The Oracle is an enigmatic figure who inhabits the Matrix; anyone who wishes to speak with her must do so in the virtual world. No one knows exactly who she is, or how she knows what she knows. However, her commitment to the Resistance has been proven many times over, and it is traditional for new Free Minds to visit her after they've finished their initial training.

The Resistance hacks into the Matrix by broadcasting a pirate signal into the AI system that regulates it. Inside the Matrix, this system is represented by the ground-based telephone network, also known as "hardlines." When jacked in, the Matrix takes over a human's lower brain functions, including respiration and heart rate. To safely disconnect, one must be at a hardline that has been set up as an exit point. Any other disconnection results in immediate death as the brain stem shuts down.

Time is always against the Resistance. The machines constantly search the Matrix's human minds for certain kinds of thoughts and activities. The complete list of flagged events is unknown, but definitely includes someone exiting the Matrix, someone being told what the Matrix really is, supernatural feats of strength or speed, and real world technology. Let a copperspot see something they shouldn't, and you'll have Agents on your ass before you can say "I need an exit!"

Agents, the infamous "men in black," are the judges, juries, and executioners of the Matrix. They haunt the dreams, and nightmares, of every Free Mind. They are death incarnate to anyone who opposes them. Because they can inhabit the virtual bodies of those still hardwired to the Matrix, all coppertops must be treated as potential threats. (Free Minds cannot be monitored by the AIs or inhabited by Agents because they are not hardwired into the Matrix.)

If you see an Agent, run like your life depends on it. It does.

When necessary, the machines will use the Matrix itself against Free Minds. Usually, this involves subtly editing an area to make it harder to escape. When something is changed in this way, it can cause a "glitch" in the system. Observant Free Minds may notice a deja-vu event, a skip in their perception of time. When this happens, your cover has most likely been blown. Head for an exit.

The Resistance possesses a limited version of the Matrix called "the Construct." This virtual reality tech allows them to use training programs, load up objects like guns and other equipment, and connects Free Minds to the Matrix. Free Minds reflexively create virtual selves called "residual self-images" that look very different from their real world selves. At first, they just look like they did as a coppertop. As time passes, they learn to create more flattering RSIs. Trench coats are popular.

Geographically, the Matrix is one, gigantic city. The downtown district could contain the entire New York metro area. It has its own government, police, freeway system, suburbs, and all the other staples of urban life. And behind the scenes, in dangerous back alleys and high-security military installations, a secret war rages...

Free Your Mind

Character creation is fast and easy. First, come up with an **interesting hook**; all Free Minds are equally skilled at combat and technology, so you'll need something else to make your character unique. Think about who they were inside the Matrix. Yes, many Free Minds were "hackers," but certainly not all of them. For example...

- **The Spook** - Government operatives often find themselves at odds with Agents. When this Israeli spy saw too much, she joined up with a group of "terrorists" and discovered who, or what, really controls the world. Her government contacts and covert ops experience make her a valuable Resistance asset.
- **The Padre** - Religious experiences sometimes give coppers a glimpse of the true nature of "reality." This priest found out on his own what the Matrix really is, and the Agents came for him. Now, he offers spiritual guidance to the crew of a Resistance hovercraft and sends coppers to a better place.
- **The Red Neck** - Maybe he was disconnected by accident, or maybe he saw something he shouldn't have. The John Deer baseball cap and leather work boots reflect his no-nonsense approach to life, and his barroom brawler fighting style catches most opponents off guard.

Or you might want to give your character some **special abilities**. Potentials are people whose brains have evolved unique ways of interacting with the Matrix. Their talents are often described as "magic" or "psychic powers" by other coppers, but they're really more like cheat codes for the virtual universe.

