

The main reason I like the Matrix movies is because of how they treat the real world like some glitched out video game. People open doors and it leads to unexpected places (the curtain leading to a brick wall, a door leading to an ocean). This trap of the unintelligible unknown manifests itself prominently in game glitches. For instance, in Pokemon RBY there are tons of glitches like Missingno, and 'what ifs' when you enter into the grass that's beyond the uncrossable boundaries. Missingno is unintelligible, and the mystery is so great because you will never know why it's there, though your mind will naturally race to find theories behind it. What if these concepts were translated into the real world? Take an ordinary, empty and run down apartment in the city- one that many in the audience live in. Are there uncrossable boundaries in it? Imagine finding a way to hack into reality to get to what you want.

This is not just about 'strange stuff happening in reality', which is seen all the time in fantasy and horror movies. Because here, all of reality is treated like a puzzle that the hackers can cleverly manipulate. There's rules and laws, but also unexplainable mysteries that go against one's hypothesized and accepted laws. There is a hidden structure behind all of the happenings. It's not just, for instance, a scary monster distorting reality by popping out of a mirror. When something happens to that mirror, it reflects some disturbance behind the code that created that mirror. Some hidden language that programs reality. And the hackers are there to try to find it.

Another reason I like the Matrix is due to the first scenes in the first Movie, where Mr Anderson is still just a hacker and is led by a strange message. This cyberpunk/hacking mystery is not present in the sequels. The mystery feeling is present in real life internet events, such as Cicada 3301. I wish this mystery could've been extended longer and not been over once Neo got out of the Matrix. All the questions about what the Matrix is and who Mr Anderson is were answered in the middle of the movie, instead of being made ambiguous.

A third reason I like these movies is the focus on a small group of hackers who are trying to uncover something; this is related to the cyberpunk hacking culture that the movie references. Mouse's death stood out to me because it's the youngest member dying- the group's most frightening nightmare is realized. The music and everything else about that scene is tragic and jarring. Running from the Agents instead of fighting them is much better. Once Neo becomes invincible, this is depicted much less, and everyone else around him looks useless.

I will now attempt to tell a story that captures these elements (those listed, among many others) of the Matrix that I enjoy, while having less/no focus on the other aspects of the Matrix.

<<<

This story can be viewed to be set in the Matrix universe, but copyrighted terms from the Matrix are never mentioned, so it's up to the reader to decide if it's a story within the Matrix universe or not.

In this story, there is no Zion. Instead, the focus is on a hacker who notices something wrong with reality. He's unable to cross certain places, and wants answers to strange patterns he's seeing that no one else wants to question. His questioning leads him down a rabbit hole to find other hackers experiencing the same stuff. He has no idea what their real life identities are. He searches on the internet (this is set in the mid 2000s, a little after Google and before Bitcoin) and begins to learn how to manipulate the glitches plaguing him in reality. He feels worried that he's crossing a forbidden line, as

strange entities begin to tell him to stay away, with one smiling while putting its finger on its lips to tell him to 'hush'.

The grey, green and dirty run down NYC apartments are a prominent setting in this story. The bleak, cramped apartment rooms are eerie and since it's dark, the characters aren't sure if they're seeing glitches or not.

Soon, he encounters Morpheus-like people who tell him to follow them, though for some reason the only way he can get to them is by unlocking reality. He slowly meets the other hackers in real life, and it's revealed they're far ahead of him, though he's found things they don't know and can do things that they can't. They tell him that they're trying to escape reality, and have a plan on doing so. But they're being stopped by government agents.

The hackers are now constantly on the run. There are 'safe places' that feel like getting out of the Matrix through phone booths, as if going into the save room in Resident Evil 4. But the hackers are never out of the Matrix. These safe places are still within their reality: a bleak mid-2000s NYC. The hackers, when they're out of the safe places, must run to the next safe place. But they're being barred by things which lead them astray, returning them to the same place, as if in a bad dream.

[Matrix](#) OST: threat mix

There are many parts of the story where the characters believe they've woken up from the simulation, but scream when they realize they're still in it. It's exactly like when people wake up in dreams and are still in them.

The hackers begin to unravel the source code of reality. They begin to hypothesize that the collective simulation is built up from a mix of artificial neural networks and human minds. The NN are constantly adapting, adjusting their weights using data taken from the human minds in a strange feedback loop. The hacking is done more like manipulating glitches in a video game, rather than messing with the low level code, though that does exist. For example, Missingno appears because some small strip of land is programmed to allow stuff to spawn there, but doesn't specify what can spawn there. When the variables where Pokemon names are kept are

<https://www.smogon.com/smog/issue27/glitch>

Though many things (especially the things such as a brick wall appearing in the middle of nowhere, along with other The Shining-like abnormalities) are left ambiguous/unexplained, there ARE definites in the story. This is to keep things moving forward and not forever stagnant, as if nothing was revealed (and thus is meaningless). Mystery is somewhere in between 'no info' and 'all info', since if there's constantly no new info, there's no new theories to be made due to lack of confirmed evidence to support them.

One such definite is a horrific truth about how the simulation works. There is no ambiguity that the simulation exists- this isn't like Bandersnatch, where it's unknown if it's the character hallucination or reality being distorted. No, reality IS a simulation, but whether one is truly understanding it or is being misled and is out of control is ambiguous, and that is horrifying, because the characters don't know if they're playing into the machine's hands or not. Who can be trusted? This is uncertain (though most of the hackers are genuine and trust one another, while the Morpheus-like entities are far less trustworthy and some may be malicious and in disguise).

