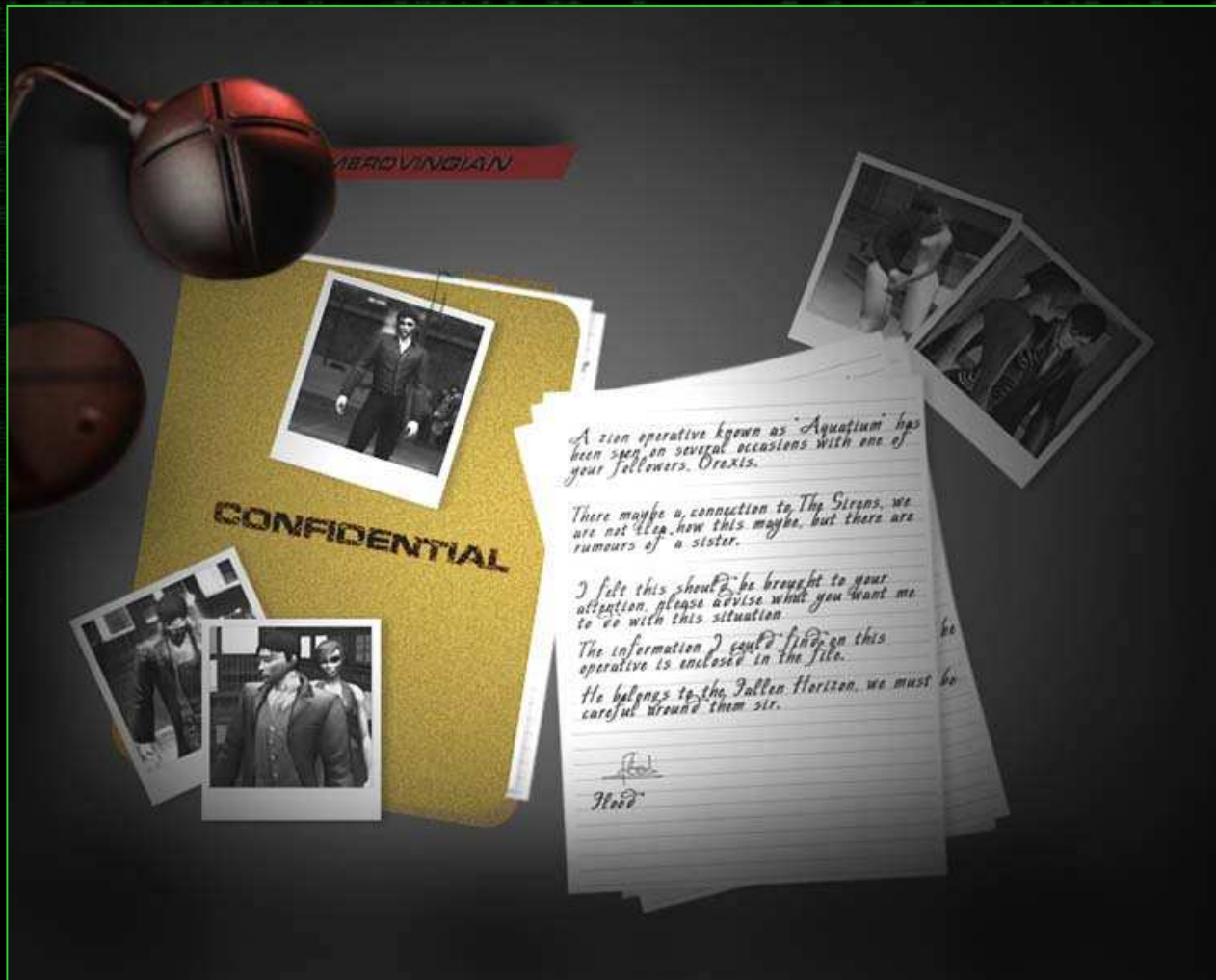


THE MATRIX ONLINE

MxO STORYLINE



The Case File by Aquatium

The following chapter summaries contain information about the storyline of THE MATRIX ONLINE, which was obtained from source code and developer notes. Due to necessary use of the interrogation virus in some subjects, there may be some gaps or inconsistencies in the data.

The information contained within these pages is considered contraband by all Agents. Extreme caution is recommended.

T H E M A T R I X O N L I N E

Chapter 1.1

Introduction to the Matrix under the Truce.

Chapter 1.2

Morpheus began a campaign of protest and sabotage to force the Machines to return Neo's body. Zion declared Morpheus' actions a threat to the Truce. Mysterious, hostile groups began to appear in the simulation: imposter Agents with red eyes, and groups of operatives with masks concealing their faces.

Chapter 1.3

Morpheus was killed by the Assassin, an exiled disposal program in form of a fly-filled overcoat and porcelain mask. Niobe brought her own group of operatives into the Matrix, along with her new right-hand man, Anome, to bring Morpheus' killer to justice.



If You Can't Beat Us by HostileIntention

Chapter 2.1

Niobe found out that it was the Merovingian who hired the Assassin. Operatives began to gather insecticide spray to fight him.

Chapter 2.2

Insecticide-spraying flit gun weapons were assembled to fight the Assassin. He was found to move through phone lines, and reside on a garbage barge. The red-eyed Agents vandalized phone booths. The masked men were lying low.

Chapter 2.3

An exiled program, the General, appeared with his commandos in a helicopter, with offers of help for the various organizations. The Assassin's power grew, but he was tracked down and killed.

Chapter 3.1

Niobe sought revenge against the Merovingian for the death of Morpheus. The Machines were also working against the Merovingian. Mysterious hissing and creaking boxes appeared around the city.

Chapter 3.2

The masked leader, Cryptos, appeared from the hissing boxes, preaching a return to sleep in the Machine pods. The name of the masked group was revealed: the Cypherites. Their agenda was opposed by the other organizations.

Chapter 3.3

The General joined Niobe and Zion against the Merovingian. Cryptos' past as a fervent anti-Machinist, and friend of Morpheus, was revealed.

Chapter 4.1

Zion used kill-codes provided by the General to combat the Merovingian's Exile programs, and searched for Cryptos' base of operations.

Chapter 4.2

The Kid gathered like-minded operatives and left Zion, forming the group "E Pluribus Neo," aka "EPN," to counter the Cypherites. The Merovingian developed weapons to kill the General's commandos.

Chapter 4.3

The General pointed out powerful "cheat codes" to Niobe, carried across the city in a locked case. He had the key, but Anome fumbled it into traffic. Everyone scrambled for the key and the case. Zion obtained them.

Chapter 5.1

Niobe opened the cheat code case, but was betrayed by Anome, who stole the cheat codes, shot Niobe, and used one of the codes to trap her in a pocket construct. Everyone tried to stop Anome. The Merovingian offered to help Zion rescue Niobe: his construct specialist, the Effectuator, was at their disposal.

Chapter 5.2

Zion found and rescued Niobe with the help of the Merovingian and the Effectuator. The Machines and the Merovingian began tracking down and killing Anome's lieutenants, who had become super-powerful by ingesting cheat codes. The General was chased out of the Matrix by the Machines.

Chapter 5.3

Anome formally named his group "Unlimit." Unlimit began attacking city facilities, particularly those belonging to mega-corporation Pendhurst-Amaranth, whose representative Brenda Utley called on Zion for assistance. The Merovingian captured Beirn, an Unlimit lieutenant obsessed with Persephone.

Chapter 6.1

Unlimit kidnapped Brenda Utley, and moved to take over Pendhurst-Amaranth. The Machines learned of Anome's past, and his psychological weakness, from an Unlimit member, Meillak, whose friend Caboclo was tortured and killed by Anome for questioning Unlimit's threats to innocent civilians. The Merovingian used synthesized cheat codes to restore the Twins. E Pluribus Neo rescued Brenda Utley from Unlimit.

Chapter 6.2

Anome was killed by Agents. The Machines asked for access to Zion's mainframe, to help head off security threats. Zion learned that the Machines had a massive Sentinel force ready to strike Zion. The Cypherites offered to infiltrate Zion for the Machines. Zion refused to give the Machines access. The Architect ordered increased surveillance and infiltration of Zion. The Merovingian quashed an Exile rebellion in the slums, and discovered that the General's commandos had been active there.

Chapter 6.3

Subchapter 6.3 of THE MATRIX ONLINE story began with the abduction of the Oracle's young ward, Sati, by the General, an old military program exiled from the Machine mainframes. The General's commando programs deployed across the city, and may have killed Seraph, who was last seen plunging into the river after falling from a commando helicopter as he tried to rescue Sati from their clutches. (As seen in the Subchapter 6.3 Cinematic.)

After several weeks, it became clear that the General had a new type of commando program at his disposal: elite troops equipped with synthetic black bodysuits which allowed them to escape detection by standard code scans.



Graceful Aggression by Vesuveus



Zion by PBlade

Sati's absence soon began to cause problems with weather patterns in the Matrix. Some feared that unless she returned soon, the simulation's weather would spiral out of control.

Cypherites:

The Cypherites, whose goal was to achieve peace for humanity by returning everyone to sleep within the simulation, helped search for Sati across the Matrix archive constructs. They continued working to attempt to get to the bottom of mysterious movements of material out of the caves of Zion, going so far as to hijack a Zion hovercraft. When its captain refused to cooperate, their ruthless control officer, Veil, sent the hovercraft on a collision course for the Zion dock.



Cypherites by Dragonram

The Cypherite leader, Cryptos, sought guidance from the Oracle during this time of uncertainty and received from her a prophesy of widespread death and destruction, to be triggered by a choice the Cypherites had already made. She reminded Cryptos of the placard over her kitchen door: "Temet Nosce": "Know Thyself."

E Pluribus Neo:

The radical Zion offshoot led by Neo's fervent believer, the Kid, worked hard to find and eliminate Cypherite spies within its ranks. These spies were already responsible for the deaths of several EPN hovercraft crews. One spy, at least, was finally unearthed.

EPN also sought to assist in Sati's rescue, deploying their data-mining Code Pulse Devices both to slow down the General's progress, and to learn the location of his base on the Earth's surface. The Machines, who regarded EPN as a dangerous terrorist organization, responded to the deployment of the devices with deadly force, culminating in the termination of a high-ranking EPN officer, Keterina, by means of a kill code.

The Machines:

The Machines worked methodically to locate and disable the network access points used by the General to bring his troops into the Matrix. After the elimination of many commando programs, and after hacking through several layers of the General's network, the Machines succeeded in manufacturing a program that could override the General's systems. They used this virus to locate the General's base on the surface of the Earth, code-named "Stalingrad." The Machines swiftly dispatched a portion of the Sentinel fleet monitoring Zion to eradicate the General's stronghold.

The Merovingian:

The Merovingian took advantage of Seraph's disappearance to make his way to the Oracle, where he reiterated an old demand. At her refusal he swore revenge, and began searching for a termination code capable of wiping out the fortune-teller. After having exhausted his usual contacts within the Matrix, he turned to the General. The stubborn warrior rebuffed his initial overtures, but eventually agreed to a cease-fire while considering the Frenchman's proposal.

Zion:

With the Oracle's powerful guardian, Seraph, out of the picture, Zion scrambled to her defense, fighting off assaults by the General and the Merovingian. In response to determined pursuit by the Zionites, the General tauntingly revealed that he was the Sentinel program who led the deadly Machine assault on the Zion dock at the end of the war.

Chapter 7.1

The weather in the simulation took on a distinctly off-color orange hue, as weather patterns suffer to the continued absence of the Oracle's ward, Sati, kidnapped by the ex-Sentinel leader known as "The General." The General struck an alliance with the leader of the Matrix underworld, the Merovingian, bringing the Frenchman into direct conflict with the Machines, who are working to eradicate the General's commando forces.

Zion pursued the Oracle's guardian, Seraph, dramatically returned (as seen in the chapter 7.1 cinematic) after his disappearance while pursuing Sati's kidnapers, and found that he'd been deleting Machine programs from the minds of humans in the Matrix, including the Cypherite leader, Cryptos, who had secretly been under Machine control.

E Pluribus Neo continued their dogged hunt after signals apparently sent by the ex-Zion captain, Morpheus, and finally came across a clear message from the former leader.

Cypherites:

The Cypherites attempted to understand Seraph's apparent rampage across the city, and to do what they could for his "bluepill" civilian victims. This quest came to an abrupt end when Seraph ambushed the Cypherite leader, Cryptos, performing a strange "exorcism" that left Cryptos extremely disoriented. As his concerned operatives attempted to aid him, Cryptos began uttering strange sounds, which, as his articulation increased, were clearly identified as Machine error codes.

Concluding that Cryptos had been operating under Machine overwriting, removed by Seraph's attack, the Cypherite controller, Veil, ordered Cryptos returned to his ship and put under intensive care, while she assumed interim leadership of the organization.



Agents of the System by JetBlack

The Machines were quick to acknowledge that Cryptos had been operating under their guidance, forming the Cypherites as a means of preventing Zion from awakening more than their Truce-allotted 1% of the Matrix' population to the true nature of the simulation. The Machines attempted to renew the terms of their agreement with Veil, but she put off accepting an accord with the Machines, and relations between the two groups remained uncertain.

E Pluribus Neo:

EPN put great effort into pinpointing the mysterious signals seen intermittently around the city of late, in which a man resembling the famous Zion war leader, Morpheus, appeared to isolated operatives, delivering messages appearing to allude to the One, Neo, being alive, but held captive by the Machines.

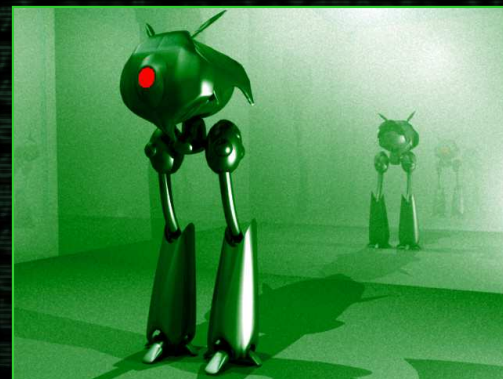
After a difficult process of mining for data concerning a newly detected broadcast of the signal, EPN tracked the signal to the Hypercube monument in Mara, where they were confronted by a clear message from this apparent Morpheus, saying that the Machines had failed, and that Neo was alive, held captive by the Machines, and in need of rescue.

The Machines:

The Machines hacked the General's network in the Matrix, gaining the capability of scanning the exiled program's plans and data. Led by Agent Gray, they captured one of the General's Elite Commandos, gaining enough data on the soldier's stealth routines to enable them to engineer a sensor scan capable of detecting hidden commandos.

Machine pursuit of the General's forces brought them into conflict with the Merovingian, who recently agreed to an alliance with the harassed General. After some frustrating initial engagements, the Machines realized that the Merovingian's opposition may slow down their timetable in eliminating the General.