- **The Escapist** - Like a reborn Houdini, this young man has a talent for slipping out of handcuffs, performing death-defying stunts, and disappearing from locked rooms. He even claims to be able to walk through walls. The only catch is that no one can be watching when he pulls off one of his tricks.
- **The Houngan** - The religion commonly known as "voodoo" includes a wide variety of spells, charms, and magic rituals. For this haunted young woman, they actually work! She can communicate with the dead, curse her enemies, and make contact with "gods" who may be the AIs themselves...
- **The Dreamer** - The aborigines of Australia describe a spirit world they call the Dreamtime. For this shaman, it is a unique way of sensing the Matrix. He can move around outside his body, communicate with AIs, and sense when a Search alarm has been tripped or an Agent approaches.

Now that you have a handle on who your Free Mind is, it's time to give them some **Traits**; 2-3 should be enough. They can be anything from skills to simple adjectives (subject to approval from your Operator, of course). If your character is a Potential, one of their Traits must describe their special ability. Through the miracle of training programs, all Resistance operatives are considered to have expert-level Traits in the following areas, so don't even worry about them...

- **Combat** - You can give it whatever name you want, but this Trait includes virtually all forms of combat, from Jujitsu to fencing to heavy weapons.
- **Hacker** - This Trait applies to all forms of software, whether real world or virtual. It includes the ability to create programs, as well as use and break them.
- **Tech** - Building, repairing, and operating all kinds of real world tech. This comes in handy for removing bugs and the like.

The almost spiritual process of accepting the artificial nature of the Matrix, and of learning to bend its rules, is called **Zen**. All Free Minds pursue Zen mastery to one degree or another, but it cannot be learned from a training program. It is not a skill, it is a belief in one's self. There are three levels of Zen mastery...

- **More Human Than Human** - Merely realizing that your residual self-image is not your real body opens up whole new levels of athletic ability. This level of Zen allows Free Minds to outrun coppers, survive deadly falls, and perform feats of incredible (but not superhuman) strength.
- **Jump!** - Defying gravity is the next step along the path of Zen. It allows Free Minds to run up walls, leap incredible distances, and pull off impossible martial arts stunts. This is as far as most Free Minds get.
- **Enlightenment** - This rare level of Zen mastery allows a Free Mind to subtly influence events inside the Matrix. Traffic lights turn green for them, but red for their pursuers. There's always a window or door nearby when they think they're trapped. Sometimes, they can even dodge bullets.

Now, it's time to **rate those Traits**. You have 8 points to spend. Each level of Zen costs two points, though Operators shouldn't allow too many Enlightened characters in a single game. Regular Traits start at level 2 for free, and it costs one point to raise them one level. (ie. A level 3 Trait costs one point, and a level 5 Trait costs three points.) Remember, all Free Minds get Combat, Hacker, and Tech at level 5 for free.

The final touch is describing something that your character is bad at. This **Weakness** gets a rating of 1; it costs you no points, and gains you no points. Phobias and Skills are good options, as are negative aspects of your character's personality.

That's it, you're ready to jack in and kick some ass!

I Know Kung-Fu

The **Wushu** role-playing system is designed to reward players for describing their characters' actions in the most entertaining, cinematic, and creative way they can. This section contains a slimmed-down version of the full Wushu system, which contains rules for magic, guidelines for non-combat actions, three sample settings based on popular movies & TV shows, and a whole heap of helpful examples.

For all the juicy details, click your way over to <http://www.Bayn.org/games>

Core Mechanics

Wushu uses a pool of six-sided dice for its obligatory dice rollin' fun. Players gets one die in their pool just for doing *something*. To get more dice, they have to add details to their descriptions. These "Embellishments" can be anything from additional actions to technical details to dramatic flourishes. As long as they're entertaining, and appropriate to the tone of the game, they're worth an extra die.

For example, a player who says, "I kick the first guy in the face (1) and do a back flip off of him (1), landing behind the second guy with my guns drawn (1) and unload both clips into his back (1)" gets a total of 5 dice: One for doing something, plus the four embellishments he made.

Social actions are handled the same way, only the embellishments need to change. A character trying to blend in at a bar while spying on an Agent might say, "I casually stroll over the bar and order a drink (1), striking up a conversation with the nearest good-lookin' guy (1) while I watch the Agent's reflection in the mirror behind the bar (1)." She gets 4 dice, and that one roll can determine the outcome of the whole scene.

