

THE  
**BLADE RUNNER**  
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by James Delson

# OUT'S SOUNDSTAGE *Blade Runner*



**R**idley Scott is an artist and storyteller who has chosen the medium of film to spin his tales and envelop his audience in dreams. From his first motion picture, *The Duellists* (1978), it was evident that he had a rare combination of great visual sense, flair for character and feel for subject which very few filmmakers possess. Stanley Kubrick (*2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Barry Lyndon*, *Dr. Strangelove*) has it, as do the great Japanese director Akira Kurosawa (*The Seven Samurai*, *Ikiru*, *Dersu Uzala*) and David Lean (*Lawrence of Arabia*, *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, *Doctor Zhivago*). It's a compelling style that draws the audience into the story in such a way that they truly believe they are experiencing the events taking place on the screen, not just watching them from a crushed-velour movie house seat.

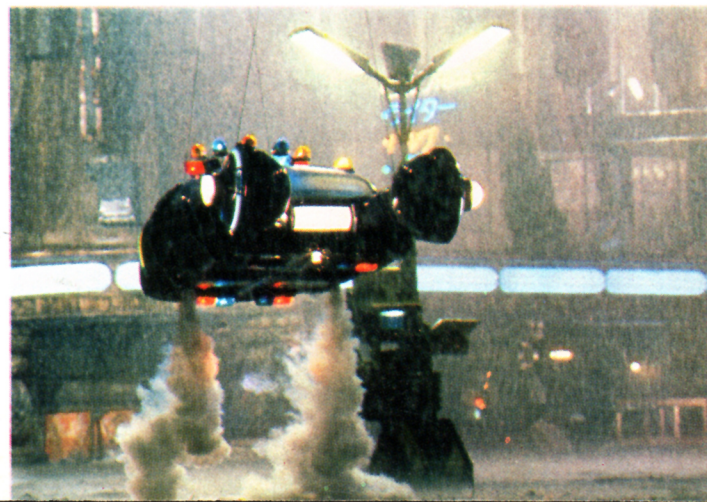
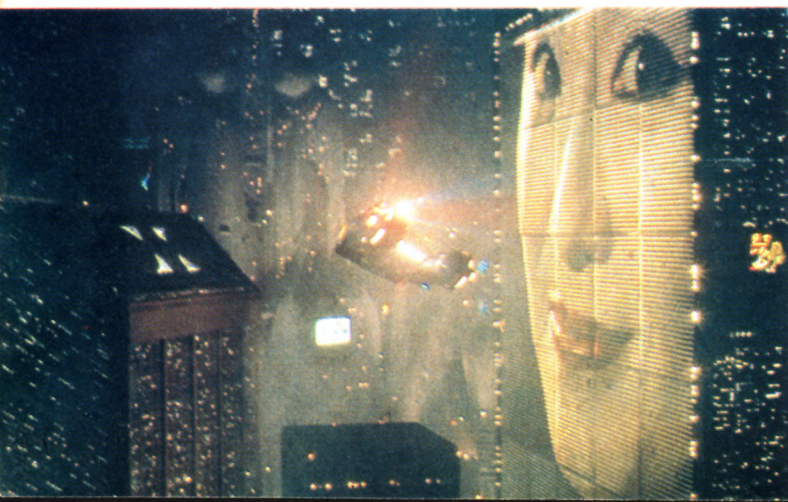
In *The Duellists*, Scott's breathtaking images of Europe in the Napoleonic Age, evoked the eerie feeling that some of the footage must have been filmed with the aid of a time machine in order to be so true to the period. And in *Alien*, he and his production team created a realistic look of what outer space would be like in the not-so-distant future,

