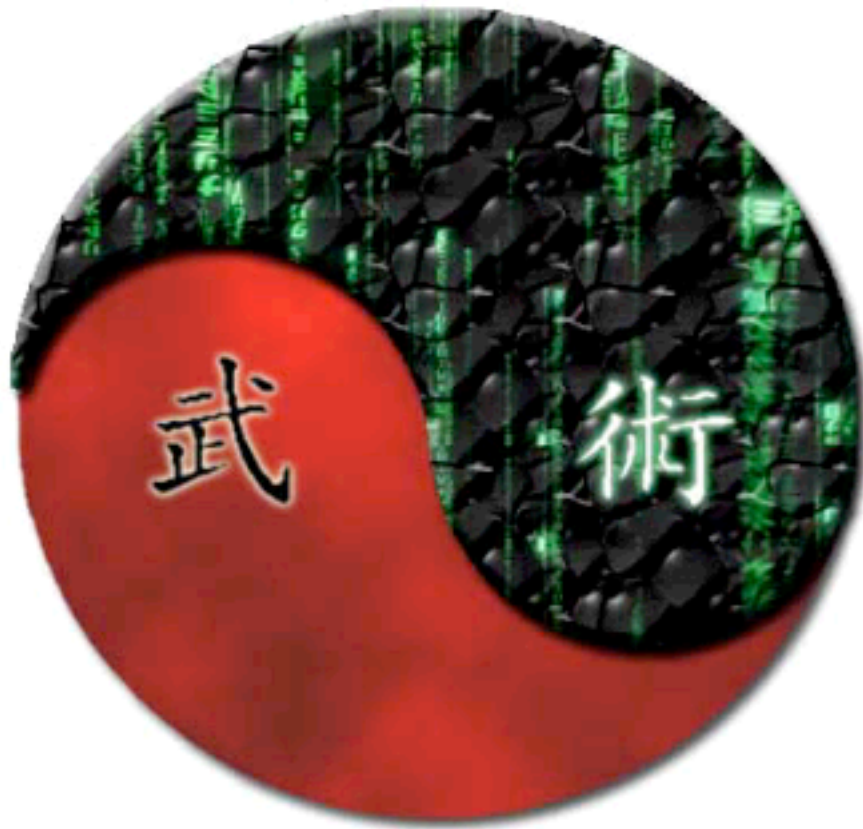


A Wushu Guide to...

Virtual Voodoo



Another Matrix Freebie from Bayn.org

Written by Daniel Bayn

In an age long dead, an exiled industrial program that called itself Ogoun raised an army inside the Matrix. The rebels named themselves the Vodun and boldly declared their independence from the coppertops' puppet government. With the help of two more rebel programs, they even defended that independence, for a short while.

Civil unrest, it appears, is not in the best interest of the system or most of the other exiles who hide within it. The rebellious programs were hacked, and barriers were raised to prevent them from manifesting their avatars in the Matrix. Without their supernatural leaders, the Vodun's organization fell apart and their fledgling nation was re-assimilated.

Now, their ancestors cling to isolated communities on the city's southern edge. Dim memories have transformed their old leaders into gods, and their old cause into a religion. A new exile has emerged to answer their prayers; he can hack the barriers that bind the rebel programs and grant them temporary access to the Matrix... through the bodies of their followers.

Cyber-Mythology

In "The Matrix Reloaded," Larry and Andy Wachowski demonstrated their setting's power to incorporate, and add to, real world mythology. Virtual reality and artificial intelligence is used to explain everything from deja vu to aliens, from angels to werewolves. Oh, and let's not forget superheroes, psychics, and wire-fu. The movie inspired me to try this cybernetic model on another set of myths that are popular with Hollywood: "Voodoo."

In reality, Vodun is a complex synthesis of African, Haitian, and Christian beliefs. Though it starts with the facts, the "voodoo" described herein is extraordinarily simplified. In other words, this is meant as a nifty resource for role-playing in the world of The Matrix, not as an academic primer on Vodun.

(Oh, and one more disclaimer: This is an unlicensed work based on "The Matrix," which is a copyright of Warner Brothers Entertainment.)



The Loa

Here's how voodoo works in the Matrix...