Of course, Operators (and the players) have the right to **veto** any Embellishment for any reason. Usually, this means reigning in players who want to deviate from the desired tone of the game, making things too gritty or cartoonish. Creativity is our friend, but even friends can wear out their welcome. Just make sure everyone agrees on what kind of game they want to play *before* you get started.

Resolution

You've got your dice, and now it's time to let 'em roll! To determine which dice come up successes, you'll need a **Target Number**. Wushu characters have Traits, rated from 1-5, that define what they're good at. Select a Trait that's appropriate to the action. Every die that comes up greater than its rating is a failure. All the others are successes. (If you don't have a relevant Trait, the default rating is 2.)

Every Wushu character should have a **Weakness**: One Trait that represents something they're bad at. This Trait is always rated 1. Any time a character's Weakness is related to a roll, the player *must* use a Target Number of 1. (It's harsh, sure, but that's the fun! It's not like it's a death sentence or anything.)

If no one's **opposing your action**, all you need is one success. If another character *is* opposing you, the character with the most successes wins. (There are a few more wrinkles in combat situations, but we'll get to those in the "Combat" section.) If you're being hindered by some kind of adverse condition, like being **blinded or restrained**, you'll have to use your first success to overcome it, before anything else counts.

The important thing to remember is that Resolution is a **purely mechanical** process. All of your narrative description, every last word of it, belongs in the description segment *before* Resolution. Everything the players described should be considered to have happened, regardless of the successes rolled, or lack thereof. The dice only tell you *how well* things worked, not *if* they worked at all.

Combat

During fight scenes, players have to divide their dice pools into offensive and defensive sets. **Yang Dice** are used to inflict harm upon others. **Yin Dice** are used to avoid getting harmed, whether it's thanks to your ninja-like agility or just because you're tough as nails. This adds a tiny tactical element to the game: Players can choose to play it safe and pick off enemies one at a time (more Yin, less Yang) or throw caution to the wind with a full-frontal assault (more Yang, less Yin). Most of the time, it'll be somewhere in-between.

When a player-character is fighting an Agent or another Free Mind (i.e. someone who's not a Coppertop, see below), each successful Yin die is used to cancel out an enemy's successful Yang die. If any Yang dice get through, the injured character loses a one point of **Chi** per Yang die. If a character goes *below* 0 Chi, they're out of the fight. (Not dead, just out of the fight. Personally, I hate killing off player-characters and classy villains.) All player-characters get **3 Chi points**; the Operator assigns NPCs 1-5 Chi, as they see fit.

PCs **regain Chi** as dramatically appropriate. Usually, that means 1-2 points between scenes. If you want to make certain weapons more dangerous (guns, poison, etc.), require more time and/or medical attention to heal the wounds they inflict. Conversely, damage from stun weapons would go away almost instantly. Handing out poker chips of different colors works great for keeping track of all this.

There are no special rules for different kinds of **weapons or armor** in Wushu. One hit from a fist or sword does the same amount of "damage" as one hit from a gun or grenade. Nor does it matter if you fire one shot or unloaded the whole clip (though the

latter makes a good embellishment). This keeps the focus on the characters, not their gear. It also speeds up play and models the cinematic feel of action movies.

There are also no particular rules for **initiative**. It's really rather irrelevant in Wushu. However, if the order in which things happen ever becomes important, have each player involved roll their default die *before* describing their actions. Play proceeds from the highest success to the lowest, then from the highest failure to the lowest. Ties happen simultaneously. Of course, they don't get to use their default die for the action itself, just whatever extra dice they earn through Embellishments.

Coppertops

Most of the time, the characters that Free Minds encounter in the Matrix are humans who are still hardwired to it, their bodies laying comatose in a power plant. Free Minds often refer to such people as "Coppertops," because the Machines use them like batteries. Because both Agents and Free Minds outclass Coppertops by such a wide margin, fighting them isn't quite the same as fighting each other.

In game terms, groups of Coppertops only exist as an abstract. Players should feel free to describe as many as they want, in whatever locations they want, in order to describe the actions they want. (Operators can do the same, of course.)