Meanwhile, the Machines also had to deal with the exposure of their secret control over the Cypherite organization when Seraph found and removed the Machine program that had overwritten Cryptos' mind. Because Seraph's "exorcism" left the Cypherite leader damaged and confused, the Machines attempted to regain control of the Cypherites by striking a deal with Cryptos' second-in-command, Veil, but she remained aloof, showing anger at the long-standing Machine deception.



Machines by LtOBrien

The Merovingian:

The Merovingian came to an agreement with the General under which the Merovingian provided transportation in and out of the Matrix for the General's forces, while the General would help the Merovingian hunt down ingredients necessary for a kill-code capable of terminating the woman who has frustrated so many of his schemes: the Oracle.

The General's commando programs and the Merovingian's operatives worked together to secure a vital ingredient, the last remaining Machine cheat code, held by an unwitting civilian. The General revealed, however, that they would need a special program to put the kill-code together: The Apothecary. Following the General's directions, they tracked down an old code trace of the Apothecary and, from the mouth of an ancient program, learned that the Apothecary was held by the Machines in their mainframes, and could only be retrieved by an old Merovingian employee: the Trainman.

Under growing pressure by the Machines, the Merovingian's operatives located the portal to the Trainman's private construct, hidden in the Abandoned Subway. Leaving an encrypted "note on his doorstep," they eventually coaxed the paranoid Exile out of hiding, and brought him once more into the Merovingian's service.

Zion:

Zion pursued Seraph, apparently deranged after his plunge from a helicopter into the highly polluted Aqueduct while fighting the commandos who had abducted Sati. They found that although Seraph's attacks on operatives and civilians alike appeared indiscriminate, the victims all shared memory loss after an episode of suspicious personality change in their past.

Zion was eventually able to make contact with Seraph, who revealed that he was nearly done with his work, and that the operatives should be careful to guard their minds. Seraph's removal of the Machine program overwriting the mind of the Cypherite leader, Cryptos, finally made it clear that the Oracle's guardian was, thanks to his exposure to the remains of Machine cheat codes in the Aqueduct, able to detect and remove such programs from the minds of humans.

With Zion's assistance, Seraph completed the eradicating of Machine overwriting around the city, and returned to the Oracle's side. The Oracle, however, directed him to rescue Sati from the General, a task that Seraph quickly began, again aided by operatives from Zion.

Chapter 7.2.1-7.2.2

The Machines developed code routines capable of disrupting the communication system used by the General's Elite Commandos, and proved their capability of hacking his holographic broadcasts. The Merovingian, anxious to test the progress of the Oracle kill-code the Apothecary is developing for him, decided to run a field test with a preliminary version of the code. The General picked Agent Pace as the target, and she was struck down by a Merovingian hit squad after being led to a deceptive meeting with Persephone. Meanwhile, Merovingian operatives fought off escalating attacks by Zionite and Machine forces.

Zion, hunting for Sati with Seraph, encountered Morpheus' Nabonidus transmission. They were able to obtain a clear reading of the mysterious signal, which should help them track it in the future. The Oracle provided some of her typically elliptical insights concerning Sati, the General, and the Nabonidus transmissions.

Chapter 7.2.3

Zion worked to track down Sati with Seraph, but came to another dead-end. Because of the many recent attacks in Mara, they began keeping the Oracle under guard at undisclosed locations around the city. They detected a new broadcast from the Morpheus Signal, and came across a broadcast saying that they must fight to rescue Neo, although the broadcast skipped, repeating the same line several times.

The Oracle returned to Mara briefly with Seraph in order to collect something she had left behind. She invited a group of operatives in for cookies, and had a discussion about the meaning of life, among other things, before she left to catch a train.

Persephone and the Apothecary quarreled over the Apothecary's work on the Oracle kill-code, which the Apothecary said needed strengthening with an injection of Beirn's kill-code-laced blood. The Machines located and attacked the Apothecary, but were held off by Merovingian operatives, as well as Beirn and the Apothecary's deadly powers. Later, Cypherites located and attacked the Apothecary as she traveled between train stations in Westview, guarded by Blood-drinkers. She was able to escape at the next station, but chided Malphas for security shortcomings.

Agent Pace conversed with Machine operatives in the Government Building, assuring them that she was ready to return to active duty, and better prepared for the dangers involved. Merovingian operatives spying on this meeting reported the Agent's more businesslike demeanor to the Frenchman, who seemed pleased that the preliminary Oracle kill-code he had tested on her had produced an effect. Some time later, the Merovingian joined a party of his operatives in the Hel Club. Flood showed up at the end of the evening to complain about the mess.

Chapter 7.2.4

The Cypherites fought against EPN Code Pulse deployment attempts that ultimately resulted in a local server crash.

Zion searched for Sati with the Oracle, retrieving a message she had given to one of the General's commandos, and finally finding and rescuing her on a computer disk from a group of decoy clones.

E Pluribus Neo searched the city for data, tracking the Morpheus hovercraft beacon signal broadcasts to their source...inside the Matrix. Because true hovercraft beacons must originate in the Real, this finding gave rise to serious doubts about the broadcasts. The Machines hunted for the Apothecary, but she escaped through the General's network. The Machines struck back by using data found in the battle at the General's base on the Earth's surface to locate his base of operations in the Matrix, in the complex guarded by Project Nine, beneath the Abandoned Subway. Machine operatives raided the base and deleted all hostile programs found. Agent Pace told the Architect that she had an idea of how to approach the suspicious Cypherites.

The Merovingian sacrificed many of the General's commandos to protect the Apothecary from the Machines until she could finish her work on the kill-code to kill the Oracle. The Apothecary, frustrated with the constant attacks, demanded transport out of the Matrix as soon as her work was complete.

The Merovingian gave her a commando guard detail and sent her on her way, supposedly to meet the Trainman, while in fact sending his operatives to kill her, and tipping off the Machines to her location. Her commando guards killed, the Apothecary fled on foot, only to be hunted down and killed by hostile operatives in a dark alley in Westview.

Chapter 7.3.1

Zion tracked the "Morpheus Signal" in the city, and succeeded in locating Morpheus, or his RSI, at any rate, in Sobra Shores. This individual said little, however, and fled, managing to lose his pursuers in the Barrens.



Data Mining by Dragonram

Meanwhile, EPN had been following mysterious posters about a "Pure Mosh" event associated, in the past, with Morpheus, and, after putting together a number of clues, found that someone with the initials "J.M." may be responsible.

The Machines chased the General, who took refuge in the Merovingian's system of backdoor areas. The Merovingian obtained from the General a promise to leave the Matrix under his protection, as well as the transfer program needed to move commandos between the Matrix and the Real.

The Machines, with Cypherite assistance, had nearly hacked into the Merovingian's system with an aim of rooting out the General when the General himself appeared, bolting across the International District with Machines and Cypherites close behind. Despite their efforts, he managed to reach a subway station, and took shelter within the Trainman's access tunnels.

Chapter 7.3.2

Zion pursued readings from Morpheus' RSI signature, finding indications that the mysterious figure may be linked to the General in some way. Eventually they located the simulacrum itself, pondering something in the Barrens. It appeared confused and hesitant when questioned. Suddenly the General himself appeared, cursing it for having failed in the mission for which he had programmed it: to sow dissent between Zion and the Machines. The General ordered the Morpheus simulacrum to deactivate, but it refused, and defended itself when the General tried to deactivate it by force. The General was forced to withdraw, and operatives crowded around the victorious simulacrum of their old leader, who thanked them for believing in him.

The Machines planted viruses in the Trainman's switch hubs, forming a map of his subway network. This enabled them to detect him when he attempted to send the General out of the Matrix on a special train. The General's reluctance to leave allowed time for disguised operatives to reach the pair; the paranoid Trainman, however, sensed that something was amiss, and kicked the General onto the train just before it left the station. He then tried to escape from the Machine operatives, and managed to make it to a white hallway door, but was critically wounded in the process. His status was unknown, so he was listed as "disabled."



Necessity by Phantom Ztryker

The Merovingian sought to get the General out of the Matrix, but the General initially refused to leave, saying he had one thing left to do. After the General's fight with the Morpheus simulacrum, and his nearly disastrous departure from the Matrix, the Merovingian launched the next phase of his plot to kill the Oracle, sending Malphas and operatives to crack a Zion email system, where they then transmitted the kill-code into Zion's network.

Chapter 7.3.3-7.3.4

Zion found and captured the undercover Merovingian crew who had relayed the kill-code to a spy inside Zion --apparently someone on the Oracle's security detail. Questioning of one of the captured crew, McLelland, helped Zion identify the spy himself--an operative named Zaelti--but the kill-code was not found in his possession.

The Machines, concerned about the possible threat posed by the General's simulacrum made in the form of Morpheus, tracked down the simulacrum by following traces of activity at some of Morpheus' old haunts--subversive posters still being put up by a Zion operative named Joshua Maston. The simulacrum shut itself down rather than suffer questioning at the hands of the Machines, but not before hinting that it might be following Morpheus' old agenda of trying to stress the System.

The Machines located the simulacrum again, at Azimuth Twin Monument, and it spoke to the operatives, questioning the Truce, and the validity of the current peace. In response to Agent Gray's demands about its purpose, the simulacrum asked if Machine control of the human race was justifiable. When the Agent insisted that the simulacrum abide by the rules of the System, the simulacrum self-terminated, and left by apparently reconstructing elsewhere. The operatives and Gray decided that the simulacrum did not pose a direct threat, but should be monitored.

E Pluribus Neo found Joshua Maston by examining Maston's tool case, which had been confiscated by officer Vogt and the Machines. Maston said that his purpose in continuing to post Morpheus' subversive posters was to keep Morpheus' cause alive, even though he fully expected to be killed because of his actions. The Kid said that belief is a powerful weapon, but that EPN should not abandon hope of living to see a better tomorrow.

The Cypherite leader, Cryptos, appeared in the city, discussing topics such as choice and freedom with Zionites who found him. After testing himself against aggressive enemy operatives, he departed with several Cypherites, telling them that he could not say what was right or wrong, but that those who claim to know should not be trusted.

The Merovingian had operatives steal information on the Oracle's security detail in order to assist his undercover assassin, planted to kill the Oracle. However, Zion 's discovery of this spy forced him to look to alternative means. The Landlord was approached about a key found buried at the Mahath Tower construction site, and traded it to the Merovingian operatives in exchange for revenge against the local gang, the Dog Pound.

The Merovingian's spies managed to smuggle the Oracle kill-code back out of Zion's organization as the Zionite investigation closed in.

E Pluribus Neo requested that they be allowed to help guard the Oracle alongside Zion. Zion Command was against the idea, but had to back down at the Oracle's insistence that EPN be admitted.

The Machines attempted to gain more information on Zion's mysterious activities in the Real on their own, but came up empty-handed. A frustrated Agent Gray spoke to the Cypherite leaders, Cryptos and Veil, emphasizing that results were needed, and hoping to push Cryptos back into active leadership over the tempestuous Veil.

During an operation to capture and punish a redpill who was causing the deaths of others who had been overwritten, like Cryptos, by the Machines, Cryptos grew impatient with Veil's presumption of control, and reaffirmed his leadership of the organization, as a miffed Veil flounced out.

Agent Pace directed a covert operation in the guise of a party for the Merovingian's officers, designed to send a distinct message to the Frenchman that his activities counter to the System's wishes, such as his support of the General, would not be tolerated.



The Merovingian by Sykin

The Merovingian requested a squad of commandos from the General, who was not entirely happy with the arrangement, but said he'd deliver them as long as they were being used to terminate the Oracle. After a few glitches, the Effectuator transferred the commando squad from the Real into the Matrix.

Once back in the city, they were hunted by Seraph, but disguised and aggressive Merovingian operatives managed to save most of them from danger. One of them was equipped with the kill-code, and the key recovered from Mahath, which allowed him to ambush the Oracle at close range. The Oracle sensed him and cried out just before he fired, and the Kid, on guard duty with other EPN operatives, reacted by jumping in front of the Oracle, taking the bullet meant for her. The terminal code in the shot stunned and weakened him, but the Oracle promised that he would recover. The danger past, she went outside for a long-awaited breath of air, and caught a train back to her home in Mara.

Chapter 7.3.5

Cypherites seeking information on men and material disappearing from Zion used an inside man to hijack the Zionite hovercraft Pelageus; when no new information was forthcoming from the crew, Veil ordered their jacks pulled. A nearby Zionite hovercraft managed to damage the hijacking Cypherite vessel, capturing one of its crew members. When confronted by the Machines, Veil said that they had no right to question her methods.

The Merovingian set up a signal relay to contact the General, now at the head of his Sentinel group in the Real. The Frenchman berated the one-time Sentinel leader for what he called his failure to kill the Oracle with the specially designed kill-code, and then initiated an override program that the Merovingian's technicians had inserted into the General and his commando programs when they transferred them out of the Matrix. The Merovingian gleefully contemplated the possible uses to which he could put his new Sentinel squadron.

The Oracle spoke to operatives, delivering a number of somewhat ominous sounding messages; she said that she's learned you can't save someone who doesn't want to be saved.

Machines/EPN and Zion/Cypherite violence spread, and threatened to bring Zion and the Machines into a larger conflict.

With the help of nearby operatives, Agent Pace recovered Machine data stolen by an EPN data runner, Morze. The Agent lingered at the scene, where more EPN operatives arrived and attacked her. She and other Machine and Cypherite operatives returned fire. Zionites too became involved in the firefight before the Agent finally left with the data.

Cypherites looking for data on Zion's movements in the Real tracked the hovercraft and jack-in signal of Zion operative Vomer, finding her



Another Grainy Day by Eleutherophobia

downtown with Zion officer Rylet, and Zion Captain Niobe. Veil announced that Cypherite ships were closing in on both Vomer and Niobe's hovercraft. Niobe defied the surrounding Cypherites, and fought free in the ensuing melee while her hovercraft escaped in the Real. Vomer and her ship were not so fortunate; Cypherites captured the ship, and the valuable data it carried. The alleged involvement of Machine operatives in the fight against Niobe raised concerns about the Machine/Zion truce.

E Pluribus Neo rescued several of their operatives from Cypherite custody, just as the Cypherite officer exivy was about to hand them over to the Machines. The Kid staged diversions with Code Pulse Devices in Richland and Westview while another EPN team rescued the Rescate crew members from exivy and Agent Johnson in Downtown.

Elsewhere, the Morpheus simulacrum was told by operatives of the Machine memorial to Neo in Gracy Heights. He visited the site, and commented on the deceased Morpheus' mad quest for the One's remains.

In Maribeau, The Exile known as Tick Tock struck up a conversation with operative SiskoUrso, discussing the nature of time in the Matrix, and how the Machines manage to keep the simulation always in the year 1999.