Though humans attach a lot of ritual and magic to it, virtual voodoo is based on the ability of an exile named Legba to allow three programs (called the Loa) to inhabit the virtual bodies of coppertops (just like Agents do). Normally, these three programs are specifically barred from the Matrix, even though two of them still perform functions within it (i.e. they are not exiles). To inspire an appropriate degree of awe, Legba surrounds his hacking with plenty of music, costumes, prayers, and other props.

Once hacked into a human "rider," the Loa can perform hacks of their own. These are usually interpreted by coppertops as supernatural powers, which the Loa use to aid and reward their faithful followers. Legba is paid for his services with the Vodun's servitude; he has plans for the Matrix, and needs human pawns to bring them to fruition....

Legba

This I/O program was written to establish new carrier signals for human infants. When a new program was written to replace him, Legba chose to hide inside the Matrix. He still knows enough to hack new Matrix connections for other AIs, ones that the system won't immediately detect and shut down. The process requires unique access codes that change each time they're used; Legba usually represents these codes with complex symbols called "veves." The Loa's rider dancers around this symbol until they enter an ecstatic, drug-induced trance. Then, the Loa's personality replaces the human's, and subtly alters its appearance.

Legba wants power: the power to ensure his own survival and carve out a personal kingdom inside the Matrix. He appears as an elderly, black man who walks with a cane. He presents himself to his worshippers as a god incarnate, but acts like a harmless old man when interacting with "outsiders." Woe be to the fool who believes this illusion, for Legba is a wrecking ball with that cane of his!

Legba

Cane-Fu (5) Legba can hold his own against Agents.

Wily (5) Legba is a cunning manipulator and con artist.

Hacking (4) Legba can manipulate coppertops' I/O signals.

Ogoun

Originally written to oversee industrial facilities in the real world, the program known as Ogoun developed an anomalous taste for political conquest. Though shrewd and charismatic, his ambition eventually earned him a delete command.

He fled to the Matrix, where he found far more Machiavellian challenges among the exiles. He used his knowledge of metallurgy to make himself immune to blades, bullets, and fire. He raised an army and made himself a god, but once again, he met with defeat. Another exile robbed him of his virtual form, trapping him in a kind of limbo between the machine world and the Matrix.

When hacked in, Ogoun turns his rider's flesh and eyes a rusty red color. He also grants the host body his invulnerability to metal and fire, and gladly cuts down the human's enemies. In return, Legba allows Ogoun to indulge in some political intrigue and enjoy the many pleasures of the Matrix (especially rum, cigars, and women).

Ogoun

Warrior (5) Ogoun fights with a sword or machete.

Metallurgist (5) Ogoun is invulnerable to bullets, blades, and fire.

Leader (4) Ogoun knows how to rally the troops & loves political intrigue.

Damballa

This old and unusual program operates sewer and sanitation systems on the South Side (see below). When it sided with Ogoun during the uprising, it appeared to be out of concern for the health and safety of the Vodun. However, when Ogoun was defeated, Damballa shared his fate. Though it still performs its intended function, it is barred from manifesting a virtual self (traditionally a large, white snake).

When hacked into a rider, Damballa can control the flow of water through the mammoth sewer system that runs beneath the South Side. However, it is usually summoned for its second ability: Damballa can erase disease programs, cure the sick. This is why the Vodun operate their makeshift clinics in the sewers.

When possessed by Damballa, a rider's skin and hair turn stark white, and their eyes are covered by milky cataracts. Their speech is rendered unintelligible by a bug in Damballa's code, so the program has never been a leader of men. However, it *has* won a battle or two by luring enemies into the sewers and drowning them!

Damballa

Healer (5) Though his riders are medics, Damballa heals by "magic."

Water God (5) Damballa has total control of the South Side sewers.

Striking Snake (4) The serpent god is swift and vicious in battle!

Baron Samedhi

When someone dies in the Matrix, their carrier signal is terminated. This leaves a virtual corpse with no human or machine mind linked to it. "Baron" Samedhi is one of the programs that handles these empty shells and simulates their decomposition. However, he can also animate them like puppets on strings. They have no intellect or language, but they can move and kill well enough.

These "zombies" were instrumental in the Vodun's bid for independence, so Baron Samedhi shared Ogoun's power and privilege. Ultimately, he also shared Ogoun's downfall. He still performs his function within the Matrix, but he is barred from manifesting a virtual self inside it. He can only animate and control corpses when hacked into a host body by Legba, and this is almost the only purpose for which he is summoned.