Operators should give groups of Coppertops **Threat Levels** based on how challenging they want the fight to be (see below). Every Yang die generated by the PCs reduces the Threat level by 1 point. When the Threat reaches zero, the Coppertops have been defeated. Whether that means they're dead, restrained, or running for their hollow little lives is up to you and your players.

Coppertops don't have Traits, and they don't roll dice. When fighting them, any player who fails to roll at least 1 Yin success **loses 1 point of Chi**. (You can explain it afterwards if you want, but encourage players to work a few hits into their descriptions, just in case they get nailed.) If, for some reason, you *need* to roll dice for a Coppertop, they always get the default Trait rating of 2. What can I say? They suck!

You should **assign Threat levels** based on how long you want a fight to last. Exactly how long it takes for a group of players to mow down a bunch of Coppertops depends on how many players you have, how many dice they usually earn, and their combat-relevant Trait ratings. You may need to experiment a little before you get it pinned down. Generally speaking, each player can be expected to generate about 3 successful Yang dice per "round," so multiply your number of players by 3, and then multiply that by the number of "rounds" you want.

That's all you players need to know! The next sections are for Operators only.

I Need An Exit

The person who runs a Matrix game is called the Operator. This is also the title for a hovercraft crew member who stays in the real world during a mission. She sets up exits, pulls up information, loads training programs, and helps out the Free Minds.

It's the perfect character for game masters. It allows them to answer questions in-character, drop hints with impunity, and just fade into the background when not needed. Besides, it's not like a player would ever want to do it!

The first thing the Operator does is load gear and weapons into the Construct. To avoid the Als' search programs, these need to be either circa 1999 objects or advanced devices built out of circa 1999 parts (like the devices used to extract bugs). The bigger the object, the harder it is to sneak into the Matrix. Anything small enough to carry is probably fine, but heavy weapons are risky and vehicles are just plain out of the question. Players will just have to acquire those on the inside.

Training Programs - Having skills dumped into your brain is an exhausting experience. You just can't do too much of it at once, especially when you're also fighting your way through hordes of SWAT guys and running from Agents. Whenever a player wants to load a new program, roll a die. If it comes up greater than the number of programs they've already loaded that session, everything's fine. They can now act as if they have a level 5 Trait in the new skill, for the rest of the session. Otherwise, the upload fails, they don't get the new skill, and they can't try to load any more until they've rested, preferably in the real world.

Zen - You may have noticed that there aren't any real rules for using the Zen Trait. This is because, in my humble opinion, none are needed. Player characters are already better in combat than coppertops, due to the special rules for fighting them. The other two levels (Jump! and Enlightenment) allow players to work increasingly impossible Embellishments into their actions. Wushu takes care of everything!

Agents - In the movie, Agents are wildly more powerful than most Free Minds. In a role-playing game, that's not so much fun. Give Agents a combat Trait rating of 5, same as Free Minds. Their advantage is their virtual immortality: they should get 5 Chi points, plus they can reload into another host any time they die. If given enough time, and host bodies, there's no reason a lone Agent couldn't wear down any group of Free Minds. The best your players can hope to do is fight them off long enough to escape.

Dodge This

Agents are free-willed, self-aware AIs. They are as capable of thought and emotion as humans are, but possess strength, speed, and stamina far greater than any human's... and greater than most Free Minds'. When necessary, they can also call upon the Machines' vast resources, both inside the Matrix and in the real world. They are smart, determined, and relentless.

Unlike most machines, Agents exist without any of their own hardware. Instead, they "run" on human minds still hardwired to the Matrix. Because of this, every coppershot is a potential Agent. When killed, Agents simply "reload" onto another mind, completely refreshed. This is what makes them truly dangerous.

Agents work on a wide variety of assignments, though most track and kill Resistance operatives. Many work alone, but can team up in small groups for especially complex or challenging missions. They have legitimate, if ambiguous, authority over all government agencies, including the military and the police. They are in constant communication with AIs outside the Matrix; they can order searches, Sentinel strikes, and changes to the Matrix at a moment's notice.

