Matrix

A game for the piecepack by Jeff Barrett

Version 1.0 December 7, 2003

For one player: About 20 minutes

Case sat in the loft with the dermatrodes strapped across his forehead, watching motes dance in the diluted sunlight filtered through the grid overhead. A countdown was in progress in one corner of the monitor screen.

The screen bleeped a two-second warning.

And one and two and –

Cyberspace slid into existence from the cardinal points.

from *Neuromancer* by William Gibson

Components

Tiles
Null Tiles (4)
Other Tiles (20)

Colored Pons (4)
Coins (5 in each color)

Generic Counters

Six-Sided Die

Data Structures
Data Forts
Ice

Ice Breakers
Power-Up Tokens

Brain Damage

Blind Luck

Goal

To Infiltrate and to occupy each of the four data forts with the corresponding (same color) ice breaker.

Set up

Shuffle the four data forts (null tiles) with six random ice (other tiles), and place face down. This is the data stack. Shuffle the rest of the ice and place face down on the data stack. Sort the coins by color into four stacks number side down (numbers do not matter). Place the brain damage counters in a convenient location. These represent points of brain damage incurred during a run on the matrix. In the basic game, a run immediately ends in brain death if one ever takes ten points of brain damage.

Runs are made on the matrix (a smooth, clear surface). The matrix has the structure of a two-dimensional grid. Ice and data forts are placed into the grid as they are encountered.

Basic game

Making a run

Execute the following steps:

(1) Choose an ice breaker (a pon) and a space contiguous in the matrix contiguous to the ice breaker breaker. An ice breaker in the matrix is contiguous to the four cardinal spaces (located up, down, left, and right). Diagonal spaces are not contiguous to an ice breaker in the matrix. All spaces in the matrix are contiguous to an ice breaker that is outside the matrix.

(2) If the chosen space in the matrix contains neither ice nor a data fort, install the top data structure from the data stack into the space and place on it a power-up token of the same color as the data structure. A data structure may only be contiguous to at most **three** other data structures. If installing a new data structure would violate this condition, it may not be installed. If the data structure can be installed, go to step (3); otherwise, go to step (1) and choose a new contiguous space.

(3) If the chosen space contains ice or a data fort **and no ice breaker**, roll the die to determine the current strength of the ice breaker. If the ice breaker color is the same as the ice or data fort color, the breaker strength is equal to the die roll plus one; otherwise, the breaker strength is equal to the die roll. In either case, the strength of the breaker can be increased by one for each power-up of the ice or data fort color discarded at this time. Go to step (4).

(4) If the ice breaker strength is greater than the data-structure strength, then the ice or fort is successfully broken. The strength of ice is equal to the number on the tile. The strength of a data fort is equal to six. Move the ice breaker onto the data structure and collect the power-up token on the data structure if there is one. The power-up token represents knowledge gained. In case of success go to step (6); otherwise go to step (5).

(5) If the ice breaker strength is less than or equal to the data-structure strength, take one brain damage. If the data structure is **ice**, then move the ice breaker onto the ice and collect the power up token on the data structure if there is one. The result of failing to break ice is just brain damage. But an ice breaker can only move onto a **data fort** if the breaker strength is **seven or greater** (that is, strictly greater than the fort strength of six). The result of failing to break a fort is brain damage and the inability to infiltrate the fort. The breaker stays where it is. Go to step (6).

(6) If the total amount of brain damage taken during the run is greater than or equal to ten, then the run ends immediately in brain death; otherwise, go to step (7).

(7) If each data fort is occupied by the corresponding ice breaker (the ice breaker of the same color), then **the run ends immediately and the runner wins**; otherwise, return to step (1).

Advanced game

The rules of the advanced game are the same as for the basic game except that one or more of the following options are added.

Minimize brain damage

Choose a target amount of brain damage (less than ten points) that you are willing to incur on the run before you start. You win if you successfully make the run while taking less than or equal to the target amount of brain damage.

Custom ice breakers

Instead of the basic game ice breakers use the corresponding pon to represent one or more of the following ice breakers. The base strength of these ice breakers is one less than in the basic game, but they each have an extra ability that can compensate. They also get the plus one strength bonus when challenging data structures of the same color as in the basic game. Distance to a target is the shortest number of steps **along a path of data structures** that would move a breaker to the target. Only steps in the four cardinal directions are allowed. And the distance is undefined if there is no continuous path along data structures to the target. A breaker outside the matrix is distance one to each installed data structure. The distance from any location inside the matrix to a location outside the matrix is undefined. The note d6 means the result of the roll of a six-sided die. The strength of an ice breaker is never less than zero.

Some ice breakers are stronger than others. Some work well only when appropriately matched. The standard way to choose an icebreaker is to pick one of the four pons, then roll d6 to determine what ice breaker of that color the pon will represent on the next run.

Black

(1) **Self-Fragment LISP**
Strength: d6 minus one
Ability: Take one brain damage to trade the position of this ice breaker with the position of any other ice breaker in or out of the matrix.