Chapter 8.1.1

Cypherite spies discovered that Zion has been constructing a new city, situated in a vast complex of natural and artificial caverns far beneath the Earth's surface, protected by a combination of heavy sediment layers, EMP devices embedded in the rock, and live EMP fields powered by geothermal energy. The Machines declared this base, popularly termed "New Zion," to be a violation of the truce, and revoked Zion's privilege of recruiting humans who reject the Matrix simulation.

Machine forces moved swiftly to neutralize Zion's systems within the Matrix, achieving rapid early success. Zion operatives found themselves under attack by Agents anywhere outside of the Richland slums.

E Pluribus Neo began examining possible ways in which they could strike back at the Machines, possible outside of the simulation itself. Concerned lest Zion fall to the Machines, the Kid offered to assist Zion hovercraft, under fire from hostile Sentinel patrols.

The Merovingian threw a party, gloating over the possibilities for profit opened up by the return of the war between Zion and the Machines.

Chapter 8.1.2

Zion attempted to put an emergency firewall system in place to protect their network interfaces from the Machines, but the Machines quickly bypassed the new System, and inserted viral routines into the Zion network, impairing their communication system.

As a fall-back plan, Zion established a temporary network uplink, which they could use to get data directly out of the simulation.

The Machines began attacking Zionite extraction points, seeking to prevent Zion from "unplugging" more humans from the pods.

The Merovingian stole tunnel mapping data from Zion, and used this information to keep the General's Sentinels from being found by Machine patrols in the Real. The Merovingian informed the General that he must stay within certain designated areas, or be shut down by an override command.

In the Matrix, the Merovingian verified the allegiance of other powerful Exiles, including Yttri, Amber, Cerulean, Madame T, and the Auditor. The Exile named Synn insisted on more protection from Agent intrusion.

Cypherites continued stealing information from Zionite data clusters, despite increased resistance from Zion.

Chapter 8.1.3-8.1.4

Zion managed to get sensitive broadcast control data out of the simulation thanks to intervention by the Merovingian, who sent Beirn to stop the Machine Agent threatening Zion's uplink portal. With the preserved data, Zion was able to keep their broadcast control system essentially intact, although because it was shared from ship to ship, their hovercraft had to rise closer to the surface to send signals into the Matrix.

Zion finally tracked down Daelyn, a Cypherite spy who'd been smuggling information to Veil. The Cypherites, however, obtained the address of a Zionite recruiting official from a potential Zion recruit, killed in a crossfire with Zion defenders. The Machines captured the official, and then the high-level recruiting data to which he had access.

Meanwhile, a flight of Sentinels dispatched to probe New Zion's defenses were deactivated by hidden EMP charges. The Kid, pointing out the danger to even Zion's new city, urged Niobe to consider opening a direct offensive against the Machines in the Real, but Niobe did not seem inclined to consider such a gamble.



End of a Small Sanctuary by FaraRose

The Merovingian, besides taking a little time to discipline the unruly Murasaki Exile, Synn, became increasingly curious to probe Machine capabilities. An attack by the Twins and operatives at a leading Downtown company, Metacortex, provoked only a relatively meager Machine response. Deigning to question the Oracle, the Frenchman was told that "power isn't everything," and was prompted to look around for himself.

Questioning the Morpheus simulacrum, who reiterated the widespread story of a Machine civilization powered by humans trapped in pods, combined with a form of fusion, the Merovingian was struck by the lack of key factual data to support the story.

Armed with lists of potential awakening subjects captured from Zion, the Machines aggressively pursued Zion extraction and recruiting operations. One bluepill in particular, Navin Manohar, was arrested, terminated, and replaced with a specially prepared bluepill, one partially overwritten by a Machine program. After being reconfigured by operatives to resemble the original Mr. Manohar, the overwritten bluepill was sent back to Manohar's residence.

E Pluribus Neo, in an attempt to save as many compromised potentials from the Machines as possible, confronted and eventually extracted Rachel Dunkirk, friend of a woman named Sarah Edmontons, who had disappeared from a hospital several years earlier, apparently walking out under her own power despite having been on life support machines for over a month with almost zero brainwave activity.

Chapter 8.1.5

Zion strove to save their compromised recruiting teams and potential awakening subjects from the Machines, with some success. The Machines, however, gained information on the location and configuration of the Zion mainframe when they tricked Zion into attempting to extract a subject who had secretly been overwritten with a Machine program designed to exploit a security hole in the red pill trace program.

The Merovingian had Raini and Silver questioned about fusion and biological power generation; the questions stemmed from Morpheus' account of humans in the pods and the Machine energy source. Information gathered made the Merovingian question the efficiency of the supposed Machine system of a form of fusion combined with humans as energy-generating devices, and he determined to learn the truth for himself by sending the General's Sentinels to scout the fields and pods.

Ghost had a run-in with Pace while on a recruiting mission; Pace hinted that "your program is compromised," and that she was visiting other Zion potentials.

The Cypherite controller, Veil, and Cypherite operatives strove to counter Zion's recruiting efforts with bluepills, and succeeded in putting a number of potentials "back to sleep" with the pills, although one had to be fed the pill by force.

Malphas and several operatives won back a feather from Seraph, stolen by Seraphim. Malphas explained that Seraph's feathers were stripped from him as punishment for his betrayal of the Merovingian, in the days when he served the Merovingian as an enforcer.

Niobe came close to losing data she was attempting to rescue from Machine capture, but E Pluribus Neo operatives saved her from Machine forces in the nick of time.

The Merovingian held a "peace party" for all operatives in Tabor Park, but turned it into a bloodbath after tempting redpills from all organizations into close proximity with cake, dancing, and Ookami.

The Exile leader Dame White was involved in some wheeling and dealing, first getting a new Exile program that controlled animal emotions stolen from her by Persephone, the Effectuator, and Merovingian operatives, and then tipping off E Pluribus Neo that the Merovingian might have access to detailed information on Machine power lines in the Real, in exchange for information they gave her, obtained from Cypherites, about a mysterious "Mr. G."

As it turned out, "Mr. G." was Itarrot, a long-missing Cypherite officer. Having serious RSI trouble due to fried systems on his hijacked hovercraft, Itarrot was found and rescued by Cypherite operatives, and restored to his old position on Cryptos' hovercraft, "The Blue Dreamer."



The Cypherites also rescued the crew of the Solstice, held by Zion since trying to defect to the Cypherite cause. Cypherite operatives staged a party in Club *Heartless O the City by HostileInetention*

Sphinx, handing out blue pills as a distraction, while a team of high level Cypherite operatives broke into the Zion outpost where the crew was held, and liberated them.

Zion and the Machines clashed in the Zero One construct, as Zion conducted a desperate search for a Machine hacker who was threatening a vital Zion system. Despite efforts by Machine operatives and Agent Pace, Zionite operatives managed to locate the hacker and disrupt his efforts. After this success, the assembled Zionites attacked Agent Pace en masse, temporarily damaging her RSI and forcing her to retreat from the construct. Ghost warned, however, that Zion's systems were still under heavy Machine attack on multiple fronts, and that it would be vital to get all of these systems transferred to the safety of Zion's new city.

Chapter 8.2.2-8.2.3

Zion turned to Danielle Wright, the ex-Zionite and mastermind behind the elite "Wright Research" technology company, for aid in coding a new red pill program that would not be vulnerable to the exploit the Machines used to gather data on the Zion mainframe.

With their recruiting program in great danger due to Machine data captures, Zion continued their attempts to save compromised potentials from the Machines, staging a large distraction near the government building in Tabor West while a small team rescued two potentials held under System guard.



The Machines, having received indications that the General's Sentinels, directed by *Fun at Club Sphinx by Stepher* the Merovingian, were approaching the Fields and pods near the Machine city and began operations against the Merovingian with the aim of forcing him to recall the General. The Auditor was ordered to cease auditing Merovingian code, and the information-gatherer Hypatia, who has given the Merovingian useful information in the past, was arrested. The Machines met with less success when they tried shutting down the relay the Merovingian uses to communicate with the General, however, as they found that the Merovingian already had at least one backup system in place.

Machine operatives, finding that Zionite hovercraft had destroyed a scanning beacon used to return data on the Earth's depths, found an old human probe that could serve as a temporary replacement, and then located an exiled program capable of communicating with the probe. Agent Gray permitted the program to return to service in order to direct the probe. Gray also consented to the establishment of a ranking scheme in order to organize and motivate Machinist hovercraft operations.

The Merovingian received scouting reports from the General's Sentinels with estimates of the human population held by the Fields and pods near the Machine city. Together with data gathered within the simulation on birth and death rates, the Merovingian achieved a rough estimate of a possible total Matrix human population, but suspected that the figures were too low, not to mention incongruous, and said that they would have to continue their investigation until the numbers added up.

Finding the General hunted by Machine Sentinels on the Earth's surface, the Merovingian sent operatives to draw the attention of the Machines in the simulation by attacking important facilities across the city. Meanwhile, a Merovingian hovercraft helped draw off Sentinels, and the General managed to escape detection.

E Pluribus Neo, considering a strike on the power lines leading from the pods to the Machine city, stole mapping data on the area from the Merovingian.

The Cypherites, feeling that the Merovingian was accessing information on the simulation that could be dangerous to the humans sleeping in the pods, investigated one of his information sources, the Coroner, who led them to data held by his nemesis, Hypatia. The data pointed the Cypherites to a hidden construct housing some of the General's Elite Commando programs, which the Cypherites defeated after a fierce battle.

Danielle Wright succeeded in creating a new red pill program for Zion, after some preliminary less-than-successful test runs. Forced to move her activities underground when the Machines discovered her work, Wright, finding Cypherites attempting to decode her encrypted jack-in signal, decided to leave the simulation for good, telling Zion operatives that there was work she had to do, but she could no longer do it in the city. She also rejected invitations from operatives and even Commander Lock to seek refuge in Zion's new city, saying that her goals differed from theirs.

The Merovingian launched a small urban terror campaign designed to dissuade the Machines from attempting to hamper his various information-gathering activities. Even so, Sentinel patrols around the pods and Fields on the Earth's surface forced the General to pull his forces back.

Meanwhile, the Merovingian discovered E Pluribus Neo's theft of the General's maps of the area around the Fields. Piqued, the Merovingian looked into the matter, and, finding that EPN intended to use the maps to conduct a raid on the power lines leading from the pods into the Machine city, concocted an elaborate plan designed to pinpoint the position of the EPN strike force, and send this data to the Machines. This plot

succeeded, and despite detonating strategic code pulse devices across the city to disrupt Machine communication, the EPN attack ran into an overwhelming Sentinel presence waiting for them at the power lines, and was forced to retreat without having reached their intended target.

Having resolved that matter to his satisfaction, the Merovingian turned his attention back to exploring the Machine power base. He used a modified red pill program to trace a bluepill's body to a previously unknown set of pods farther away from the Machine city.

Chapter 8.2.4

Zion began distributing the new red pill programs to their recruiting teams, and to their allies in E Pluribus Neo, but this distribution met with opposition from Cypherites, and the Machines.

Investigating reports of Sentinels hovering suspiciously around the city of Zion, E Pluribus Neo, thanks to a bargain struck with Pepper, was able to capture Machine data showing that the Sentinels formed a thin cocoon around Zion—a nearly perfect spherical distribution. These Sentinels, however, would evade Zion or EPN ships, rather than attempting to engage them in combat, and the Kid expressed concern over what might lie behind this unexpected behavior.

The Machines investigated Wright's business, Wright Research, and found that they had worked closely with a small company, Argent Biometrics, specializing in encryption across biological interfaces similar to that used by Wright on her own jack-in signal. Discovering that Argent Biometrics was a cover company set up by the Exile, Silver, the Machines tracked, pursued, and confronted Silver, demanding the key to Wright's signal encryption, and threatening to delete all of Silver's research if he did not cooperate. Silver grudgingly handed over the required information.

When the Merovingian learned of Silver's deal with the Machines, he sent operatives, and Ookami, to punish Silver by wiping out several of Silver's labs in Camon Heights. Summoning Silver to Club Sphinx, the Merovingian angrily reminded him that no commerce was to be conducted with the Machines without his permission, and finally allowed operatives to delete the unrepentant researcher, saying that he could be restored from a backup copy, possibly after modifying his code to make him less intractable.

The General's Sentinel scouts, ranging further across the Earth's dead surface, reported more human pod clusters, arranged in a rough grid pattern, roughly 100 to 150 kilometers apart. Meanwhile, the Exile Sunshine was consulted, and estimated that, taking the cooling of the Earth's climate due to the perpetual storm clouds into consideration, the Machines might be able to use about 1/16th of the Earth's surface for pod clusters. Malphas calculated that this could mean the Machines have about 300 million people in pods worldwide, but the Merovingian felt that something still wasn't adding up.

Operatives tracked a powerful Exile program, called "Incidence 5.991" by the Machines, and found it using deceptive simulacra to retrieve data from hidden nodes. These simulacra were deleted without retrieving their data in time, but more nodes were believed to exist.

Chapter 8.2.5

Information was sketchy, but available details indicated at least two nearly simultaneous acts of deadly sabotage in the old city of Zion, bearing similarities to past Cypherite attacks: a hijacked hovercraft rammed the main gate to the city's dock, and shortly thereafter, all communication with Zion Command was cut off, following what may have been a large explosion in the command facility.



Escape by Wolfess

At about the same time, the Machines were sending a virus directly into Zion's mainframe, using a device captured from Danielle Wright's lab near the Earth's surface, which the Machines located by tracking her broadcast signal, whose encryption they had unlocked. Wright herself, in her last known appearance in the Matrix, remained characteristically calm when confronted by the triumphant Machines; she collapsed, lifeless, as Sentinels dispatched her body in the Real.

Several days later, Ghost pursued rumors about the sabotage that had taken place in Zion, finding strong indications of Cypherite involvement, in collaboration with the Machines. Ghost warned operatives not to try reaching the old city with their hovercraft, as it was now entirely infested by Sentinels. A number of Zion hovercraft, missing since the attack on the city; Zion's Commander Lock, present in Zion Command at the time contact was lost, had also not been found.

Reports to the Merovingian from the General's Sentinel scouts, ranging farther across the surface of the Earth, indicated regular arrays of small pod clusters in a loose grid-like pattern across the otherwise lifeless land. The only significant variation found was another large pod cluster and set of human-growing Fields over 6000 miles away, from which power cables led off into the distance; contact to the scout sending this report

was lost, however, and the remainder were recalled to preserve them from Machine patrols. Merovingian estimates based on a compilation of recent findings placed the Matrix population at approximately 300 million humans; according to the Merovingian, these would scarcely provide sufficient power for the Machines' needs.

With Lock still missing after the destruction of Zion's old city by the Machines, Captain Roland was promoted to Commander of Zion's military.

Fighting over the new red pill programs continued, with Machines working to keep the pills out of E Pluribus Neo's hands. A hard battle was fought between the two groups in Westview, ending with Machinists recovering some of the programs.