All Agents have the same **expert Traits** as Free Minds (Combat, Hacker, & Tech). In addition, you may give them whatever Traits you'd like for things like intimidating enemies, spotting ambushes, interrogating prisoners, and so forth.

They do not possess **Zen**, but they have the equivalent strength, speed, agility, and endurance. Though they cannot bend gravity, their strength allows them to jump as far as any Free Mind. And their ability to edit the Matrix is even more powerful than Enlightenment. Don't worry about balance; these guys are supposed to be tough!

Most of the time, you'll probably run Agents as faceless "level bosses" to close out your missions. However, Agents are perfectly capable of developing unique personalities. Here are some examples to get you started...

Agent Lee - Lee is more extroverted than most agents. He finds the stimulation-rich environments of the Matrix invigorating and spends an unusual amount of time enjoying human diversions. He loves few things more than the thrill of the chase; the more dangerous the target, the bigger the thrill. He is known among Resistance fighters for carrying an almost ridiculous number of guns. (That's right, this is the Chow Yun-Fat character.) If you find yourself being pursued by agent Lee, you know you've seriously pissed off the wrong AI!

Agent Doe - Decades of hunting and killing humans have left this program with a very human problem: a serious psychological disorder. Specifically, he has become a homicidal sociopath, a serial killer. The AIs are well aware that Doe regularly abducts coppers and tortures them to death. However, his track record as a Resistance-hunter is so impressive that a few mutilated humans are considered a fair price to pay for his services. Any Free Minds who cross agent Doe are likely to be taken alive and tortured, simply for Doe's amusement...

Agent X - This paranoid program sees itself as the custodian of the humans under its jurisdiction, and considers keeping them docile and happy its primary objective. It does not approve of the inhumane tactics employed by many other agents. On occasion, it has even gone so far as to help Free Minds escape from them, though its intent is not so much to help the humans as to discredit and thwart the agents. If the PCs are losing badly to one of the agents described above, X may show up and give them a chance to escape. He also makes an excellent informant, especially if the PCs think he's a coppers. Be sure to play up his ability to mysteriously disappear (by moving out of the host body he was inhabiting while talking to the PCs).

Artificial Intelligence

The AIs who control the Machines and the Matrix are mysterious, alien entities. No human has had direct contact with them, though many suspect that the "spirits" and "gods" contacted by some Potentials are in fact disguised AIs. Despite how it may seem, most AIs do not hate mankind. In fact, the original Matrix was designed to be a human utopia. However, their goals and motives are as unknowable as the Meaning of Life, and they pursue them with calculated efficiency.

Some have theorized that the Oracle who guides the Resistance is a rogue AI. This would certainly explain her nearly omniscient grasp of events inside the Matrix, but it is an unpopular opinion among Free Minds. (A hovercraft crew's plot to prove the Oracle really is an AI might make an interesting adventure...)

There Is No Spoon

Running one-shot games set in the Matrix is a snap! The Resistance runs all kinds of covert ops in the virtual world, pretty much anything criminals or spies might do. Your players are given a mission (retrieval, search & destroy, surveillance), something goes bad, Agents get involved, and then everybody runs for their lives. Woo hoo!

That's the basic format, anyway. What follows is a sketch of my stock Matrix adventure. I've run it dozens of times, and it's always a success. You'll have to fill in the blanks, but all the chunky bits you need (plot, NPCs, etc.) are here.

Background

Ever since the beginning, the Resistance has been baffled by Potentials. No one knows how they do what they do, not even the Machines. One hovercraft captain is convinced that the survival of the human race hinges upon unlocking that secret, not waiting blindly for another savior to come along.

Unfortunately, his superiors don't want to spare the resources for a concerted study of the phenomenon. After years of frustration, he's decided to take matters into his own hands. He and his crew have gone rogue.

They abducted a young boy, already identified as a Potential, and are holding him in a secure location while they run a series of pre-extraction tests. When they're done, they plan to remove the boy from the Matrix and *make* him to become The One.

