

# Film fails to realize story's potential

David DiCerto/CNS

NEW YORK — Ragtag freedom-fighters, led by a messianic computer hacker, battle the machine overlords who have enslaved the rest of mankind in an illusory mind-prison in order to tap humans as an energy source in the special-effects lollapalooza "The Matrix Reloaded" (Warner Bros).

Inspired by the cyberpunk literature of Philip K. Dick, writer-directors Larry and Andy Wachowski, who redefined the sci-fi genre in 1999 with "The Matrix," pose age-old questions concerning the nature of reality and free will set against a neo-noir, futuristic backdrop.

The film's glamorized violence

overshadows an otherwise intriguing premise, making it little more than a technically ambitious shoot-'em-up. And while the high-octane sequel leaves the eye-popping visuals of its predecessor in the dust, it breaks no new ground story-wise.

This sequel takes up where "The Matrix" left off. In some distant Orwellian future, technology overtakes man as the dominant intelligence on Earth. A war ensues with homo sapiens coming out on the short end. The victorious machines see in mankind a cheap and efficient energy source by harvesting their neural electricity. People are bred in pod-like cocoons oblivious to their bondage because they are plugged in to a vast virtual-reality network — the Matrix

— which dupes them into thinking they are living normal lives.

Some people have escaped and wage a guerrilla war against the malevolent artificial intelligence from the sole remaining human outpost, Zion — a subterranean city near the Earth's core. Chief among the rebels is Thomas "Neo" Anderson (Keanu Reeves), a nebbish computer whiz, revealed in the first film to be "the One," the prophesied savior who will free the human race — recruited by the mysterious sage Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne) and his hellcat sidekick Trinity (Carrie-Anne Moss), now Neo's lover.

Neo, whose extraordinary ability to manipulate the Matrix has increased exponentially, must come to

terms with his messianic destiny, as an army of drones bore down toward Zion bent on mankind's extinction.

The frustratingly dense story line revolves around an enigmatic character called the Keymaker (Randall Duk Kim), who may hold the secret to humanity's ultimate victory.

The techno-heavy pretzel of a plot, coupled with a mountain of back story from the first film — which is never recapped — makes it nearly impossible for new viewers to make heads or tails out of what is unfolding on the screen.

Author Orson Scott Card once observed that science fiction is one of the few realms of modern culture where serious theological and philosophical reflection can still be prac-

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