Zion, investigating Cypherite involvement in the attacks leading to the destruction of the old city, captured some data from the Cypherites, and decoded it after fighting to gain access to Cypherite computers. The data consisted of a brief message about Danielle Wright: "We found a neologism from Wright: Alphadecimal." Operatives began to investigate if this information could relate to any previously discovered details about the mysterious researcher.



Downtown Celebration by odj

A high-level Zionite fought off Merovingian operatives while complaining about having to find his way to Pillsen for Commander Roland. The Zionite was bald, muscular, wearing a green sleeveless T-shirt, arm tattoos and green glasses, but his name was unknown.

Machinists found Brenda Utley touring the headquarters of Wright Research in Vauxton. Utley hinted that her company, consumer products giant Pendhurst-Amaranth, may have been interested in acquiring the research firm of the missing Danielle Wright.

The Oracle bumped into a few operatives of various organizations in Downtown, inviting them to an impromptu picnic in One Zero, where they discussed peace, war, and economics while munching freshly baked cookies.

Chapter 8.3.1

Colt, Captain Roland's first-mate, newly promoted to captain since Roland's own promotion to Zion Commander in place of the missing Lock, helped direct operatives in heading off attacks on Zion data stores by both Machines and Merovingian Exiles. Colt described the destruction of Roland's ship, its systems fried by feedback when the Machines destroyed the old Zion mainframe. He feared that some of his crewmates, including Mauser and AK, had not survived the crash, or the swarm of Sentinels around old Zion, where the ship went down.

The Machines captured some potentially useful data from the Zion mainframe: a three-year-old archive of operative RSI signatures. The data could be used to lock the known operative's signal, and prevent their emergency jack-out system from functioning, making a death in the simulation truly fatal; however, the archive was neurally encrypted, and would unlock only when receiving signals matching the brainwave patterns of those who "signed" it: Lock, or Morpheus. Attempting to solve this problem, the Machines constructed their own crude simulacrum of Morpheus from available data, but it was found lacking in correct human responses, and was scheduled for training by operatives.

Some of the General's Sentinels were among the swarm in on the sack of Zion, and caught glimpses of Lock and another man fleeing through the wreckage. After capturing Machine Sentinel reports detailing which Zion ships were present in the vicinity at the time, the Merovingian's researchers identified the other man as Mauser, from Roland's crew. Neither Lock nor Mauser were seen again.

Colt and Ghost, anticipating that the Machines might try to use the General's Morpheus simulacrum to unlock the captured RSI data, led Zion operatives in their own pre-emptive search for the sim, but it proved elusive, and heavy Agent attacks prohibited further pursuit.

The ex-Unlimit, Beirn, discovered AWOL Elite Commando programs in the white hallways. Failing to call them back to duty under the General and the Merovingian, Beirn disposed of the rebel programs on hand, but, tired of the disorienting maze of hallways, left the others to their own devices.

The Merovingian ambushed the Machine Morpheus simulacrum, hoping to extract some useful data from it. Although he managed to coax it into a startling display of some of Morpheus' old codes, he found its comprehension highly limited, and apparently incapable of giving him the kind of information he was after; he seemed almost relieved when the Machines recaptured it.

Machine operatives led the sim through re-creations of scenes from its memory, hoping to attune its mind to the state necessary to match the real Morpheus' brain patterns, and unlock the RSI archive. But the sim's recall of and reaction to the events was shaky, and in the end it failed to access the archive. Agent Pace had operatives delete it.



Corporate Neurosthenia by PBlade

relative to the dangerous information, captured from Zion's dead mainframe, that it could possibly unlock for the Machines. But it appeared unsure of what it should do, and even a face-to-face meeting with Niobe failed to persuade it to commit itself one way or the other.

E Pluribus Neo spoke to the Oracle and Seraph about the simulacrum, but the Oracle was exceptionally vague on the topic, although she seemed very familiar with the sim.

Seeking more information on how the Machines might possibly be forced to give up power from the Matrix, EPN targeted code pulse detonations on power centers in Westview and Downtown, confirming that simulation power concentration is higher in the Downtown area, despite the presence of power plant facilities in Westview.

Chapter 8.3.3

The Morpheus simulacrum broke the encryption on the RSI signature database the Machines had captured from the Zion mainframe. Zion veterans whose signatures were on the list evacuated the Matrix to avoid signal-lock and termination; Niobe and Ghost were among them.

The Cypherite controller, Veil, led several assassination missions against compromised Zionite veterans. After one of these she was opposed by Colt, Zion's remaining ranking field officer, as well as other Zionites and Merovingian operatives who converged on the scene. Colt also led a mission to rescue data from a Zion organization area to which the captured archive had opened up access for the Machines.

The Merovingian tracked down and summoned the pod subroutine who had been in charge of overseeing the vanished bluepill, Mary MacHenry, but the subroutine refused to cooperate. Undeterred, the Merovingian arranged to have its log files stolen, and found that the Machines had subjected MacHenry to vigorous physical reconditioning before removing her from her pod.

The Effectuator snuck a team of Merovingian operatives into a Machine detention block where they rescued Hypatia, returning her to the city for some scheme of the Merovingian's.

The Furihata-based redpill named "Grace" was found by Cypherites, pursuing Silver Dragon gang members across the International District. With help from the operatives, she eventually found what she was after: data confirming that hers was among the RSI signatures in the archive captured by the Machines. Grace, once a Zionite but now independent, worried that she would have difficulty obtaining the firmware necessary to reconfigure her broadcast signal.

Chapter 8.3.2

Following a tip from the Oracle, the Merovingian found evidence that the early, pre-War Machines were much simpler, and lacking in complexity. He pondered whether this could have led to their reliance on humans.

Merovingian operatives found Persephone in a library in the Chateau. She read them poems by Swinburne dealing with love, loss, and death. Something from her past seemed to weigh upon her mind.

Both Zion and the Machines pursued the Morpheus simulacrum, attempting to win it over to their point of view

Chapter 8.3.4

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Chapter 8.3.5

Zion tried desperately to get its last signature-compromised operatives out of the Matrix before they could be terminated by the Machines. Before he can be led to an exit, operative Strenlo, who stayed in the Matrix trying to save important information backed up from the lost Zion mainframe, was terminated by Agents. Zion succeeded, however, in evacuating loner Joshua Maston, an ex-Zionite who has been working to continue Morpheus' legacy inside the Matrix. Before allowing himself to be evacuated, Maston told Zion that while he was grateful for their help, he would leave them after they reconfigured his RSI signature to protect him against signal lock and termination.

Persephone recalled a time during her work for the Machines at the pods when a human was removed, where the log files were very similar to those that have been found concerning the mysteriously vanished Mary MacHenry. Hypatia, to return the favor for her rescue from the Machines, put the Merovingian in touch with the Archivist Society, who could not find information on the specific incident recalled by Persephone, but were able to look up yet another similar incident, this one having occurred during the first version of the Matrix. Stealing the fingered information from the Machines, the Merovingian found log files describing the simultaneous live disconnection of fourteen individuals from the pods.

Suddenly and inexplicably, on the verge of completely incapacitating Zion's operations within the Matrix through termination or forced jack-out of nearly all of their veteran operatives, the Machines recalled their forces, both inside the Matrix and in the Real. Before retreating himself, the General sent a broadcast to the Merovingian, hurriedly reporting a large number of Machine Sentinels taking up positions around the Machine city, and another large formation of Sentinels approaching.

The Exile known as Digger showed some operatives a dungeon room hidden in the tunnels deep below Rawlins Corner, explaining that he believed it to be a direct code re-creation of a room from the second version of the Matrix. Digger and the operatives also engaged in some speculation as to Machine manipulation of symbols from the Book of Genesis, along the lines of theories propounded by philosopher Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach, and the possibility of multiple Matrix simulations running one inside the other. Among other ideas floated, GreatWorm suggested that the Earth's ruined sky could be compared to the flaming sword set down to prohibit man from re-entering the biblical Garden of Eden.

A number of operatives went on a tour of the Ouroboros corporate headquarters in Creston Heights, conducted by an irritatingly chipper, yet somewhat evasive, tour guide. Several odd pieces of information came to light about the giant electronics manufacturer.

Machine operatives were contacted by a Zionite named Cpahr, hoping they would return to him a personal digital assistant program he'd lost when the Machines sacked the old Zion mainframe. Upon interrogation, it appeared that the program, ZAITSO, might have some knowledge of previous conversations with the EPN leader, the Kid. Operatives decided to keep ZAITSO for further questioning, much to the sensitive Cpahr's dismay.

Zionites attempted to evacuate a veteran operative, Viellard, compromised by the RSI archive the Machines had captured from the Zion mainframe. Machine programs formed a cordon at the nearest hardline, however, and Viellard, attempting to evade the cordon, was caught by the Machine operative Darjarian, and killed by Machine operative Starschwar.



Creston Heights Museum by Dragonram

Chapter 9.1.1-9.1.2

A large man composed of a glowing wireframe mesh appeared at Ascension Monument, terminating a squad of Agents who confronted him before disappearing into the Barrens.

The Machines pulled back their forces within the simulation and in the Real, concentrating on locating and expelling the mysterious intruder. However, he demonstrated the ability to delete or override their programs at will, confounding their attempts to deal with him by force. He was less dominating when confronted by operatives, but they found him to be extremely powerful; he appeared more amused than concerned when dealing with their attempts to control him.

The other organizations also pursued the intruder, interested in both his power and his purpose. E Pluribus Neo retrieved strange codes left behind by the intruder, some with the ability to influence large areas of the simulation. Zion took some of these codes to the Auditor, who, having analyzed them, became agitated, saying that they shouldn't be in the Matrix at all. When Zion asked the Oracle for information on the mysterious man, she responded evasively, appearing to know more than she was willing to say about him.

When confronted by Cypherites, the intruder countered them with overridden Machine programs. In a later operation, Cypherites, led by Veil, stopped Zionites from making contact with the intruder.

The Merovingian, hoping to use the intruder's power, tracked him down with the expensive assistance of the information expert, Cerulean. Attempting to impress the stranger with displays of power and influence, the Merovingian introduced him to Cerulean, Malphas, Ookami, and Hypatia, but the intruder, while hinting at some familiarity with Exile programs and Matrix history, seemed only mildly interested. Attempts by Merovingian operatives to win the intruder over met with equally lukewarm success, as he appeared to regard their claims of Merovingian might with great skepticism.

Chapter 9.1.3

Zion, using data retrieved from intruder codes, found a way to contact the mysterious man by hacking into landlines, and managed to get a message through to him, despite Machine jamming attempts. His brief reply indicated some interest in hearing from the Zionites.

E Pluribus also used the landline exploit to reach the intruder with a message, and were able to meet with him deep below the city streets. He questioned them about their plans to combat the Machines, seeming skeptical of their chances.

Cypherites showed concern that the intruder's high profile was disturbing citizens of the simulation. Cryptos led operatives in a plan designed to disrupt attempts by E Pluribus Neo and Zion to reach the intruder, with partial success; the intruder displayed a baffling mix of interest and disinterest in operative affairs.

The Merovingian had Elite Commandos brought into the Matrix to demonstrate his military capabilities to the intruder, who was mildly interested; however, a further demonstration, a battle between commandos and Merovingian operatives, bored the intruder, who wiped out the commando programs, much to the General's displeasure.

Chapter 9.1.4-9.1.5

The intruder met with Niobe, and expressed an interest in Zion's rebellion against the Machines. He later met with Zion operatives, asking many questions about their defenses, armaments, and plans for combating the Machines.

The Machine policy of avoiding the intruder while preventing other organizations from contacting him became frustrating to their own operatives. Agent Pace explained that the intruder is inextricably linked with highly sensitive System information that absolutely cannot be compromised. She also said that because the Matrix was not designed to support his code, his presence within the simulation is causing problems; because they cannot remove him directly, they will have to work to minimize his impact on the simulation as much as possible, while avoiding aggravating him further.

Cypherites looked into how the intruder might be entering the simulation. Although they couldn't find out if he was using some sort of unknown jack-in technology, questioning the Auditor revealed that the intruder's code is a higher version than the Matrix itself.

The Merovingian attempted to impress the intruder with Persephone and various simulated delights, but while the intruder seemed interested in the possibility of the Merovingian's usefulness, he did not respond enthusiastically to the programmed temptations.



Entirely Without Incident by FaraRose

The Merovingian staged a party in the Hel Club, and succeeded in getting the intruder to appear, although he seemed more interested in looking around and sparring with operatives than in light conversation.

E Pluribus Neo began moving their ships into the abandoned, wrecked city now known as "Old" Zion, where they have initiated plans to improve the defenses so that the city, fairly close to the Machine city itself, can be used as a forward base.

Chapter 9.2.1

The powerful intruder examined the Morpheus simulacrum, made demands to the Architect, pumped Zion and EPN for information on Neo and Trinity, and teased the General by displaying knowledge of his old "Seeker" missiles. When Cypherites, opting for Cryptos' approach of talking to him over Veil's desire to attack him, attempted to question him, he refused to answer. After most of these encounters, he left powerful, hostile programs in his wake, including a large program that pumped out a continuous stream of overridden Machine forces. Even the Merovingian, snooping through Machine files, did not manage to dig up definite information on the intruder.

Around the confusion caused by the intruder, the man-machine war continued. EPN rescued the crew of their hovercraft Horizon, who had been captured while obtaining Machine maps of the wrecked old Zion city. Meanwhile the Cypherites began working to hijack the Zion hovercraft, Juggernaut, whose extremist captain had been eliminating bluepills, whom he regarded as sub-human.

EPN detected a Zion-type emergency beacon signal coming from the surface above the old city, and sent crews to investigate.

Chapter 9.2.2

Cypherites hijacked the Zion hovercraft Juggernaut, whose captain, Cinquez, they accused of the murder of bluepills who refused the red pill. Taunted by Cypherite operatives in the Matrix, Cinquez learned of the hijacking and managed to jack out and detonate the hovercraft, killing all on board.

Hunting through Machine systems, Merovingian operatives found a partial note of a meeting between the Machines and the intruder that took place before the intruder entered the Matrix, in which the intruder appeared to have referred to the General's old "Stalingrad" base. The Merovingian called a conference on the subject with operatives and the General, in which it was decided that the presence of Sati at Stalingrad at the time of the Machine attack may have been what attracted the intruder's interest.

Machine operatives managed to reach the intruder and get him to agree to a meeting. At the meeting, he was surprised that Agent Pace was female, but grew angry when she said the Machines did not have what he was looking for. The intruder demanded to meet with the Architect, and Agent Pace said this would be arranged.

Zion found the intruder taking code readings in the slum building where Neo was awoken by Morpheus.