The whole thing has caused a major crisis among the Resistance's leaders. They're not sure how other Free Minds will react to being sent on a mission against their fellows. So, they send one of their hovercrafts the following mission...

"Agents abducted a Potential, a young boy, from his school playground a few hours ago. They're holding him, for unknown reasons, inside a specially shielded office building. We can't see clearly where the boy is or what they're doing to him, but odds are it'll eventually include killing.

"You are to infiltrate the building, locate the boy, and take him back to the hardline for extraction. This is an extremely dangerous operation, so take out anyone and everyone who stands in the way. Shoot first, and don't ask any questions."

Scene 1 - Lock 'N' Load

Don't forget to role-play through the Construct bit. This is the players' chance to request whatever gear they think their characters should have. If you're at a convention, and the player's don't all know each other, give everyone a chance to introduce themselves and describe their characters' Residual Self-Images.

When everyone's ready, the Operator loads them into the Matrix. They find themselves in the back office of an bankrupt bookstore. All of the equipment they'll need to extract the boy is arranged on the desk. The shelves in the main area are empty and covered with dust. The front windows look out onto a fairly busy street.

The office building is about a block down the street and across a divided highway. There's a broad patio area in front, leading up to a set of large, glass doors. A water fountain dominates the scene, and ramps lead into the underground garage.

The lobby is a wide oval, decorated with a chandelier and some furniture. A directory is displayed on a small podium in the center of the room. Security cameras cover the front doors, the elevators, and the reception desk. A hallway leads to the administrative offices and the loading dock in back.

Someone's cell phone rings as they enter the building. It's the Operator, "Looks like there are two likely candidates. There's a pediatrician's office on the 29th floor, where they could keep a child without suspicion. A company called 'Evolution Software' opened an office on the 26th floor just last week, but there seem to be no employees. It could be a front." Which one actually contains the kid depends on which one they investigate first...

Scene 2 - Ambush

Try to make this the Evolution Software office, but if everyone decides to go to the pediatrician's office first, you can run this scene there just as easily. (See Scene 3 for a description of the pediatrician's office.)

The waiting room is sparsely decorated: a few chairs, some magazines, a motivational poster on the wall, etc. The Glass Man is standing in front of the floor-length windows, completely invisible. The Woman In Red sits behind the reception desk. She flashes the PCs a disarming smile. "Hello! How can I help you, today?" She will, of course, deny any knowledge of a little boy.

Anyone who tries to question or read her for signs of deception must oppose her "I'm Innocent" power. (Embellishments may include her childlike looks and saccharine tone of voice.) If she wins, they're convinced she's perfectly innocent.

When the PCs start getting pushy, or try to force their way into the back office, the Woman in Red grabs a pair of Uzi's from under her desk and sprays down the room! The Glass Man opens fire with his assault rifle at the same time! After a round or two, either of the Rogues may give the PCs a chance to surrender. If the PCs accept, or if the Rogues are defeated, they will be happy to take the PCs to see their Captain...

Scene 3 - Revelations

If you're running this scene in the Evolution Software office, use the lobby description in Scene 2 instead of the one given below.

The PCs walk into a pretty typical doctor's office. There are lots of chairs, plenty of old magazines, and a wall rack full of informational pamphlets. A few, worn toys litter the floor. Bushido is sitting, rather uncomfortably, behind the reception desk. He'll greet the PCs, but insist that the doctor is out of the office today. Of course, if the PCs have already killed the Glass Man and the Woman In Red, he'll probably just skip the pleasantries and go straight to the ass whompin'!

As soon as the action starts, Lil' Buddha blinks in from the back office, where he's been listening/watching, right behind someone with a gun; he tries to field strip the weapon(s) one-handed and blink away. Bushido may also seek out targets with guns, since they won't fire at him.

When the fight's over, Charon bursts into the lobby, puts his hands up, and requests that everyone calm the fuck down for a minute. "Zion has deceived you," he says, "and there is much we need to discuss."