Baron Samedhi's riders take on a pale complexion and become almost skeletally thin. Their eyes turn entirely black, like empty pits. The Baron prefers to wear a tuxedo and top hat, and carry a walking stick, so these items are always present during a summoning. His speech is refined and his mannerisms genteel, but his cold ruthlessness knows no bounds.

Baron Samedhi

Zombie Master (5) Samedhi can do pretty much anything with the dead.

Gentleman (5) The Baron enjoys polite company and conversation.

Duelist (4) A gentleman must be able to defend himself!

The South Side

The modern Vodun inhabit a large, isolated district on the Matrix' southern edge. It is known, rather unimaginatively, as the South Side. The vast majority of this district is dominated by cemeteries where countless generations have buried their dead. It has changed little since its creation.

Most of the Vodun work in these cemeteries as grounds keepers, morticians, or security guards. However, under Legba's direction, they have also established a thriving criminal enterprise. The sprawling cemeteries are used to hide contraband (like weapons, drugs, and stolen goods), and the sewers beneath are used to transport them throughout the city. Legba's witch doctors orchestrate robberies, extortion, and assassinations from the safety of their hounfor, a "haunted" house.

The Cemetery

This isn't your typical, western graveyard; it's more like a necropolis, a city of the dead. Large mausoleums dominate the skyline, many of them built to resemble mansions or cathedrals. Most are 1-2 story structures packed between the narrow, dirt paths that crisscross the cemeteries. It's remarkably easy to run along the "rooftops" of this city, though damaging the crypts is considered a grave offense by the Vodun.

Undeveloped swamplands separate the cemeteries, and this is where the Vodun make their homes. Free Minds might not consider the ramshackle huts particularly imposing, but the residents are armed with enough shotguns and home-made explosives to warrant a significant Threat rating! They don't take kindly to strangers.

Free Minds sometimes use the cemetery as a meeting place, because it's almost completely devoid of coppertops (which means no host bodies for Agents) and there are an unlimited number of escape routes. Exits are usually set up on the edges of the surrounding city; there are no hardlines in the cemetery itself. Lately, however, more people have been visiting the cemetery to partake in all that smuggling.

A visit to the cemetery could be complicated by a number of challenges...

- Let's face it, a group of Free Minds is kind of conspicuous. The Vodun might take offense at their presence, arrive with shotguns and guard dogs, and try to kick the Free Minds' leather-clad asses out. Hopefully, your players will do the genre-appropriate thing and give them a hellacious beating! Then, the rest of the Vodun come looking for revenge, and bring out their big guns (Baron Samedhi and his zombies)!
- A rival drug gang could slip into the cemetery during a meeting, looking for hidden drugs or weapons. Before the Free Minds know it, they're caught in the middle of a full blown turf war, and both sides assume the PCs are with the enemy! No sooner do the scumbags start hittin' the dirt than they lurch back to their feet... as zombies under Baron Samedhi's control!
- Pretty much the same thing would happen if the DEA or ATF raided the cemetery, looking for drugs or weapons, respectively. However, in addition to a legion of zombies, the Free Minds would also have Agents to worry about!

Zombies are little more than meat puppets, but they're almost impossible to terminate. Even headless, they'll keep shamblin' around, so feel free to give them impressive threat ratings! The Vodun have invested a lot of time in a few of their best zombies, wiring blades (or chainsaws!) to their arms and bolting metal plates to their chests for armor. If you want to run these bad boys, run them as Nemeses...

Uber-Zombie - Make Things Die (5) Notice the Living (4) Chi (3)

The Hounfor

The "Spirit House" is the sprawling, vine-choked ruin of a once-stately Victorian mansion. There's no obvious security: no cameras or alarms, doors are unlocked, there are even gaps in some of the walls. Except for all of the worn appearance of its swampy yard, the place looks deserted.

However, the Loa have provided for its security by altering the hounfor's code. Many parts of its architecture are non-Euclidean; operators have great difficulty reading its blueprints. There is only one hardline, and it terminates in a room with no doors. These, however, are not the reasons that coppertops think the place haunted...