(2) **Ankara**
Strength: d6 minus one
Ability: Take one brain damage to increase the strength of Ankara by two on its next challenge. This ability may be used multiple times before the challenge.

(3) **Black Diamond**
Strength: d6 minus one
Ability: Take two brain damage to increase the strength of all ice breakers within distance five of Black Diamond by three for their next challenge.

(4) **Kuang Grade Mark Eleven**
Strength: d6 minus one
Ability: Take one brain damage to challenge directly any data structure within distance d6. Take the brain damage before rolling for the maximum distance to the target.

(5) **Assimilation Kuang**
Strength**:** d6 minus 1
Ability: Pay one of each color power-up (four total) and take one brain damage to move this breaker onto any installed data structure. Can move onto a data structure occupied by another ice breaker.

(6) **Wintermute Compiler**
Strength: 0
Ability: Take one brain damage to set the strength of Wintermute Compiler to 10 for its next challenge.

Green

(1) **Turing Scout Construct**
Strength: 3
Ability: If in the matrix, the strength of Turing Scout is equal to three plus the number of other ice breakers within distance three.

(2**) Trinity Prep**
Strength: d6 minus one
Ability: If in the matrix, Trinity may use the **sum** of the strengths of all contiguous ice breakers as its own strength. Diagonal spaces are not contiguous.

(3) **Klein Liar**
Strength: d6 minus one
Ability: One may use any color of power-up token to increase strength of Klein Liar by one.

(4) **Finn Construct**
Strength: d6 minus one
Ability: If Finn Construct is in the matrix, one may take two brain damage and pay one power-up token to switch the positions of any two ice breakers. The color of the power-up token must match the color of one of the ice breakers switched.

(5) **Flatline Dix**
Strength: d6 minus one
Ability: The strength of all ice breakers within distance three is increased by one for their next challenge.

(6) **Case-Curry Construct**
Strength: d6 minus one
Ability: If in the matrix, pay one of each color power-up token and take one brain damage to exchange the locations of any or all ice breakers in or out of the matrix. The same data structures that were occupied by an ice breaker before the exchange should be occupied after (possibly by a different ice breaker), and the same number of ice breakers (thought possibly different) should be outside the matrix).

Red

(1) **Sendai Sub-Street**
Strength: 3
Ability: Each red power-up increases the strength of Sub-Street by two

(2) **Chiba Cross Talk**
Strength: d6 minus one
Ability: May challenge any data structure within distance two.

(3) **Hosaka Prime**
Strength: d6 minus one
Ability: If Hosaka Prime is on a red data structure, add three to its strength.

(4) **Sliver Virus**
Strength: d6 minus one
Ability: Pay one red power up token to set the strength of Sliver Virus equal to the total number of installed red data structures (ice and forts) plus one. Pay one red power-up token at any time to reduce permanently the strength of the data structure Sliver Virus currently occupies by two.

(5) **Cray Envelope**
Strength: 1 if outside the matrix.
Ability: If Cray Envelope is in the matrix, its strength is determined by the color of the data structure it currently occupies: strength 1 if on blue, strength 4 if one green, strength 5 if on black, strength 10 if on red.

(6) Tessier-Ashpool S.A. Stealth Blade
Strength: d6 minus one
Ability: Instead of rolling for strength, the strength of Stealth Blade may be set to one plus the distance to the nearest other ice breaker. This ability can only be used in the matrix and only if at least one other ice breaker is in the matrix.

Blue

(1) **Zion Loop**
Strength: d6 minus two
Ability: If currently on a blue data structure, strength of Zion Loop is d6 plus the strength of data structure.

(2) **Dub Lattice**
Strength: d6 minus two
Ability: If in the matrix, instead of rolling for strength, the strength of Dub Lattice may be set to three plus the number of blue data structures within distance four.

(3) **Babylon Q**
Strength: d6 minus two
Ability: Pay any two power-up tokens and take one brain damage to move the data structure occupied by Babylon Q to any place in the matrix where it might be legally installed. Babylon Q moves with the data structure.

(4) **Dahlia Mix**
Strength: d6 minus two
Ability: Pay any two power-up tokens and take one brain damage to exchange the data structure occupied by Dahlia with any other unoccupied data structure in the matrix. Dahlia moves with her current data structure.

(5) **Viral Dub**
Strength: d6 minus two
Ability: Pay one blue power up and take one brain damage to exchange the positions of two **unoccupied** data structures in the matrix. Viral Dub must be contiguous with at least one of the exchanged data structures.

(6) **Enigma**
Strength: d6 minus two

Ability: Pay two blue power-up tokens and take one brain damage to exchange the positions of any or all **data forts** currently installed in the matrix. Breakers occupying forts move with the forts.

Game Notes

This game clearly owes much to the creative genius of William Gibson. If one is in any way interested in either the real or the virtual future, I recommend his books without reservation. *Neuromancer* is a good place to start.

 Best gaming wishes.