EPN followed an emergency beacon to a wrecked surface facility above Zion, where they found Commander Lock, weak and recovering from wounds, but conscious. They evacuated him to the old city.



Unauthorised Activity by PBlade

Tailing the intruder, EPN found him examining upper floors of a skyscraper in Center Park. Comments by the intruder suggested that it was the spot where Trinity hacked the Machine power grid and received a fatal gunshot wound from an Agent, before being caught and miraculously revived by Neo. The intruder did not offer an explanation of his presence there, but it appeared to have something to do with the object of his search. He also mentioned that he didn't want operatives knowing what it was, because they might want it too.

Chapter 9.2.3

Zion's Commander Lock, guarded by EPN and recovering in the old city, sent a message to Zionites with the story of his rescue from the Machine attack on Zion by Mauser, who took him to an abandoned lab facility on the surface, and tended to Lock's injuries until being killed while leading Sentinels away from his position.

Overhearing this story, the intruder expressed surprise that Mauser had a gun effective against Sentinels. Colt was expanding upon this by describing how Neo could zap Sentinels with his bare hands when he was suddenly interrupted by the intruder flying into an inexplicable rage, saying "They WERE lying!"

After this, powerful override programs created by the intruder began to appear around the city, including Accelerators, and the newly encountered "Decelerator" and "Runtime" programs.



Millions by ManicVelocity

Zion, attempting to track down the intruder and convince him to exercise more discrimination in his attacks, ran afoul of Cypherites out to shut down the intruder's programs before they could endanger citizens. When a group of Zionites organized by Ghost finally caught up with the intruder, he accused them of being involved in a cover-up with the Machines, and attacked them.

Shortly after Cypherites removed a series of the dangerous programs from Downtown, including some around the Government Building, Agent Gray called upon Machinists to eliminate Agent programs that had been turned against the System by Accelerators.

The Merovingian, following evidence suggesting that the intruder may have been interested in the Oracle's ward, Sati, sent operatives to question the intruder about the girl, but was unable to locate him. Flood directed an attempt to kidnap Sati without the intruder's input, but the operatives sent into Mara found only Seraph, who warned them that Sati would not be found while certain conditions persisted.

Another attempt to locate the intruder, assisted by one of the General's Elite Commando reconnaissance programs, succeeded in finding him, and convincing him to meet the General, although the intruder appeared to be unfamiliar with Sati's name and significance. Her role in causing the Machines to attack the General's Stalingrad base caught his attention, but not to the point that he was willing to pursue her himself. Instead, he suggested that the General recover his own data on the Exile from the Machines, and asked to be kept apprised of any progress made in that regard.

Chapter 9.2.4

The Kid contacted Zion with details on the surface lab in which EPN found Commander Lock: the structure showed signs of damage from Sentinels, and a Zion "lightning gun"; Mauser's fingerprints, and traces of his blood, were found inside. The lab equipment was entirely wrecked. Tyndall sent Zion operatives to capture Machine logs of Sentinel activity at the site, but no records of any such activity were found.

The Machines found an intruder-spawned "Terminator" program behind the deaths of many System Agents. Fortunately, operatives were able to eliminate the program.

The General helped Merovingian operatives recover some of his data that had been captured by the Machines, but his data on Sati appeared to be missing. After consulting with the intruder about the Sati question, the intruder, hearing that Sati was only out of the Matrix once as a stored computer program in the General's base, decided that she couldn't be what he's looking for. He was hunting something he called a "biological interface program," adding that if the Merovingian could obtain one for him, he would make him "king of the Matrix."

Machine operatives looking for the intruder tracked him down in the vicinity of the Metacortex building. The intruder exhibited anger and impatience, and was unwilling to answer questions put to him by the operatives. When Agent Gray intervened, asking why the intruder skipped the meeting that had been arranged with the Architect, the intruder used an override code to terminate Gray, then told operatives that the Machines were still "jerking his chain." Agent Pace appeared on the scene, despite operative warnings, and told the intruder that the Architect would await the meeting, saying that the intruder would be able to terminate the Architect himself if he found the meeting displeasing. The somewhat mollified intruder said that he'd see about it.

Zionite operatives were called in after a report of the intruder near the Chelsea Convention Center, where they found him fighting overwhelmed Bookworms. The intruder cut through the Bookworms in the Center to reach Hypatia, and demanded that she give him a biological interface program. When she said that she didn't have such a thing, the intruder terminated her. Wandering through the building's lobby, he said something about being "trapped," before appearing to jack out.

Operatives identified contact between Seraph, Morpheus, and Lo Ruhamah. Morpheus was seen with Ruhamah at the Abandoned Subway.



Fighting in the Snow by odj

A confused computer hacker named "Murphey" dressed as an Agent and went "on patrol" around parts of Richland and Downtown, occasionally saying odd things, even long binary numbers. Agent Griffin appeared on the scene and informed operatives following Murphey that Murphey was believed to have located a large cache of the intruder's override programs, but that a close examination of the programs had unhinged Murphey's mind. It was hoped that an analysis of Murphey's utterances would reveal the location of the dangerous programs. This was achieved by Ouranos, who located the programs in the building housing the Deus Lounge.

Beirn submitted himself to examination by the intruder at Club Cyclo. The intruder detected the Machine cheat codes in Beirn's system, and was only convinced that Beirn was not a Machine after subjecting him to various override codes. The intruder invited Beirn to try his cheat code abilities on him, and Beirn was surprised to find the intruder immune to them. The intruder questioned the General about the origins of the cheat codes, but eventually dismissed them as irrelevant to his search.

Chapter 9.2.5

Hypatia had been imperfectly restored by her loyal Bookwyrms after her termination by the intruder, so Machine operatives saw to the job properly, removing the code overrides from her routine with a clean kill.

Agent Gray, still recovering from an encounter of his own with the intruder's termination routine, facilitated a meeting between the intruder and the Architect, with Agent Pace and a senior operative also in attendance. The intruder demanded a "biological interface program," saying he knew that it existed. The Architect confirmed this, but denied having created it, and told the intruder that the only surviving copy was removed from the Matrix, as the intruder himself had witnessed. The Machines hoped that this information would inspire the intruder to leave the Matrix.

Zion searched Wright Research in the hopes of finding something about the "biological interface program" the intruder has mentioned wanting, but even though interface technology was one of Danielle Wright's areas of particular expertise, nothing promising turned up at the Wright facilities. The intruder didn't seem surprised by this, hinting that the program wasn't written by a human.



The Merovingian, deciding to procure the mysterious program himself, checked with possible Exile sources, such as Persephone and Silver, but came up empty-handed. Asking the intruder, who they found surrounded by dead N30 AG3NTS, to provide more information about the program, operatives were told that programs made by the Exiles in question were nothing like what he wanted, and that he was certain the program is somewhere in the Matrix. The intruder also mentioned something about someone else having "taken the other one."

The Kid helped operatives Demedrian and Tsusai clear powerful override programs out of

Merovingian Getting Assimilated by Smith by Mantra777

Ikebukuro, although the task was complicated when engagement protocols were overridden. The Kid also encountered operatives in Stamos, where he was wondering about recent activity in the area. While talking, an override routine hit the area, and the group was unexpectedly attacked by N30 AG3NTS.

Others had also taken an interest in the Morpheus simulacrum's recent Westview activity. Agent Pace led a search for the sim in Westview, but when operatives attempted to hold the simulacrum for questioning, they found themselves pushed away from him. Agent Pace ordered the sim to surrender, but he fled across the district, eluding pursuit. Before fleeing, the simulacrum said something about "the watchers."

Veil, in the company of operative Fyror, tracked the simulacrum down to a ramshackle building, and asked him what he was up to. The simulacrum responded with a quotation from an ancient source, which included references to certain omens, and "the teaching of the watchers."

The Merovingian sought information on the simulacrum's activities as well, with Flood sending operatives, led by Ookami, to question two prominent Westview Exiles: Indigo and Amber. Indigo claimed to know nothing about the simulacrum's activities, calling it an outdated reject. Amber mentioned that the simulacrum had been in contact with many "gutter" people in the area, similar to the "riff-raff" who often associate with the Oracle. Various conspiracy theories were discussed, but Flood dismissed them as paranoia.

Eliminating some override programs in Downtown, Ghost and other Zion operatives encountered the intruder, who began asking questions about the relationship between Neo and Trinity. Those present were not interested in giving him the information, and he left frustrated.

In Westview, Zion operatives eliminated one of the intruder's Accelerator programs that was overriding the Demon Legion gang in Sobra Shores. The zealous redpill Father Jonas led the Brethren and other Zion operatives to the gang's leader, Jezebeth, who helped track down the Accelerator.

Merovingian operatives found Persephone contemplating one of the intruder's Decelerator programs on the top floor of a building downtown. Persephone stated her opinion that the intruder was an empty shell of a man, saying that he would not have used his abilities to defend someone, like the assembled operatives defended Persephone against marauding Zionites.

Shimada and other E Pluribus Neo members went after a Machine installation in downtown, trying to obtain data relating to the "biological interface program" the intruder has mentioned being interested in. EPN was tipped off to the existence of the information by a hacker, Pigo, who found a reference to it in a two-month-old Machine data archive. An overwhelming security counter-attack by Agents at the site prevented EPN from retrieving any data, however.

Chapter 9.3.1

With Sister Margaret's help, Cypherites searching for the Oracle found Seraph, who alluded to a widespread plan, and said that others would be called upon to help at the right time.

A second wireframed man appeared, confronting and fighting the intruder in Westview. According to their monitored conversation, they appeared to be at odds over the acquisition of something.

Halborn, known until now only as the "intruder," complained to Zion that the other man, Carlyne, whom he has known for some time, is a practiced liar. Carlyne, on the other hand, visited the Machines, telling them that he wanted to help them by removing Halborn from the Matrix.

The Merovingian met with both men, assuring them of his full aid in their fight against the other.

In a later meeting with Machinists in the Government Building, Carlyne told them that Halborn is searching for what he's called a "biological interface program" because his real body is essentially dead, and Halborn hopes the program will offer a remedy for this condition. Meeting with the Cypherites, Carlyne apologized for the problems caused by override programs, and said that he hoped he wouldn't be needed at all to remove Halborn, but that Halborn's override activity appeared to be reaching a dangerous point.

Halborn, meanwhile, frustrated by his failure to locate the interface program, even with the assistance of Merovingian operatives, decided that he would have to go back to the Machines and ask them who made the program.

The busy Carlyne continued his rounds, encountering E Pluribus Neo, again mentioning Halborn's critical condition in the real world. He said that his main goal is to get Halborn out of the Matrix, and that that would benefit him in certain ways; he also mentioned that he was curious to see if the interface program Halborn wants really exists, or if it is just a figment of Halborn's desperate imagination.

Chapter 9.3.2

Halborn demanded to see the Architect, and asked him to name the creator of the biological interface program. The Architect told him it was written by the Oracle. When operatives were asked by Carlyne whether they had seen Halborn, who he is searching for, they were instructed to say "no."

Stonewalled by Zion, Halborn went out on his own to look for the Oracle. After the departure of Halborn, Carlyne contacted Zion, saying that he wants to help them stop Halborn.

Merovingians found Halborn in the process of overriding more Exile programs. He requested information on the Oracle, which the Merovingian was happy to supply.

Searching for the Oracle, Machine operatives recovered data fragments that may have been authored by the Oracle. These fragments were provided by the Exile gang leader Zero, in return for assistance in a business deal with other shady characters.

Cypherites came across evidence of a Machine investigation of override code use in Apollyon, but Agent Pace claimed to be unable to provide them with any information beyond speculation that one or even both of the wireframed intruders was involved. Searching further afield, the Cypherites found code overrides in use in the One Zero construct, and neutralized them.

A member of the Archivist society polled operatives in the new Datamine construct on their opinions of the area. Malphas wondered if there was



Falling by The Taxidermist

another motive behind the recent increase in Archivist Society activity besides their usual profit-making from archived historical data.

Carlyne was invited to a Merovingian meeting at the Jade Room. He mentioned to the Merovingian that he'd heard Halborn was asking questions about the Oracle, but the Merovingian assured Carlyne that his primary interest was in aiding him against his rival. To demonstrate this, he had operatives guide Carlyne to override programs placed by Halborn in Murasaki.

Colt led a search by Zion operatives for the Oracle in Mara, to contact her about Halborn. Mara gang boss Owl Bangheart, whose gang had been suffering from code overrides in the area, told the operatives that the Oracle hadn't been around lately, but that he'd seen Seraph disappear through a doorway. Operatives located Seraph in the system of white hallways branching off of the White Lotus Hotel's side entrance. Seraph said that the Oracle had expected something like the current situation, and that this was not the right time to meet her. He added that others would be trying to locate her as well, and that the Oracle would not be able to avoid them all without help.

Chapter 9.3.3

Halborn searched for the Oracle in the vicinity of Mara while Carlyne, backed by Zion, searched for him. The Machines mobilized their operatives to keep hostiles away from Halborn in order to allow him to complete his task, hoping that afterwards he would leave the Matrix.

The Merovingian conducted his own search for the Oracle, uncovering evidence of a deep-seated plot among certain Exile groups. This investigation, however, was interrupted by Carlyne, who saw it as confirmation of the Merovingian's support for his rival, and severed his connection with the Frenchman.

The pressure-cooker situation around Mara resulted in numerous violent encounters involving operatives, the two wireframed rivals, and their override programs:

- Ghost and Colt, conducting a covert operation in Westview, had to abort and call in reinforcements when the Agent they were fighting became Accelerated by an override program.
- Niobe and Zion operatives battled Halborn, deleting many of his programs in Mannsdale.
- Machinists battled override-supported Zionites at Magog South. While the Machinists fought to hold off the Zionites, Halborn showed up and eliminated the override codes, allowing the Machines to send in Agents to secure the area.
- A large wave of programs, some aligned with the Machines, some with Zion, and some with no operative group, appeared throughout north Richland. Operatives battled to remove them.

Meanwhile, small groups of Machinists located the Oracle in Mara, but the appearance of Seraph, and directives from Agent Gray detailing Machine concerns regarding the overall situation, required the operatives to depart without arresting her.

Shortly thereafter, Merovingian operatives, tracking suspicious movements into the Sakura construct, found EPN soldiers there. A battle broke out, in the midst of which Seraph appeared, proceeding to eliminate many of the Merovingian operatives from the construct, despite the significant support the Merovingians received from their healer, CiaoYun. The survivors found themselves face-to-face with the Oracle, who told them that they might soon find something very valuable, but warned them against trying to use it selfishly.

Chapter 9.3.4

Zion located Halborn, and communicated his position to Carlyne, so that he could be stopped before reaching his goal: the Oracle. Halborn, still unable to locate her, demanded that the Machines help him locate her, but the Machines claimed that she had been designed specifically to be unpredictable. And the Merovingian, sensing that Halborn was faltering in his search, arranged a strategic planning meeting to revitalize his campaign, but Halborn did not arrive.

