

Film



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The Matrix Resurrections review - drained of life by the Hollywood machine



Not the one ... Keanu Reeves in The Matrix Resurrections. Photograph: AP

Keanu Reeves is back as cyberpunk icon Neo but fans of the original will find this cynical reboot a bitter pill to swallow

Eighteen years after what we thought was the third and final Matrix film, The Matrix Revolutions, Lana Wachowski has directed a fourth: The Matrix Resurrections. But despite some ingenious touches (a very funny name, for example, for a VR coffee shop) the boulder has been rolled back from the tomb to reveal that the franchise's corpse is sadly still in there. This is a heavy-footed reboot which doesn't offer a compelling reason for its existence other than to gouge a fourth income stream from Matrix fans, submissively hooked up for new content, and it doesn't have anything approaching the breathtaking "bullet time" action sequences that made the original film famous.

The first Matrix was a brilliant, prescient sci-fi action thriller that in 1999 presented us with Keanu Reeves as a computer hacker codenamed "Neo", stumbling across the apparent activity of a police state whose workings he scarcely suspected. Charismatic rebel Trinity (Carrie-Anne Moss) brings Neo to the mysterious figure of Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne) who offers our reluctant hero one of the most famous choices in modern cinema: the blue pill or the red pill. The first will allow Neo back into his torpid quasi-contentment, the second will irreversibly reveal to him the truth about all existence. He swallows the red and discovers all our lives exist in a digitally fabricated, illusory world, while our comatose bodies are milked for their energies in giant farms by our machine overlords.

A vivacious and underrated sequel, The Matrix Reloaded, appeared in 2003 and later in the same year The Matrix Revolutions, in which the idea ran definitively out of steam: the awful truth was that the drab "reality" in which the rebels were fighting their tedious intergalactic war against these machines looked like Battlefield Earth, the dire sci-fi movie starring John Travolta.



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But the red pill and the blue pill was an irresistible meme gifted to political discourse at the dawn of the online age. Christopher Nolan's Inception was surely influenced by The Matrix and when Succession's digital media baron Lukas Matsson, played by Alexander Skarsgård, contemptuously compares social media users to Roman slaves, he is echoing ideas touted by the original film. Jeff Orlowski's documentary The Social Dilemma, about social media serfdom, comes with Matrix-esque imagery - and Mark Zuckerberg is attempting to craft a new digital world called Meta. Moreover Lilly Wachowski, the original's co-director, has intriguingly discussed the world of Matrix and its relevance to the dissenting politics of gender.

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