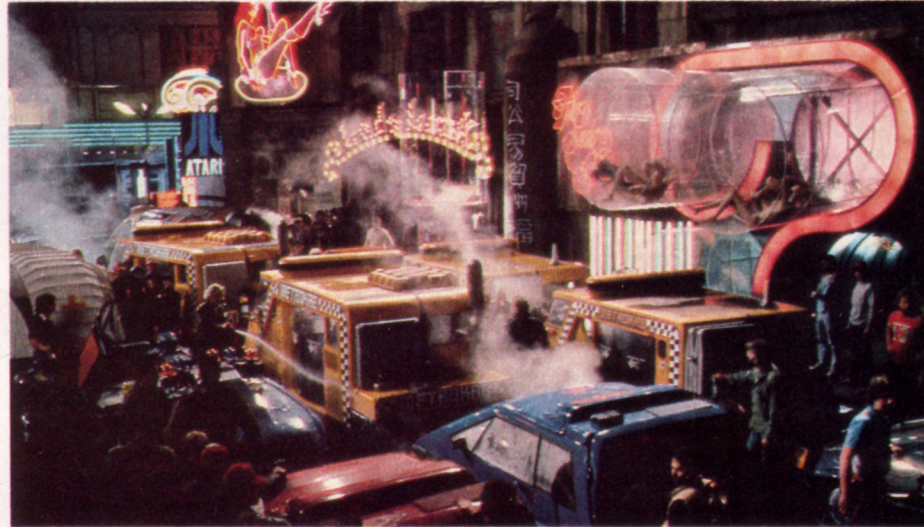
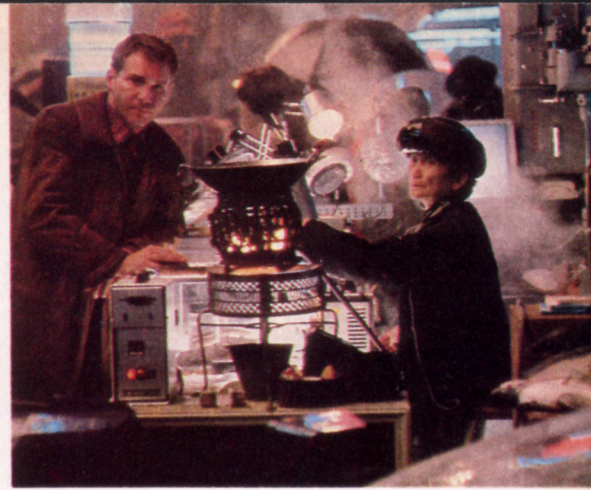
## 82's Sci-Fi Blockbuster Is "Multi-layered Shit-heap" of Futuristic Images

surpassing even *Star Wars* in detail and imaginative production design.

Now, with *Blade Runner*, Scott is doing to urban society what he did to space travel in *Alien*. His expert melding of a team of top-notch artists created the wonderfully authentic look of *Alien*. In *Blade Runner* he has drawn together another group of specialists: industrial designer Sid Mead, special effects artist Douglas Trumbull, production designer Lawrence G. Paull, art director David L. Snyder, costume designers Charles Knode and Michael Kaplan, storyboard artist Mentor Heubner, car designer Gene Winfield, and a huge support staff. Together under Scott's perfectionist supervision they have devised a believable future, where cities of seven-hundred story buildings house twenty-five million people, a world which harbors "replicants," humanoid flesh-and-blood life forms.

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Hannibal Thieu, an eye designer for replicants. In the center, Sean Young, as Rachael, saves Deckard's life by killing a replicant. A scene of street life, far right. Below, Sean Young, as Rachael, assistant to the head of the Tyrell Corp, and to the right, a futuristic street scene.



To the left, an odd inhabitant of the future. Joanna Cassidy as an exotic dancer, above and center.

On the left, top, Harrison Ford, as Rick Deckard, a blade runner out to catch Batty, and Rutger Hauer as Roy Batty, a rogue replicant. A "spinner", far left, bottom, flies past a huge sign. Another "spinner" as a flying police car.

## BLADE RUNNER

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"I don't like the way the future has generally been portrayed in films," Scott explained as we talked last April. "So rather than going with the by-now traditional 1984-type scenario we decided to try and present a very rich, multi-layered approach. Our future isn't an austere, militarist world. It's a busy, noisy, multi-national, multi-lingual place, with all the complications that brings with it. It's colorful and alive, a multi-layered shit-heap of a conglomeration."

Beginning to think about *Blade Runner* while still in the final stages of making *Alien*, Scott, a former artist and designer, drew doodles of costumes, scenes, characters and situations that he was struck by in the new screenplay. "That's how I formalize my thoughts on how to handle the material," he said. "I'm not just drawing a character, costume, or shot, I'm integrating myself into the total ambiance of the movie. By drawing it, I start to see it, or more appropriately, start to climb into it. It's very difficult to break away from one subject and start another, especially when you've worked on one project for so long. It's a matter of severing yourself from the umbilical cord of the previous movie in order to start the next one with a clean slate. Storyboarding the newest film allows me to make that separation."

Searching for a futuristic look for the film, Scott and designer Sid Mead decided on a style they called "retro-deco." "The term came out of the look," Scott said. "Everything in our world is built on top of or added to something else, which results in layered vehicles, buildings and other structures. Everything is 'retro-fitted' to keep on functioning, instead of being torn down and built from scratch. It's kind of like what's happened in Times Square, where people keep on adding false fronts to buildings to make the old dumps look better."