Ultimately, Carlyne, with help from Zion, intercepted the isolated Halborn. Operatives from all organizations attempted to interfere or monitor the encounter, but an incredibly powerful override code blast forced everyone to evacuate the area, and overloaded monitoring sensors throughout the district.

The Machines continued working to understand mysterious data fragments they'd recovered several weeks earlier in Richland, possibly connected with the Oracle. An eccentric Machine technician came up with a plan to decode the fragments' unique fuzzy logic routines with the help of unstable code within the Datamine construct. While this plan cost the technician his existence, and did not retrieve a full data set, some information was obtained, and Agent Pace took personal charge of the fragment project.

The Oracle called Veil and Cypherite operatives to a surprise meeting in the One Zero construct, where she handed Veil what appeared to be an



The Might of Machines by Bayamos

encrypted code fragment, and asked the Cypherites to watch over Sati for her. Although very curious as to what the fragment contained, and what was motivating the Oracle to make these requests, the Cypherites agreed to help her. EPN operatives, removing override programs from Debir Court, were confronted by Seraph, who invited them to step through the doorway at the end of the courtyard. Doing so, they found themselves in the Ashencourte construct, where the Oracle greeted them, giving Shimada a piece of encrypted code, and asking the operatives to watch over Sati. The operatives assured her that they would do what they could to help her.

The next day, Cypherites led to Uriah by Cryptos in order to remove override programs from the Uriah docks ran into EPN, who happened to be holding a meeting in nearby Club Parallaxis. Fighting broke out between some members of the two parties, while others concentrated on removing the programs. With most of the programs removed, concentrated sections of both organizations began a fierce battle that ended when Cryptos, supported by his operatives, who at that point held a numeric superiority at the scene, managed to defeat the Kid. Cryptos called a retreat, declaring the Cypherites' job complete. When his troops rallied, and the operative Tygrius revived him, the Kid led them to remove the last of the override codes in the area.



Pray by Godgiver

Searching for Halborn around the site of his clash with Carlyne in the Slums, Ookami suffered domination by override programs infesting the area. Merovingian operatives called in to locate her had to resist her out of control attacks, but, retracing her steps, located Halborn, badly injured and holed up in a decrepit apartment building. When the overridden Ookami found them there and resumed her attacks, operatives asked Halborn if he could remove the overrides on her program; he forcibly rebooted her, saying this might cure her, if she survived the process. Making their way through surrounding override codes and hostile operatives, the operatives led Halborn to temporary security in nearby Club Duality, where Beirn met them, inviting Halborn to hide and recuperate in the safety of the Merovingian's extensive underground network. Halborn insisted that he had no time to waste in getting to the Oracle, but was unable to put up much of an argument in his severely weakened condition, and Beirn whisked him away.

Chapter 9.3.5

The Oracle crossed a few wires to speak to Zion operatives individually, but was uncharacteristically at a loss for words, saying that she couldn't say what she wanted to say, but that nevertheless she felt she'd made the right choice.

The Machines found code fragments in the override-infested Richland area that somehow had not been affected at all by the fallout from the clash between Halborn and Carlyne. Analysts were able to examine these fragments along with those recovered weeks ago from Exiles, which were written in the Oracle's trademark "intuitive" style, and concluded that the fragments were left over from the process of writing a kill code.

The Merovingian arranged a distraction for Carlyne, enabling the wounded Halborn to bypass him and head for northern Richland, still intent on locating the Oracle.

EPN found the Morpheus simulacrum, and asked him about the mysterious encrypted code given them by the Oracle. The sim told them that she may have chosen them precisely because they are able to choose for themselves. He also suggested that while the Matrix is a system of control, Zion, in opposition to the Matrix, could be considered a system of control as well. This conversation was interrupted by a Cypherite attack led by Veil.

A forecasted outbreak of the Smith virus arrived in the city, its manifestation strengthened here and there by the presence of override programs.

Merovingian operatives attempted to steal some information from E Pluribus Neo, but this was foiled when the Exile contact used by the Merovingians operatives turned the data back over to EPN, apparently in repayment of a favor.

The Cypherites stole information on potentials, among other things, from a Zion system in Richland, although the operation was complicated by attacks from override codes in the area.

Ghost led Zion operatives into Richland in search of the Oracle, but found only override programs and Halborn, who showed his violent impatience at operative interference in his plans.

Chapter 10.1.1

Although he terminated the Oracle, his last apparent hope for retrieving the program he craves, Halborn remained inside the Matrix. The Machines asked him to leave, but he refused, hinting that he had a new plan in mind. Meanwhile, Carlyne met with Zion, declaring that he was working on a more direct means of removing Halborn.

Flood ran Merovingian operatives through a review of the Oracle's actions leading up to her termination, concluding that she orchestrated recent events in order to achieve something relating to either to the program Halborn seeks, or to the intruders themselves. A small group of Zion operatives led by Deffdog rescued two Exiles, Palorina and the Evaluator, from an Exile gang that had kidnapped them.

Machine operatives defended the ZAITSO program from EPN and Merovingians, and succeeded in retrieving information from it relating to a series of mysterious "image fragments." ZAITSO was then sent back to officer SIMLO for repairs.

Ookami and a band of Merovingian operatives hunted for Seraph, Sati, and the Morpheus simulacrum in Mara and Westview, but found their usual haunts abandoned. Finally, at the Abandoned Subway, they found the exiled monitoring program Lo Ruhamah, who spoke of other worlds beyond the Matrix before vanishing herself.

E. Pluribus Neo operatives found Halborn attacking Carlyne in a building downtown. Operatives restrained Halborn while Carlyne escaped. Frustrated by a barrage of hindering attacks from the operatives, Halborn retreated. Afterwards, Carlyne told EPN that Halborn had tried to run a trace program through his RSI, and thanked them for intervening.

The Architect had a group of Machine operatives brought to the Oracle's apartment, where he questioned them about their outlook on the current situation. The operatives had many questions as to what could be done to solve the threat posed by the intruders, particularly Halborn, but the Architect did not respond to these directly. He did remark that Halborn's "predicament" was the result of a choice Halborn had made a long time ago, overlooking the long-term drawbacks in favor of immediate benefits--a typically human decision.

Chapter 10.1.2

Halborn attacked one of Zion's broadcast control clusters in the Matrix for reasons that were not immediately clear. Carlyne mentioned that Halborn is probably trying to shut him down by attacking his hovercraft.

Carlyne met with Agent Pace and Machinists, telling them that once Halborn was removed from the Matrix, he'd see to it that Halborn's access was restricted by "the Oligarchs." The Machines moved on to investigate the encrypted codes the Oracle gave to the Cypherites and E. Pluribus Neo. Veil said that the Cypherites hadn't been able to crack the encryption, but that they were keeping the file safe outside of the Matrix. Subterfuge by Agent Gray and Machine operatives led Agent Gray to determine that E. Pluribus Neo were likely to be keeping their encrypted file at their base in Zion's old city.

A surly Halborn agreed to meet the Merovingian, but refused to discuss his goals, or the program he's been looking for, citing a concern that Carlyne might find a way to use such information against him. Halborn went on to say that he could get rid of Carlyne if he could find his ship; he also mentioned a location "800 miles away" to the northwest, in relation to Carlyne.

Halborn attacked an E. Pluribus Neo stronghold in the slums, but was repulsed by operatives, although not until he had damaged the file system on the servers there.

The Machines launched a small Sentinel attack on EPN's base in old Zion, in tandem with an attack on a high-ranking EPN hovercraft. Operatives within the Matrix delayed contact between the assailed crew and the Kid, preserving the attack's element of surprise, and allowing Sentinels to capture the craft. Data returned by the Sentinels from the base and the captured ship indicated reinforced defenses at the old city, but a high probability that E. Pluribus Neo did not maintain a central mainframe there.

E. Pluribus Neo located and held Halborn while Carlyne tried to run a trace of his own through Halborn, but Halborn had already equipped himself with a countermeasure to the trace routine. Carlyne said that there were other methods he could try.

Having heard rumors of Commander Lock's imminent recovery with EPN from injuries sustained during the Machine and Cypherite attack that destroyed Zion's old mainframe, Veil led an attack on an EPN hideout, trying to crack their computers to search for more information about Lock. A counter-attack by Shimada and EPN operatives foiled the Cypherite plan, despite Veil's defeat of Shimada during the pitched battle.

The Merovingian and his operatives captured Machine mapping data on the area Halborn had referred to, 800 miles northwest of the Machine city. The data showed that the mountainous region there was avoided by Machine patrols.



The Subway by odj

Chapter 10.1.3

At Niobe's insistence, Carlyne gave Zion rough descriptions of the advanced ships used by himself and Halborn. Zion captured information from a Machine surveillance database that seemed to confirm the descriptions given by Carlyne; the database also contained a record of a ship like Carlyne's that was present at the Machine city over two years ago.

Halborn demanded the location of Carlyne's ship from the Machines, but they told him their ability to give out such information was restricted, and suggested that he check with the Cypherites--Veil, specifically. Veil told Halborn that she had some interesting things to show him in the Real.

The Merovingian and the General determined that the area to which Halborn had referred, 800 miles northwest of the Machine city, was classified as a "no fly" zone by the Machines, and avoided by their Sentinel patrols, although other patrols were blocking the General's route to the area. Merovingian operatives attempting to disrupt Machine Sentinel control routines found that command protocols given to them by the General no longer worked, but the General obtained updated data by capturing a Machine Sentinel, allowing operatives to disable the Machine systems long enough for the General to make his way past their patrols, and continue on his way to the blackout zone.

When Sentinel attacks still proved a hindrance to his progress, operatives got a commando, Lieutenant Petrov, through to a Machine mainframe, where he uploaded his own program into a Machine Sentinel, buying the General time by attacking the other Machines in that Sentinel's squadron.

Cypherites, assisted by a spy named Pernicia, decimated the crew of a hovercraft commanded by Zion's Captain Suda, and captured data that Veil turned over to Halborn. Halborn very pointedly did not invite them along, but Veil intimated that the Cypherites would be flying somewhere with Halborn in the Real.

A further attempt by Merovingian Exiles to disrupt Machine Sentinel routines was overcome by a quick response from Machine operatives, who wiped out the Exile group, found in the vicinity of Pendhurst-Amaranth plaza. Beirm rallied Merovingian operatives, and defeated most of the Machine programs remaining in the area, but faced stiff resistance from the Machinists, and was even forced to reconstruct by the Cypherite operative SaintDaniel.

Halborn attacked a Zionite hovercraft in the Real. One of their crew members, Ramin, managed to jack into the Matrix, where he contacted Zion operatives. With assistance from Ghost, Halborn was called into the Matrix on the pretext that the Machines had agreed to give him the program he wanted. Disguised Zionite operatives stalled Halborn long enough for Ramin's crippled hovercraft to reach safety.

Colt hurried through the city's bars and clubs, apparently looking for his ship's mechanic. Despite help from operatives, he was unable to locate his crewmate, and jacked out after complaining about Commander Lock, and the loss of his old crewmate, Mauer.



You Need to Come With Us Sir by odj

Shortly thereafter, EPN and Zion hovercraft transferring Lock from the EPN base in Zion's old city to New Zion were attacked by Machine, Cypherite, and Merovingian fleets. After a prolonged battle, the transfer of Commander Lock from EPN Captain Steele's "The Hand of God" to Zion Captain RedBindi's "The Titan" was completed successfully, and New Zion prepared to welcome their old Commander to the city.

Chapter 10.1.4

Halborn destroyed a Zionite hovercraft that was following his ship; the crew had tried luring Halborn into scan range at Carlyne's suggestion. Although the crew were killed, Carlyne said that the partial information they'd returned might help him finish a program he'd been working on to eliminate Halborn.

Halborn, angry at finding himself in the middle of a large hovercraft battle after following coordinates given him by Cypherites, demanded to see the Machines again, but the Machines did not meet with him. Halborn took his anger out on Cypherites inside the Matrix, and muttered about operatives being manipulated by someone who knows all about the program he's after.

Machine programs pursued Merovingian operatives and commandos, seeking to prevent further Merovingian interference with Sentinel systems. Although the Machine programs were eliminated in part by taking advantage of one of Halborn's Accelerator programs, the Merovingian declared that Halborn's usefulness to him was at an end.

Niobe led Zion operatives to a Cypherite installation where they'd detected a spike of override activity, and they found Cypherites and Cryptos there, as well as a Decelerator program, which caused problems for Zionites and Cypherites alike, as well as for some Merovingian operatives seeking to cash in on the confusion. Cryptos departed, and the Zionites sealed off the area, but did not, as Niobe had hoped they might, find solid information on a link between the Cypherites and Halborn, which their joint presence at the scene of Commander Lock's transfer had led her to suspect.

Agent Pace and Machine operatives warned Halborn that his ship had probably been compromised by terrorists. Despite an attack by EPN operatives armed with code pulse devices, Halborn thought little of the warning, saying that everyone could go to hell as far as he was concerned.

Cypherites running checks on their computer systems found override programs at some locations. E. Pluribus Neo, using captured data, made their way to one of these installations as well, where a fight erupted between Cypherites, EPN, and override programs. The Kid defeated the outnumbered Cryptos, and E. Pluribus Neo managed to gain temporary access to the Cypherite mainframe at the site, but they only had time to extract fragmentary data from it before the Cypherites finally secured the mainframe.

Zionites found and fought Halborn in the Historic District. Carlyne appeared on the scene and distributed instances of a special program to a group of the operatives, saying that if they could hit Halborn with it, it should be able to disable his broadcast signal at the source. The operative Corebus was able to bypass Halborn's defensive routines and strike him with the program. Halborn fell to the ground, inert. Carlyne said that it looked like the program had worked, although he'd have to check his data before he could be sure.

Merovingian operatives accompanied by Beirn tried to persuade Carlyne to remain in the simulation, entertaining him at Paradise Lost, but Carlyne, although apologetic, was adamant about having to depart, for various reasons, most of which he did not describe.

Chapter 10.1.5

Carlyne thanked Zion for their help, saying he was going to leave the Matrix now that Halborn can no longer jack in due to his ship having been disabled, and that he had to leave to take care of certain concerns, one of which was ensuring that Halborn would not be able to return. Carlyne had a similar message for the Machines, saying that he hoped there were no hard feelings. With the intruders and their override routines out of the picture, the Machines mobilized their programs to begin fighting Zion once again.

Cryptos theorized that the override routines had been able to operate by taking advantage of a fundamental vulnerability in the simulation. Having noticed that they had no controlling effect on his own RSI, which is partly Machine code, he declared his intent to begin working on an algorithm capable of resisting the override programs, using his own code as a starting point.

