

ANGELA WATERCUTTER

CULTURE 12.22.2021 07:00 AM

The Matrix Resurrections Review: The Wachowskis Were the True Oracles

Directors Lana and Lilly Wachowski warned about the dangers of trusting tech 22 years ago. With the latest sequel, Lana is back with another harbinger.



SCIENCE FICTION, IN its most perfect form, operates like a Möbius strip. It critiques the present by speculating about the future. Then, years later, early adherents look back and analyze its predictions, knowing full well that sci-fi set the blueprint for the world they're living in. Utopic or dystopic, the future always folds back on itself. Rarely, though, do the creators of sci-fi get to revisit the worlds they built after the events they anticipated are set in motion. In this, Lana and Lilly Wachowski are all but singular.

When *The Matrix* came out in 1999, it was a beautifully realized cyberpunk fable. It took the hopeful energy of the early internet years and envisioned what might happen if humanity's reliance on connectivity and thinking machines led to its near-demise. It was a grim prediction, but one in a long line of sci-fi stories that foretold the near-future. *Brave New World* presaged antidepressants. Philip K. Dick warned readers about androids, and now fears of AI revolts creep up when we dream of electric sheep (or at least watch a Boston Dynamics robot dance). Everyone who makes surveillance tech surely knows the year 1984. Would virtual and augmented realities even exist if it weren't for William Gibson's *Neuromancer* and the *USS Enterprise*'s holodecks?

What the Wachowskis predicted in *The Matrix*—a world where artificial intelligence turns people into batteries and runs a simulation to keep them docile—hasn't entirely come to pass, but hints of it are everywhere. No one lives in a simulation, but Silicon Valley can't get enough of the metaverse, which often feels just a few clicks West. Scientists are working on brain-computer interfaces that could, many years from now, send virtual experiences to our brains. AI doesn't generate our reality (probably), but it does live in our cars and TVs and toothbrushes. You don't need a red pill to experience the real world, but the conspiracy-laden, right-wing internet has co-opted "red-pilling" to mean waking up to the many ways liberalism is poisoning America. (Or something.)

Midway through *The Matrix Resurrections*, the new Morpheus attempts to convince Neo that the Matrix, the thing he's been trying to forget, is just a virtual reality. This has always been the head-trip of the *Matrix* movies too. They're where viewers go to escape, but two decades later, their concepts have moved from the screen to meatspace. With *Resurrections*, the years of discourse about the franchise have found their way into its next chapter. Is there anything *new* here? Hmm, dunno. But it's nice to go back down the rabbit hole. Science fiction, in its most perfect form, operates like a Möbius strip.