



THE MATRIX

Released: 1999 by Warner Brothers

Producer(s): Joel Silver

Screenplay: Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski

Music: Don Davis

Cinematography: Bill Pope

Directed by: Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski

Starring: Keanu Reeves, Laurence Fishburne, Carrie-Anne Moss, Joe Pantoliano, Hugo Weaving, Julian Arahanga

Rated: **R**

If last year's *Dark City* was your cup of tea, then *The Matrix* is a must see. Visually, *The Matrix* had a lot in common with the former film, the major difference being the setting. Where *Dark City* went for a film noir look, *The Matrix* goes for a gritty, "urban grunge" mise en scene. Yet the worlds in which each film is set are eerily similar. Once you get past the carefully constructed façade of routine living, the world in which you find yourself becomes decidedly hostile.

It was a treat for me to find another intelligently written and conceived science fiction film so soon after *Dark City*. Too often, producers and directors let special effects do all the work punching up a dumb premise and dumber writing. *The Matrix* provides a tight story, dialogue that doesn't insult your intelligence, and plenty of time for exposition. The characters do talk a lot—in fact, through about two thirds of the film. But there is enough action interspersed throughout to keep it from becoming tedious. And then, there's the payoff. The last third of the film is a heart-pounding thrill ride that doesn't let up until the epilogue. It's sort of a reward to the viewer for having to sit through all that dialogue.

In describing the special effects that make that thrill ride such a treat, it's becoming harder and harder for reviewers to come up with new adjectives. The state-of-the-art has reached such a level of sophistication it is no longer surprising to us when effects are seamless and awe-inspiring. Nevertheless, *The Matrix* dazzles us with some remarkable and visually stunning scenes. It's evidence of the imagination and craft that the Wachowski brothers put into the film.

Speaking of craft, the cast assembled for *The Matrix* is superb. Laurence Fishburne lends his usual high level of credibility to the role of Morpheus. Carrie-Anne Moss not only looks great in black vinyl, but she combines a high level of acting skill and physicality in her role as the character Trinity. Joe Pantoliano, an alumnus of the Wachowski brothers' film *Bound*, lends his usual top-notch support. In a brilliant turn as bad guy Agent Smith, Aussie actor Hugo Weaving delivers a chilling, ultra-controlled performance. He delivers his lines in a clipped, precise style of diction that made my blood run cold. Much has been said of star Keanu Reeves acting ability, usually in far from laudatory terms. As far as I'm concerned, he's made for roles such as this turn as Neo, the film's heroic computer hacker. He performs with nary a misstep, as he did in *Speed*. Reeves is an action hero who doesn't dominate the scene with sheer muscularity, a la Arnold Schwarzeneger, but looks lithe and quick. His Kung Fu scenes are astonishing to behold.

Aside from a little too neatly resolved ending, *The Matrix* is a stylishly conceived film, abetted by cinematographer Bill Pope's stark lighting. It is a study in closeups, with many scenes so tightly framed around an actor's face they almost cause claustrophobia. You feel edgy, but it is by design. Your suspension of disbelief is properly anesthetized throughout the film's length,

allowing you to immerse yourself in a bizarre, yet plausible world of the future. In my opinion, that's what good science fiction is *supposed* to do, whether on the printed page or in a stylish film like *The Matrix*.