The General reached the Machine no-fly zone on the Earth's surface, northwest of the Machine city, and encountered a heavily fortified facility. Unable to penetrate the facility's defenses, his Sentinels found a data conduit nearby. Tapping into the data stream, they encountered unusual data protocols, only partially matching known Machine formats. Merovingian operatives within the simulation forced their way into highly secured Machine servers, and, after much effort, located a data type similar to what the General had found. Using this new information, the General's soldiers began decoding the foreign data feed, but their transmission was cut off just as they sent back a partially scrambled decoding identifying the data stream as part of a massive system labeled the "Oligarch Network."

Operatives encountered override programs on rooftops across the city, possibly remaining from a last-ditch effort by one of the intruders.

The Exile Rose, having heard that the intruders had left, took a bold trip from her station in Southard to the heart of Downtown with the help of a couple operatives.

Ghost visited the site of Captain Suda's ambush and death at the hands of Cypherites in Widow's Moor. He discussed the possibility of larger motives or relationships behind the recent events surrounding Suda's death, including the actions of the intruders, and the attempted interception of Commander Lock by Cypherite and Machine hovercraft. This discussion was interrupted by an Archivist, who demanded that Ghost and the operatives with him leave the construct, enforcing this command with a swarm of Gargoyles.

Zion operatives pursuing Machine Data Technicians in the Datamine construct crossed paths with Captain Raeder, apparently an officer in the security division of Supersymmetric Research, the company who had owned the artificial island. Raeder rambled on about research, experiments, and bureaucracy while attempting to expel the "trespassers."

In a remarkable coincidence, with the departure of the intruders, massive parties broke out in the simulation, with Merovingian operatives packing the Hel Club for a party hosted by Les Enfants Terribles, and operatives from all organizations partying it up in Club Duality.

Machine operatives were called in to deal with an Exile sniper attacking pedestrians in Morrell. Operatives worked to locate the sniper by posing as civilian targets. The taciturn Agent Griffin was concerned that the way in which this was implemented gave the sniper an opportunity to escape, but nevertheless he was located and neutralized by operatives.

Cryptos summoned Cypherite operatives to Zero One for a test against programmatic enemies, including Accelerated programs. Cryptos studied the combat sessions, and said that the information gathered would help him in his research into the override codes.

Operatives encountered override programs on rooftops across the city, possibly remaining from a last-ditch effort by one of the intruders.

An unidentified broadcast signal was briefly detected in northeast Richland. Agent Gray asked operatives to report any further information found on the signal.

Chapter 10.2.1

Colt reported to Zion that his old crewmate Mauser, thought to have been killed rescuing Lock from the destruction of Zion, had been seen in the Matrix. This was doubly surprising since Mauser never had jacks for entering the simulation. Zion picked up readings thought to be Mauser at several hardlines, and at an internet café, but did not locate the man himself.

With the departure of the intruders, the Machines resumed anti-Zion operations in the Matrix, disabling their computer systems, and interrupting coppers' awakenings. Some Machine operatives, however, encountered a large Zionite force headed by Niobe, who stated Zion's determination to resist offensives by the System.

Signals between the Matrix and the Machine no-fly zone becoming too weak to maintain communication with the General, Merovingian operatives inserted a program designed by Malphas into bluepills around the city, with the intention of using the EEG wiring and human energy fields of people in the pods to create a wide broadcast array, but the signal generated proved insufficient to reach the General.

The Machines sent operatives to delete a small group of override programs remaining in Zia. The operation was complicated by the unexpected presence of Zion captain Niobe, enemy operatives, and nearby overridden Agent programs.

Cryptos led Cypherite operatives on an information-gathering mission against Zion strongholds, hoping to find out more about the mysterious broadcast signal picked up earlier by Zion in Richland. No pertinent information was found, and the Cypherites discussed the possibility of Zion themselves lacking further data, and of recent occurrences suggestive of a larger conspiracy.

Veil and her operatives infiltrated Zionite hovercraft to intercept a courier, capturing data, programs, and a copy of a message from Zion's Councillor Dillard to Commander Roland, telling Roland that ex-Commander Jason Lock was not due to be reinstated.

Merovingian operatives helped an operative named Medea gather information from broadcast towers in Downtown. The information was the final ingredient needed by Medea's crew to set up a new, more powerful communication relay to the General on the Earth's surface, but on the verge of completing the station, the crew was wiped out by Machine Sentinels.

Colt called for a sweep of hardlines across the city, hoping to find his old friend Mauser, who still had not contacted Zion. Mauser's signal was narrowed down to the vicinity of Mannsdale, where he was eventually seen heading for a hardline, but when he spotted the operatives around the phone booth, he made a dash for a pay phone down the street, and vanished.



The Dark Angel by JetBlack

Chapter 10.2.2

Zion found that the line Mauser had escaped through was part of an old, pre-Truce Zion hardline network to which only certain operatives had been given access. Zion's current data on the network was incomplete, since some was lost when the Machines sacked Zion's mainframe, and it was also suspected that some areas of the network had never been documented.

After some difficulty in navigating the network, Zion operatives encountered Mauser, who, before exiting along a spliced restricted line, said only that he was working to win the war.

Machine operatives worked with law-enforcement officials to investigate break-ins by the individual said to be Mauser. Evidence of computer tampering was found, leading to the discovery of a backup log showing that one of the tampered computers had been used to connect to a remote system via network tunneling using an unknown, encrypted protocol.

The Merovingian, needing to re-establish contact with the General, stranded on an investigative mission in the Machine no-fly zone 800 miles northwest of the Machine city, sent operatives to find a way to improve the communication link. Research indicated that cloud seeding of the mysterious, global storm, created early in the Man-Machine war by a human project called "Operation Dark Storm," could possibly boost communication range through a weather phenomenon known as "tropospheric ducting." Specially-equipped commando Sentinels were dispatched to begin the seeding operation along the route to the no-fly zone.

Theresa Morton, a bluepill, helped E. Pluribus Neo locate a phone line on the old restricted network in Downtown, near a terminal that had been hacked by Mauser, and investigated by the Machines. Zion operatives caused a distraction elsewhere in the city to keep the Machines away from E. Pluribus Neo during the investigation, but when EPN tried accessing the line, security quickly appeared on the scene in large numbers. Morton was taken into Machine custody.

Machine operatives fought to protect mechanic programs as they modified hardlines in Downtown to prevent access by Mauser's unusual broadcast signal. Strong resistance from E. Pluribus Neo and Zion operatives forced the Machines to send successive mechanic programs in order to complete the work.

Soon afterwards, E. Pluribus Neo operatives hunted for possible unmarked hardlines around the city, particularly in Downtown. Machine and some Merovingian operatives hindered the search, but it was hoped that the line location data gathered would lead to the mapping of more of the hidden network.

Merovingian operatives seeking more information on the "Dark Storm," with the goal of improving the tropospheric ducting project, located a program named CAR80N in One Zero. CAR80N, claiming to be a pre-war Zero One assembly line worker, proved to have very limited data on the storm and its origin, but gave what may have been a uniquely first-hand perspective of Machine attitudes at the time in which Operation Dark Storm was put into operation. CAR80N's reminiscence painted the picture of a peaceful Machine population forced into war by human jealousy that they did not understand.

Chapter 10.2.3

Zion began the process of shutting down known sections of the old restricted access hardline system, now compromised by Mauser, and possibly under threat of scrutiny by the Machines. Progress along one of the branches came to a sudden halt when a Decelerator program, one of the intruder overrides, appeared nearby, its command routines scrambling the line.

The Machines began investigating the restricted line system, using data captured from Zion's old mainframe, as well as intelligence gathered by spying on Zion operatives, to determine that an unusual broadcast signal associated with the system--possibly Mauser's Matrix connection--was coming from the vicinity of old Zion.

With the tropospheric ducting effect of the seeded Dark Storm re-enabling communication with the General in the distant Machine no-fly zone, the Merovingian started looking for Machine links that would help unscramble complex data found in the strange network there. Data was obtained, but the General's comm link into the Matrix was severed just after he relayed a report of an incoming missile attack on his forces, from an unknown source.

E. Pluribus Neo helped the ex-Zion operative Grace work out some personal issues with her nemesis Ginjiro, leader of the Silver Dragon gang, in exchange for whatever she could tell them about Zion's old restricted hardline network. Grace showed EPN the phone line in Furihata that was her appointed emergency exit when she worked there for Zion, but said that she had never used it, and that Zion had informed her that the system was being shut down when the Truce with the Machines went into effect.

Merovingian operatives helped a commando program salvage flight data from the General's downed Sentinels in the no-fly zone. Retrieving the remains of their programs after these were returned to the Matrix by the commando, it was found that just before they were destroyed by missiles, some of the General's Sentinels had detected a distant ship matching the profile of the craft used by the intruders, Carlyne and Halborn.

Now able to access sections of the restricted line system, Zion operatives chased Mauser through unmarked lines across the city. They caught up to him several times, but he did little to acknowledge them, uttering only one sentence in Downtown, and ignoring his old crewmate, Colt, before vanishing through a phone near the Hel Club. A Runtime program appeared where he had been standing, bringing overridden Machine programs that attacked the assembled Zion operatives, and disabling the line Mauser had used to escape.

The Machines captured E. Pluribus Neo scanning stations on the surface above old Zion, and accessed their control interfaces inside the Matrix to begin using them to help pinpoint Mauser's broadcast. But, much to the surprise of both the Machines and E. Pluribus Neo, the scanning station network security systems, which had been disabled in the earlier Machine attack at the surface, suddenly re-engaged, forcing the Machines to give up the attempt.

Chapter 10.2.4

Mauser's course through Zion's old restricted line system ran through Merovingian territory, causing problems for the Zionites tracking him, and for the Merovingian and his Exiles, who found themselves victims of the theft of the topographic data on the no-fly zone they had stolen earlier from the Machines.



Run by Garutachi

The Machines, encountering an unexpected error message when trying to capture surface scan data from EPN computers, resort to the internet black market in order to obtain information on EPN's rescue of Jason Lock, in which Mauser, according to Lock's account, had been involved. Lock's account contained noteworthy discrepancies, however, not the least of which was that Sentinels were supposed to have killed Mauser, in spite of the fact that, according to the Machines, they had no Sentinels in that area at the time. After obtaining a copy of flight data from the EPN ship that had picked up Lock from the ruined building on the Earth's surface where he said he had been hidden by Mauser, the Machines realized that the building was the same lab where, roughly nine months earlier, they had found and killed Danielle Wright, whose connection to Zion's mainframe had then become the key to the Machine destruction of Zion's former city. Agent Gray suggested that Mauser, a highly skilled technician, may have salvaged Wright's technology from the ruined lab, which could explain some of his surprising capabilities in the simulation.

E. Pluribus Neo, following up overheard police reports of a person matching Mauser's general description in Westview, ran into dedicated Morpheus follower Joshua Maston, who said that police may have had Mauser confused with the Morpheus simulacrum, whom he had just encountered in the area.

A previously unknown operative contacted the faction Temet Nosce, asking for help in reclaiming his former life from a program the Machines had put in his place. His attempt to assassinate the program was brought to an abrupt end by Agent Griffin, who shot him dead, and explained to the operative whose cooperation he had hired that the assassination target was a real bluepill, and that the would-be killer was in fact an exiled program. The Temet Nosce operative was skeptical of the Agent's spin on the story.



In Hel by Garutachi

Machinists helped guide a team of operatives on foot through the raging electrical storm at the Earth's surface, searching for the fugitive Mauser's broadcast location. The furious storm claimed victims among the surface team, but, guided by operatives analyzing the scans they returned of the area, they succeeded in locating a Zionite "lightning gun" firearm at the edge of a large chasm in the Earth's crust.

Ookami and Merovingian operatives followed Mauser's erratic trail across Downtown, fending off Mauser's former crewmate, Colt, who was also looking for the evasive former technician of The Hammer. The Merovingians found Mauser just as he jacked out in a far corner of Creston Heights.

Chapter 10.2.5

Zion searched for whoever it was that was in Westview, Mauser or the Morpheus simulacrum, but found only an old disconnected phone line, Cypherites, and a cryptic message on a mysterious computer.

E. Pluribus Neo detected an unidentified small craft heading north from a deep tunnel location around old Zion. Searching the tunnels, they found a recently used site strewn with pieces of Sentinels and hovercraft. A terminal from one of the hovercraft was found to contain some data, which they set to work decoding.

The Machines located Mauser's RSI, and were moving to lock his signal, when the Morpheus Signal appeared in their scan control room, disrupting the procedure. By the time they could reinitialize the process, Mauser was nowhere to be found.

The General, returning from the Machine no-fly zone, sent back all of the data he had pulled from the mysterious network line found there. The data was found to contain circa-1999 traditional human network headers. These were tracked by Merovingian operatives to a private corporate provider, where they were ambushed by security guards from the Ouroboros Corporation.

A bluepill named Gerald Croyden complained bitterly about the difficulties of moving and coming back to the city, but persevered to attend his son's high-school graduation.

Merovingian operatives pumped Ouroboros tour guide Judie Lahler for information in Club Janus in her off hours. Judie, who leads tours in Ouroboros' corporate headquarters in Creston Heights, indulged in a number of drinks, and seemed unhappy about her job, calling it boring and restrictive. She said that the things she had to tell tour guests about the corporation were just silly lies, that no real work was done there, and that nobody ever told her anything.

Cypherites found the Morpheus simulacrum in a church in Westview. The simulacrum admitted that it had intended to be disruptive in its sudden return, and made mention of the difficulty of achieving peace. The simulacrum directed the operatives to a nearby construction yard, where they found E. Pluribus Neo operatives in the act of using Code Pulse Devices. The Cypherites eliminated the operatives and defused the devices.

E. Pluribus Neo shut down the Matrix interfaces to their scanning equipment around Zion's old city, after finding the Machines attempting to hack into the interfaces once again. Shimada said that from now on they would have to rely on indirect communication with the scanning arrays in the Real.

Machinists tracked down a dangerous escaped lupine, Vulg, and eliminated him. Their Exile informant, Rosaleen, startled by the sudden approach of one of the Twins, was killed by the trigger-happy Machine operative BlazinWolf.

Ghost and Zion operatives stopped a Machine attempt to hack a previously undiscovered section of Zion's old restricted-access hardline system in Park East.

The Effectuator was caught by operatives while trying to gather information at Kalt Chemical Engineering in Kedemoth. Kalt herself appeared on the rooftop, warning the group of operatives to disperse. A strong security force appeared on the scene shortly thereafter.

A small group of operatives found Persephone musing at an old bookshelf in a hidden study in the chateau. A conversation about the nature of love followed, and Persephone invited operatives to write down their own love stories to share with others.

Operatives found Ghost standing quietly in Debir Court, near the bench where the Oracle was killed. Ghost and the operatives talked about the war and the views of the opposing sides. Ghost remarked upon Machine insistence on remaining emotionless, and wondered if humans had reason to fear that Machines might become better at feeling emotions than humans, whom they have already surpassed in industry and science.