- Phantom I/O signals wander through the house at random intervals. Sometimes it's inarticulate whispers, and other times it's a deafening howl or piercing scream. Phantom movements stimulate peripheral vision. Tactile stimuli, like crawling insects or searing burns, occur without visible cause. (Just use this to establish mood.)
- The place is honeycombed with spatial "shortcuts." A free-standing door in the east wing opens to a hallway in the west wing, but only from one direction (from the other side, it's just an empty frame). There's a first floor window that looks out on the third floor. All of the doors to the telephone room open into rooms on different floors. (The only door that opens *into* the room is in the cellar.)
- The center courtyard contains a region of variable time. Anything that enters this region slows to "bullet-time." However, those inside the region perceive themselves as moving normally, and see those outside as moving supernaturally fast. The hounfor's inhabitants will use this phenomenon to escape pursuit by skirting the edge of the courtyard and baiting their enemies into rushing through its center.

Free Minds might encounter the hounfor at the end of either a cemetery or sewer adventure, since it appears to be the closest hardline to both areas. It would be an absolutely nerve-wracking place to try to outrun Agents! Failing that, a houngan witch doctor channeling Ogoun would certainly give them a run for their money.

Free Minds could also come to the hounfor on purpose, seeking the hougans who control the Vodun's criminal empire. Their smuggling, kidnapping, and extortion activities could all run afoul of a hovercraft crew's interests. In this case, you might want to eliminate the hounfor's hardline entirely and force your PCs to escape through the cemetery or sewer, heading for an Exit on the outskirts of the city.

The Sewer

The virtual water reclamation and sewage disposal systems of the Matrix are gigantic, labyrinthine structures that wind over hundreds of miles in every direction. Criminals have used them for covert travel since time imemorable, and Free Minds are no exception. The gargantuan tunnels can easily accommodate small cars, though you will have to navigate the occasional catwalk, rope bridge, and waterfall.

Under Legba's direction, the Vodun have been constructing a network of concealed tunnels, "safe houses," and refueling stations throughout the area. It allows them to move contraband across the cemeteries and into the city with remarkable speed and stealth. Their vehicles of choice are super-charged fan boats: metal rafts that use large, gas-powered fans for propulsion. They're loud, but rarely is anyone around to hear them.

One of the major purification centers is located beneath the Vodun's cemeteries, and Damballa is its operations program. A sub-cult of powerful mambos (female witch doctors) run make-shift clinics in the local tunnels, where they treat injured Vodun soldiers, cure illnesses through Damballa's "magic," and look after the unfortunate victims of the Vodun's genetic isolation (see below).

Like the cemetery, Free Minds often use the sewers as meeting places, and for similar reasons. For a quick rescue game, just have the Vodun take exception to this activity and kidnap an NPC for ransom. Otherwise, Free Minds might need to recover something stolen by the Vodun, try to recruit them as underworld contacts, or stumble across their convenient smuggling network (and steal a fan boat or two for a unique chase sequence!).

For something a little more original, infect one of your PCs with a new "virus" that blocks them from using Exits. Their hovercraft can't leave broadcast depth or use its EMP without killing the trapped character! The Operator has heard of the miraculous healing powers of the mambos, and sends the whole group into the sewers to find them... before sentinels find their hovercraft.

The mambos range in age from apprentices in their teens to the ancient crones who run each clinic. All are competent healers, though woefully inferior to a decent surgeon. Damballa's powers are their saving grace, and they are devoted to him above all other Loa. This causes occasional conflict between the mambos and the hougans, but neither group would let such matters threaten the Vodun as a whole.

Years of isolation have resulted in a startling inbreeding problem within the Vodun population. Hundreds of mutants inhabit the sewers, and all are under the protection of Damballa and the mambos. They help run the clinics and act as sentries, scaring off civil servants and ambushing rival gangs. Most are just mooks, but a few have been gifted with advantages like increased strength, immunity to pain, natural

weaponry, etc. (You know your mutants. Go nuts! Either run them as Nemeses or high-Threat mooks.)

The sewer segways easily into hounfor and/or cemetery adventures, since there are access points from the sewer tunnels into both of the other locations. An old well connects the sewer to the hounfor's cellar. Many of the crypts were built on top of service tunnels, and holes have opened up between them over time. Finally, the Vodun have tunneled into the sewers from several mausoleums in order to facilitate their smuggling.



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