The horrific truth is how (some of) the glitch tricks are able to get things that are needed to propel the hackers forward in the race to escape the simulation.

The group begins to learn how to fight back by using glitches which get them gear and weapons

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simulated_reality_in_fiction#Literature

There is no world-changing plot twist. The characters are not revealed to be AI or anything, unlike in the vaporwave story I'm working on where all the characters are AI. I don't think the story should reveal what's outside the simulation. It ends with the main character and perhaps one or two others barely escaping, just like in movies such as Alien. The main character learns to control reality by having control of his own mind, like Neo. However unlike Neo, he doesn't become a god. He's not the One (such a thing isn't even mentioned in the story). Instead, he learns a crazy truth about how the system code actually works, and this allows him to escape. This truth is tied into the pattern that he kept on seeing since the start of the story.

There are many red herrings and wrong theories within this short story.

https://www.reddit.com/r/Glitch_in_the_Matrix/top/?t=all

Strange phenomenon:

- Open doors to see something unexpected
- The same motifs that keep appearing- Eg) a horse that keeps appearing in the character's life
- Unintelligible emails that the character receives that others just brush off and ignore
- Objects appearing/disappearing
- Events that the character remembers but others don't
- Characters that behave scarily, like they're smiling "all knowing" but are oblivious to it
- Time that passes wrong
- Elevators on the wrong floor. Ones that went up that seem to go down now, with people who were just there
- People supposedly being in one location now being in another, and genuinely not realizing it
- Deaths that are out of place or 'didn't happen' (don't do this glitch- it's way too obvious and not subtle enough)
- "Falsely remembered" deaths or events
- Strange patterns that keep on re-appearing in things characters read, too often to be coincidence
- Where is the other child?
- 1 hour drive done in a few minutes at late night
- Others contradictions/paradoxes

Anyways, the hackers are able to figure out what causes these glitches, and exploits these causes (see Beyond in the Animatrix) to use these glitches to propel them into the 'forbidden zones' that will let them figure out more about the strange source code language and escape the simulation. They want to escape because they're slowly losing their sanity, or have horrible or just uninteresting lives, and there's a truth out there they need to seek (see the Animatrix for why people want to escape). No one around them believes them.

Some hackers have fears about who the NPCs are, about who they can or can't kill. They go crazy. Some commit suicide.

The main character learns the truth at the end and is set free, but the reader is not told what this truth is.

The hackers are able to exploit time travel to reach places faster, though this is very uninteresting. They figure out partially (full is never given) about why certain motifs/patterns keep on appearing. With this information, they're able to predict how to make crazy things they can't fathom predict (Eg no one knew X would be the thing to be there when they did crossed the barrier into the grass in pokemon using a gameshark). Exploiting glitches is also how things like Missingno can be used to gain lots of items or speed run.

Essentially, the hackers must do things at certain times to get other strange stuff to happen. Much like how talking to the Old Man in a certain procedure allows you to get Missingno. But lots of times, the hackers predict this wrong (often times because they follow the wrong person's theory due to lies/coverups/bad allegiances and influences) after arguing with one another, and this causes some to die.

But exploiting glitches is not easy. It requires them to come face to face with horrific entities. Abnormal things happen, making characters retreat and not want to leave their comfort zone of normality. Their retreat is what makes them die in horrific fashions, often times strange and unknown (Eg "why are they just a pile of goo now?"). The main character learns from their and his own mistakes by the end of the short story.

The hackers all follow the messages (like in 3301 Cicada) and compete with one another to reach the prize, though many form alliances as they realize they have to work together to overcome this. Each one has their own personal belief about what lies at the end, about what the prize is. The main character doesn't really know what he wants the prize for; not because he is zen-like, but because he operates more on the instinctive short term and doesn't think about the big picture and life that much.

There is false info about what safe places are. Characters know they're in a safe place if they feel a sense of calm. But this sense of calm can be forged. Among the group of allied hackers, there are traitors playing for other hacker teams, or just themselves. In the safe place, there are no glitches. The hackers tell the MC that usually in their normal lives, they are already in a safe place. But if they pursue the white rabbit, according to instructions from the messages in the ARG, they will leave the safe place. Once left, they're in danger. Agents will try to silence them and punish them for escaping. They have to hop from one safe place to another to avoid the agents. But once they leave their 'designated one and only original safe place' they were meant to be in, they can never go back and will be hunted forever. This causes many characters to regret and fear their decision to rebel.

Not all the hackers are tech hackers. Some are conspiracy theorists, others just felt like something was wrong. In fact, most of them are not tech hackers. Some are misguided, others are gamblers, others are very religious. It's as assorted as the cast of Gantz. Some are even just old people; one is a single mom with a child. Their affinity at exploiting the glitches varies considerably. A Morpheus-like mentor shows the MC all the ropes that he's missing.

Like Neo, the MC should be very bland to mirror the reader. The MC has very little specific personal history. The name of the MC is also bland, like Steven or David. Though having a white MC be considered normal is controversial, so the MC shouldn't be a 100% self insert and should still have defining characteristics. Maybe make him some tall, skinny-fat Indian hacker.

The hackers theorize that humans are being controlled by 'something' to propagate memes. This is why humans would die for symbols and ideas, such as dying for one's belief. Memes have a mutual relation with human emotions. The glitches in reality are due to handling/storage error of these memes in the simulation. The hackers can alter their emotions to alter what memes are used to represent reality.