Disguised Cypherites infiltrated a party held by the Merovingian at the Hel Club. The operatives, in the guise of Exiles, attempted to get the Frenchman to talk about his ambitions in investigating the Ouroboros Corporation, but his replies were light-hearted and insubstantial. Ookami appeared, examined several of the Cypherites, and unleashed an attack of lupines that drove the operatives out of the club.

Chapter 10.3.1

Deciphering a cryptic message found while searching Westview several weeks earlier led Zion operatives to the Camon Heights Exile, Silver, who had already taken the precaution of going into hiding. When checking up on Silver's old business partner, Wright Research, the operatives heard of a break-in attempt at Wright weeks earlier by an individual matching Mauser's description.

Machine operatives took care of problems caused by EPN and Zion operatives, and asked a coppersmith meteorologist for an "intuitive" analysis of the heightened storm in the Real; the meteorologist's opinion was that the storm activity could last for some time, possibly growing worse. After hearing the report of these various operations, Agent Gray said that the most efficacious course of action at present would be putting a stop to the Merovingian's disruptive activities.

Merovingian operatives kidnapped an Ouroboros network manager, delivering him to Exiles for interrogation on means of accessing that company's secured data. They also found that they had been observed by a Cypherite spy during the course of this operation.

Operatives delivered data to the Effectuator in Ashencourte, where they encountered resistance by EPN forces. The transfer was completed, although EPN obtained another set of data that had been hidden nearby.

Niobe led a small group of Zion operatives into the Merovingian's chateau, looking for clues about what he was after at Ouroboros. Meanwhile, other Zion operatives sought to distract the Merovingian's attention by battling security forces outside his Hel Club; this battle grew quickly due to an unexpected attack by Cypherite operatives. Niobe and her team were located and chased from the chateau by a Twin and powerful Exile guards, but not before they confiscated some data.

Disguised Cypherite operatives snuck into Ouroboros, seeking to capture a sample of the Oligarch data said to be feeding into hidden computer systems there. During their search, they crossed paths with Merovingian Exiles, possibly pursuing a similar goal. The Cypherites overcame the Exiles and Ouroboros security forces long enough to extract some of the foreign data.

The Merovingian, annoyed by Cypherite interference, tracked down the Cypherite leader, Cryptos, and warned him against further disruptions. Cryptos said that he had wanted to obtain the Oligarch data sample from Ouroboros in order to advance his research into developing a counter-agent to the override codes used by the intruders.

E. Pluribus Neo used information obtained from Exiles, including a scheme captured from a Machine mainframe, to decrypt the file they had recovered from a hovercraft terminal found among bits and pieces of dismantled hardware in a maintenance tunnel near old Zion. They found



Two Futures Collide by odj

that the file contained a topographic map of the no-fly zone established by the Machines far to the northwest of the Machine city--the same area to which the Merovingian had recently dispatched the General and his Sentinels. In light of this coincidence, Shimada said that it was time EPN looked into the area themselves.

Chapter 10.3.2

Zion found nothing but hostile guards at the Wright Research facility Mauser appeared to have raided weeks earlier. Shortly thereafter, Pendhurst-Amaranth chairwoman Brenda Utley contacted Zion, and revealed that Wright Research was threatening to sue her company; Wright alleged that Mauser broke into their office at Pendhurst-Amaranth's behest, basing this on claims of connections between Mauser and Zion, and between Zion and Pendhurst-Amaranth, dating back to the Unlimit affair.

Cypherites contacted the Machines, confirming Merovingian raids on the Ouroboros Corporation, intended to retrieve information related to the intruders. The Machines located Merovingian forces attacking an Ouroboros office and repelled them, taking care not to harm the corporate guards at the site. Gray noted that Ouroboros had failed to notify the proper authorities of the attack by the Merovingian.

Merovingian operatives kidnapped an Ouroboros network manager, obtaining a list of Ouroboros network passwords from the information he supplied. They began putting the passwords to use, infiltrating Ouroboros systems, but encountered resistance from the Machines.

Zionites assisted Brenda Utley at a court-appointed hearing, attempting to resolve the Wright/P-A dispute. Although Utley and Zion strongly maintained their position that they had nothing to do with any action by Mauser, Wright Research's representative insisted that Wright had information to the contrary, and said that they would continue to press their claim.

An Ouroboros security guard attempted to kick Merovingian operatives out of a parking lot in Lemone. The guard put up a tough fight, and had hopes of being promoted to an easy job in network security, but operative reinforcements put an end to his hopes of landing a dream job.

Machine operatives investigating the disappearance of a SWAT unit encountered and pursued the Twins across Downtown, tracking them all the way to an Ouroboros complex, where the Twins were at work cutting through the company's guards. Machine operatives joined in the security melee around the Twins, who departed without much delay. The operatives were then quickly recalled by Agent Gray, who said that it was extremely important that the Machines avoid engaging Ouroboros security forces, as this could result in an alert being sent back to the real power behind Ouroboros: the Oligarchs.

Flood and Merovingian operatives disguised as Agents attempted to use their assumed federal authority to enter an Ouroboros lab, with the aim of confiscating valuable data. They were surprised when the Ouroboros guard at the site stated that their federal jurisdiction did not apply at the company's facility. A battle ensued, and although the operatives eliminated the guard, reinforcements eventually forced the operatives to join Flood in choosing discretion over valor. A safe distance away, Flood pointed out that Machine authority was evidently worthless when it came to dealing with Ouroboros.

Chapter 10.3.3

Brenda Utley, saying that her company, Pendhurst-Amaranth, was getting too much legal heat from Wright Research over an alleged break-in by Mauser, which Wright blamed on P-A, asked Zion to search for clues about Mauser's activity at the Ouroboros Corporation, rather than at Wright Research.

Utley put Zion in touch with an informant inside Ouroboros, where, after speaking with an Ouroboros security guard, Zion operatives found that a security incident at that company four weeks ago, about the time of Mauser's last known activity in the Matrix, was a hack attempt that came over the internet, cutting right through the Ouroboros corporate firewall. Zion captured the firewall server's log of the incident, which showed that data transferred in and out of the company's network during the attack used an encryption scheme bearing a resemblance to the encryption Danielle Wright used for Zion's revamped red pill program; this suggested that Mauser, or whoever was behind the attack, may have been using stolen Wright technology to hack into Ouroboros.



Storm Ahead by odj

The Machines stated that they've known Ouroboros is a front for the Oligarchs, a group whose number includes the two powerful "intruders," Halborn and Carlyne, who recently caused so many problems in the Matrix with their override codes. Agent Gray emphasized that trouble at Ouroboros could cause a security alert to bring Oligarch attention back into the Matrix, raising the spectre of another wave of overrides disrupting the simulation.



Roukan In Sakura by Garutachi

To prevent this possibility, Machine operatives attempted to set up a system inside Ouroboros' network that would redirect any communications being sent out into the Real, but had to abandon the project when powerful override programs appeared, disrupting the communication programs.

Merovingian operatives armed with captured passwords continued their exploration of Ouroboros' computer network. They encountered resistance from Ouroboros security and Machines, but a distinct lack of cooperation between those two forces somewhat alleviated the problem. Noting this, the Merovingian dispatched an operative to Ouroboros executives with a letter detailing Machine and Cypherite tampering attempts at Ouroboros.

Brenda Utley helped Zion operatives discover the name of a network engineer at Ouroboros, Sheldon Brewer, said to have access to a virtual map of the company's internal network.

Cypherite operatives impersonated tourists on a site visit to a large Ouroboros office building, while operative Marias snuck past guards on the upper floors and killed Ouroboros security officer Matthews. Veil hinted that Matthews had been in charge of sending out a security report.

Machine operatives located and eliminated an Exiled hacker, C0wb0y, who Agent Gray said was responsible for generating civilian currency inside the simulation in such vast amounts that it could destabilize the population's economy. Operatives began working with officer Vogt to track down and confiscate all of C0wb0y's hacked funds, which had been concealed in various investments.

Merovingian operatives seeking to distract public attention from their own target, Ouroboros, got help from gang leader Seven in creating a scandalous scene at a Wright Research office, where they also obtained security passcodes. Using the codes, the operatives broke into Wright Research headquarters, wrecking mainframes and leaving hacker programs designed to look as though they had come from rival corporation Pendhurst-Amaranth.

Chapter 10.3.4

Zion found that the Ouroboros employee with access to a map of that corporation's network, Sheldon Brewer, was an unassuming technician with the network data surgically implanted in his physical, pod-housed brain. This made obtaining the information difficult, but a red pill trace program and coordination with a hovercraft overcame the obstacle.

Wright Research declared their intention to go ahead with their lawsuit against Pendhurst-Amaranth, claiming that they had security camera footage of Mauser breaking into their facility, as well as other information demonstrating his ties to Zion, and Zion's close relationship with Pendhurst-Amaranth. Machine operatives delivered a subpoena to Pendhurst-Amaranth chairwoman Brenda Utley, requiring her to appear in federal court to answer questions about the case.

Merovingian operatives ran into a puzzling speed bump in their infiltration of the Ouroboros network: a missing connection between two active network sections. Attempts to study and locate the absent connection failed, and even the Effectuator became discomfited by the baffling problem. Setting it aside for the time, investigation continued along the rest of the network line, returning reams of financial data.

The Machines obtained operative help in questioning Brenda Utley about her company's involvement with Mauser and Zion. The P-A chairwoman emerged from a barrage of questions and warnings apparently unfazed. Agent Pace, backed up by an operative, caught up with Ms. Utley in Downtown, delivering a warning that if Utley's company continued to associate with Zion, it was possible that they could be subjected to a time-consuming federal audit.

A Zion operative, Negligible, made off with data Cryptos was using for his research into countering intruder override codes, making declarations to the effect that the Cypherites couldn't be trusted to use such information selflessly. Pursuing Cypherites managed to catch Negligible, and recover the data.

A disoriented Sheldon Brewer stumbled out of an apartment building in the slums, questioning nearby Machine operatives about the time and location. Brewer did not understand how he had gotten there, and grew concerned that he would be late for work, although he couldn't quite remember where his office was. An Ouroboros security officer appeared, curtly dismissed the Machine operatives, and took the confused Brewer back into the building.



Loading Area by Sykin

EPN operatives, with the help of the network map obtained by Zion, located the Ouroboros security server holding the record of activity on the company's network during the widespread hacking incident weeks earlier, attributed to Mauser. After overcoming heavy security at the site, the EPN operatives obtained a full log of the hacking incident, complete with the network addresses of the specific Ouroboros computers the attacker had targeted.

The Effectuator dragged Merovingian operatives back to the missing Ouroboros network link, taking another crack at solving the mystery. The search for information seemed fruitless until frustration grew among the search team, at which point network activity readings began to appear. Through experimentation, the team found that displays of emotion caused the readings to grow stronger. Furious emoting ensued, sparking a surprise outbreak of Accelerated Ouroboros security guards. These were defeated, but the team wasn't able to get a lock on the network link until Persephone arrived to assist in their performance.

Chapter 10.3.5

Using network addresses from a captured log of the hacking incident at Ouroboros attributed to Mauser, Zion operatives located data on an Ouroboros computer that referred to what may have been a location on the surface of the Earth, with information about power ratings and network links. This data display was suddenly cut off, and Seraph appeared, asking Zion to stop investigating the data, as their investigation could be harmful. Niobe was not happy about the interruption, but admitted that she still trusts Seraph.

Machines listened in on Ouroboros security transmissions to facilitate their pursuit of Merovingian forces attacking the company's network, where Machine operatives encountered evidence of violent clashes, as well as a powerful Decelerator override program. The transmissions and activity ceased when the operatives ran into Seraph, who warned them that their search must end.

Merovingian operatives overcame numerous obstacles, some with surprising ease, to find a computer terminal surrounded by powerful override programs and Ouroboros security teams. A heavy firewall protected the terminal, but penetrating it took less time than expected, and the triumphant operatives returned to a gleeful Merovingian with an incredible find: the "biological interface program" sought by the intruder Halborn.

The Kid and other EPN operatives battled Cypherites who had ambushed a courier transporting red pills. The operatives defeated the Cypherite leader, Satiare, and recaptured some of the pills, but the Kid found evidence that the pills had been tampered with, and a foreign program inserted into their carriers.

Zion operatives decided to visit the Kalt campus in Kedemoth, to ask Kalt to help Zion ally Brenda Utley and her company Pendhurst-Amaranth, which is dogged by a Machine-supported lawsuit from rival Wright Research. Kalt's receptionist had some trouble contacting Kalt at the operatives' request, and while they waited, an Agent arrived, asking them to leave the building. Most of the operatives did not cooperate with the request, and the Agent called in SWAT teams to disperse the crowd. While this met with some success, the Machine forces were eventually defeated by the Zionite teams. By this time, the receptionist had departed, and operatives were left wondering if it would still be possible to contact Kalt.

After a long day of business involving her husband Mr. Black, the Merovingian, and the Ouroboros Corporation, Dame White went to Club Haus to relax, escorted by her watchful, silent bodyguard, Ebony. The Dame ran across operatives at the club, running a "fight club" contest on the club's trendy whips-and-chains upper floor. The frosty Dame seemed amused by the energetic exhibition put on by the operatives.

Ookami encouraged Merovingian operatives to get in some "practice" by joining her in a street brawl with enemy operatives in Tabor Park, where many important lessons were learned.

The Effectuator threw a "Biological Interface Party" at The Sanguine Room, whose itinerary included the wide distribution of heady code snacks, Ookami and Malphas costume contests, and an exhausting battle against colorful ninja, all under the club's intense purple and white spotlights.

Veil and Cypherite operatives raided a warehouse in Camon used by Zion to store red pills. The Cypherites defeated the Zionites in the building and set fire to the pill containers, but then had to scramble to rescue bluepill workers who had unexpectedly lingered in the building's basement, while fending off a spirited Zionite counter-attack.

The youngest member of the powerful Spectrum family of Exiles, the Southard mission contact Rose, went on a shopping spree after using a hack to access the operative Marketplace from a hardline in Uriah. Operatives in the area provided helpful fashion tips and accessories.

Lurking around Mara, Beirn pondered the implications of the Merovingian's possession of the biological interface program. The ex-Unlimit expressed concern that the hunger of the powerful "intruders" for the program would lead to unpleasant changes in the Matrix.

A member of the Archivist Society invited operatives to a re-creation of the original Sleepwalker spotlight attack in the Sati's Playground archive construct, and a review of the powerful Sleepwalker "Security" team who led the defense of the spotlights.

The Kid contacted several operatives to make sure they knew about an upcoming EPN expedition to the Machine "no-fly" zone, and then helped them fight off attacks by hostile operatives.



Racing Through Downtown by odj



Hmm Upgrades by O-Link