

HOW TO MODERATE A MATRIX GAME

Matrix Game Rules: *Start with a problem. Say what happens next. There is no order of play. Anyone can add to or alter what happens. All players may ask a player to roll if they don't like what they said. Roll 2d6. ≥ 7 : The action happens and cannot be altered. ≤ 6 : It does not happen and cannot happen in the game. The game ends when the problem is solved.*

Creating a game: Anyone can make up a Matrix Game. It only takes a few minutes. It requires no resources but time and players.

- Make up a problem that needs to be solved. This can be ripped from the headlines or something completely fantastic.
- Make up a list of stakeholders/main characters/factions. Limit this to around ten to keep the game from getting too complicated.
- Remember, Matrix Games are not simulations. They are a tool to explore imagination of what might happen in a given situation.
- Recruit 4 to 10 players. Grab a couple of six-sided dice, and get playing.

It helps to have paper, pens, and index cards to record what happens but they are not needed. Recording the game with video is just as good. Maybe even better because it can be posted for all to see.

Running the game: The player who creates the game is the host. That would be you, since you are reading this document. The host helps keep the game moving by encouraging players to make things up. The other players pick a character to champion.

Introduction: The host tells the players the situation and what problem they need to solve to end the game. The players then introduce themselves and who they are championing. The host then reads the rules and gets the game started.

Breaking the Ice: Players are naturally shy. Matrix Games ask them to do things that they don't normally do. It helps to start the game with the host going around the table and asking each player what their character was doing before the game began. This tricks the players into making their first actions of the game.

Encouragement: The host now steps back and lets the players play the game. They do this by asking "What happens next?" There is no order of play so anyone (even someone walking by) can chime in. Sometimes the host needs to single out a player and ask "What do you think should happen next?"

Breaking Impasses: Everything that is said happens but it can be overwritten by what is said next. Sometimes this leads to two players getting stuck in a loop. Any player may ask them to roll but, if no one else steps up to do this, the host calls for a dice roll. It is not uncommon for games to have no dice rolls or have just a few rolls.

Ending the Game: The host listens to what the players say. As soon as they resolve the opening problem the host ends the game. Games can also end when the allotted time has run out. Games frequently only take an hour to play.

Post game actions: In social games it is fun to go around the table one last time and ask each player what their character does after the game is over. This wraps everything up.

Debriefing: Never run a professional game without doing a post game debriefing. The time allotted to debriefing should be as long as the game play. This is when the lessons of the game are realized and the learning is cemented in people's memory. This can be an open discussion but it can also be done by the host asking each player a series of questions.

1. What did you do in the game?
2. What did you notice another player do that has not been mentioned yet?
3. What, in your opinion, was the most important thing to happen in the game?
4. What did you learn from the game?
5. What question does this make you ask next?

The Host: You will note that the host does not have any power in the game. They facilitate the game. They are not a game master or referee. A host needs to be inviting, encouraging, nonjudgmental, and graceful. A host maintains the social atmosphere to maximize player input. As a social host, the host does have the power to veto any action that destroys the collegiality of the gathering but this should be done sparingly.

Authors and Audience: The players are both the authors of the story of the game and the audience of it. Some players will contribute more than others. This is okay. Some participants learn more by just listening than they would by acting. Those who do act are not role playing. They are not limited to just what their character does. They say what everyone does.

Unpopular Actions: A player may say something that everyone objects to. If this happens, the offending player may be asked to roll for their action by every player in the game. The player needs to pass ALL of these checks for their action to happen.

Invitation to Create: And that is all it takes! I want to invite you to use this in any game you wish. You can use it for commercial games as well as non profit ones. All that I ask is that you let people know that Chris Engle invited Matrix Games in 1988 in Bloomington Indiana. It took 30 years to get the game this simple. I think you will find it a rugged little mule that can go almost anywhere.

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