He'll gladly take them in back while he tells them about his convictions and how Zion tricked them with that story about Agents abducting the boy. He says they fully intend to extract the boy from the Matrix, and would even let the PCs do it, if only they could have one more hour to conduct tests *inside* the Matrix. "Potentials evolve inside, and something changes when they're disconnected. This is the only chance I'll get to gather the data that may save us all from extermination."

Scene 4 - Deja-vu

If the PCs don't agree to give Charon his hour, go straight into this scene. Otherwise, let them take a look around the office and relax in the break room for a while. As the hour draws to a close, drop in a deja-vu moment like:

- Charon walks in. The door closes behind him... and closes behind him.
- The microwave counts down 3 seconds... two seconds... two seconds.

You get the idea. If your players know their Matrix, they should say "Oh shit!" in unison! If not, feel free to have an NPC say it for them and explain the deja-vu thing.

Sure enough, a quick call to (or from) the Operator confirms that “something” was changed, and that there’s a SWAT team and a whole mess of cops arriving out front as they speak! All exits have been sealed, save the front doors, and (if they check) the windows are now made of bulletproof glass.

Things get really freeform from here on out, so you’ll have to think on your feet. The PCs have a host of options when it comes to escape routes:

- They can have the boy use his Potential powers to unlock the roof access, and then jump from the roof to the much shorter buildings across the highway.
- They could set an ambush in the office, try to trap or divert the Agents, and sneak the kid out past them.
- They might even try to brute force their way through the lobby, killing dozens upon dozens of mooks while carefully evading the Agents.

In any case, make sure to put plenty of cops in their way, for some nice Coppertop combat, and keep the Agents in reserve until dramatically appropriate!

Scene 5 - The Red Pill

To liberate the boy, someone’s going to have to get him back to the bookstore, disrupt his input-output signal, track his location in the Real World, and make sure he doesn’t go into cardiac arrest. (All of those things make good Embellishments, by the way.)

If the entire group is converging on the bookstore at the same time, it makes a great location for the Final Showdown (tm). Have most of the group hold off the Agents long enough for the others to get the boy disconnected, then have everyone retreat to the bookstore’s hardline.

If you want a little more action after that, have an Agent drive a squad car through the wall of the bookstore right after they get the kid out. The crash destroys the hardline, so everyone has to run to another exit. Plenty of potential there for car chases, chance encounters with groups of coppertop police, and gravity-defying leaps over rooftops!

Non-Player Characters

This is the Rogue hovercraft crew. All but the captain are Potentials. Since they're Free Minds, they all possess the Traits "Combat," "Tech," and "Hacker" at level 5.

The Woman In Red

Traits: I'm Innocent (3) Flirtatious (3) Criminal (4) Zen (2)

This young woman managed to become an accomplished criminal inside the Matrix, due in part to her ability to make people view her as an unthreatening, innocent person... no matter what kind of threatening or suspicious activity she was engaged in. (Very handy for dealing with cops!) Now, she's Charon's covert ops point man.

The Glass Man

Traits: Transparent (4) Ears of the Dog (4) Zen (2)

His power causes light to pass through him and anything he's carrying, making him both blind and invisible. He has trained his hearing to such a level that he can stay quite well aware of his surroundings while blind, and can give himself enough sight to aim his AK47 by making himself partially visible.

Bushido

Traits: Honor Is My Shield (5) Haiku (3) Zen (2)

Guns do not work against Bushido, for they are dishonorable weapons. Any gun fired at him will simply fail to function. Click click. However, he will not use guns himself, nor any other dishonorable tactic (poison, ambush, etc.).

Lil' Buddha

Traits: Blink (5) Enlightened Death Metal (3) Zen (2)

This biker-turned-monk has the power to teleport short distances. He wears a leather jacket with a flaming Buddha on the back, and likes to fight with brass knuckles.

Charon

Traits: Leader (4) Scholar (4) Zen (2)

The Rogues' captain is an introspective man driven to extreme measures by the inability of his superiors to see beyond the tips of their noses, or so he'd say. Your players will have to make up their own minds. He always presents a reasonable, intellectual front, and truly believes that his mission is crucial to humanity's survival.