"If you stood in Times Square forty years ago and suddenly stepped into a time warp and popped forward to now, the changes would not be at all that significant," Scott conjectured. "The cars would be different, though a few might be the same. People's clothing wouldn't have changed that much. And the overall feel would only be different on a subtle level. People always change everything in sci-fi movies, which is fuckin' ridiculous. I used to live in a fourteenth century house, but in that house I had products by JVC, Westinghouse and Norelco, a bloody Ferrari, and a horse stuck in a stable. So it was a conglomeration of all things. The realistic way of looking at the future is to have something similar to what we have now, but with subtle changes. The Chrysler Building will still be there in forty years time."

"The world of 2023 is ruled by giant trading conglomerates as well as governments," Scott said. "Kind of like today, really. Except in the future the conglomerates will have more money than the governments, so they'll be the ones pushing outwards in space exploration, licensed by the government to exploit off-world natural resources."

And who will do the work in space that's too dangerous, boring, or time-consuming for humans? 'Replicants.' Man-made androids who mimic the way humans think and act. "They're the next step beyond assembly-line robots," Scott said. "They've got no memories, no mum or dad, nothing to relate to. And therefore they are supposedly much more suitable to jobs in outer space like mining, military work and exploration because they have less to lose than humans."

They're aware of their situation in life, which is essentially slave labor. But they never think of rebelling. They run as a kind

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***"It's the job of Harrison, as a 'blade runner,' (a detective who hunts down and exterminates rogue replicants) to eliminate the super-android."***

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of army. Meanwhile, back on earth, the Tyrell Corporation, which manufactures replicants, among other items, has developed a new generation called NEXUS-6. Instead of leaving their brains empty, on these models they've implanted past experiences, memories of childhood, and so forth, without informing them of the fact that they're artificial life forms with super-human powers.

Because they so closely duplicate human beings, replicants are outlawed on Earth. But in *Blade Runner*, when a "rep" called Roy Batty (Rutger Hauer), who's one of the new models, finds out what his true situation is, he decides to locate his maker to learn about his origins. And it's the job of Rick Deckard (Harrison Ford), a 'blade runner', (a detective who specializes in the hunting down and exterminating of rogue replicants) to eliminate the inquisitive super-android.

"Harrison's character is a kind of laconic, low-key Phillip Marlowe type," Scott said, "with a sardonic sense of humor reminiscent of those 1940s private detectives whom Bogart played. It's a rather unsympathetic job to have, and he doesn't like it much. In fact, he's retired from the force. But when

this situation comes up, he's called back to work."

Scott is very concerned that people don't begin to read social messages into his film. "It's an adventure," he said, "a mood piece. A comic strip. And it shouldn't be regarded as trying to be anything more." In the course of the film, however, Scott, a graduate of 3000 television commercials before he turned to features, did take the opportunity to make a number of solid jabs at the advertising community.

He has gigantic blimps circling the city, their three-hundred-foot screens advertising the latest products. "They throw everything at you, from birth pills, beer and cigarettes to government propaganda encouraging people to join up for off-world colonization." Scott said. "They're saying that space offers cleaner air, better life and more opportunities. We don't say where, of course. And I'm sure Carl Sagan would think it's all bloody insane because it takes so many years to get there, but that's a credibility bridge which the audience won't have to cross because the film takes place on Earth."

"People are going to have to take a lot on faith in this film," Scott said. "But that's what movies are all about. I mean, space exploration is only just beginning, and there are no seven-hundred story buildings yet. But on the other hand, when I was in Denver previewing *Blade Runner*, I was told they have a stadium there that's resting on 2½ inches of water. This enables them to shift the building's position, sliding it backwards and forwards. If they can do that now, I figure they'll find a way of setting up seven-hundred story buildings in a few decades.

"Though most of the action in *Blade Runner* takes place in the cramped, dark streets, we have huge city vistas as backdrops for the action to remind people where and when they are. Extremely wide shots with a great deal of advertising like fifty-story moving signs. And there's a lot of air traffic in the city. Corporate vehicles, police vehicles and others, flying about, taking off and landing on pads which will, by then, be included in every building. There's so much going on, with air traffic and these gigantic buildings, that you hardly see the sky."

While the rich and powerful live among the clouds, the low-lives of *Blade Runner* reside at street level, where the only alterations in the past few decades seem to have made an already overcrowded situation even worse. Traffic jams abound, while an almost continuous misty rain soaks the greasy streets. It is a world where light barely penetrates the mile-high canyons of buildings, and one where Deckard can stalk his prey without attracting undue attention from those around him, the odd inhabitants of the underbelly of this future society. ■