

THE
BLADE RUNNER
PRINT ARCHIVE

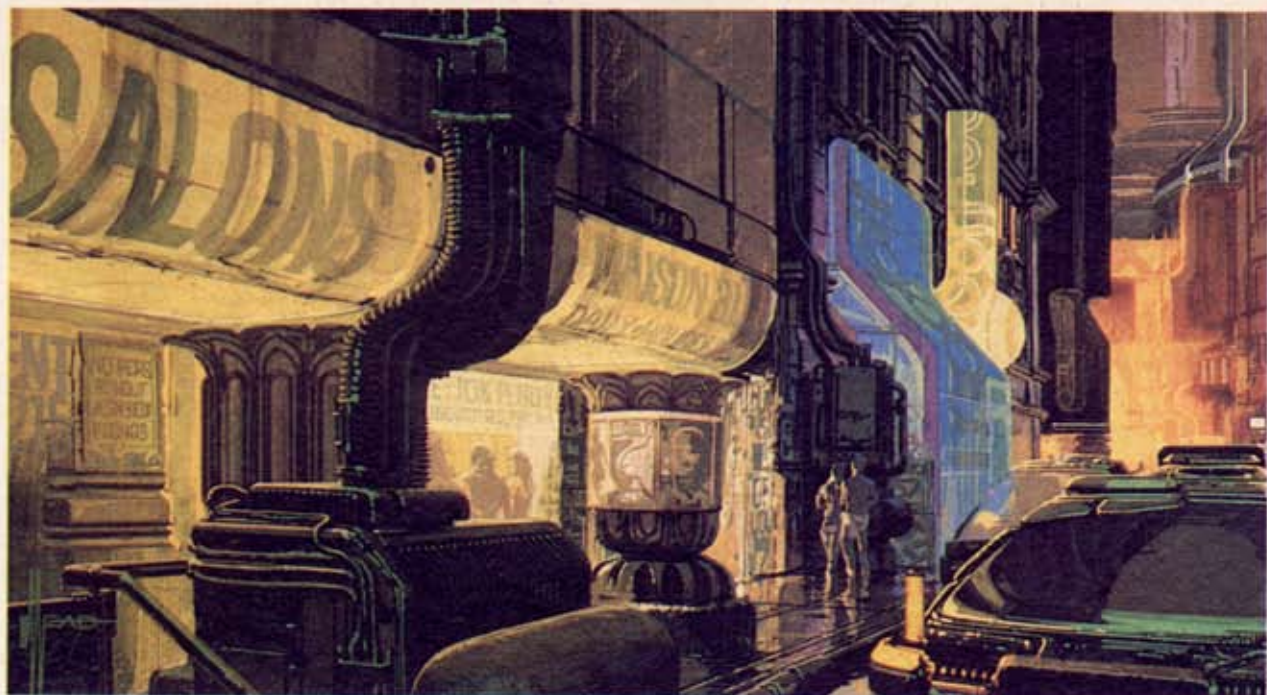


notes:

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by Claude Rathbone/
Lou Stathis

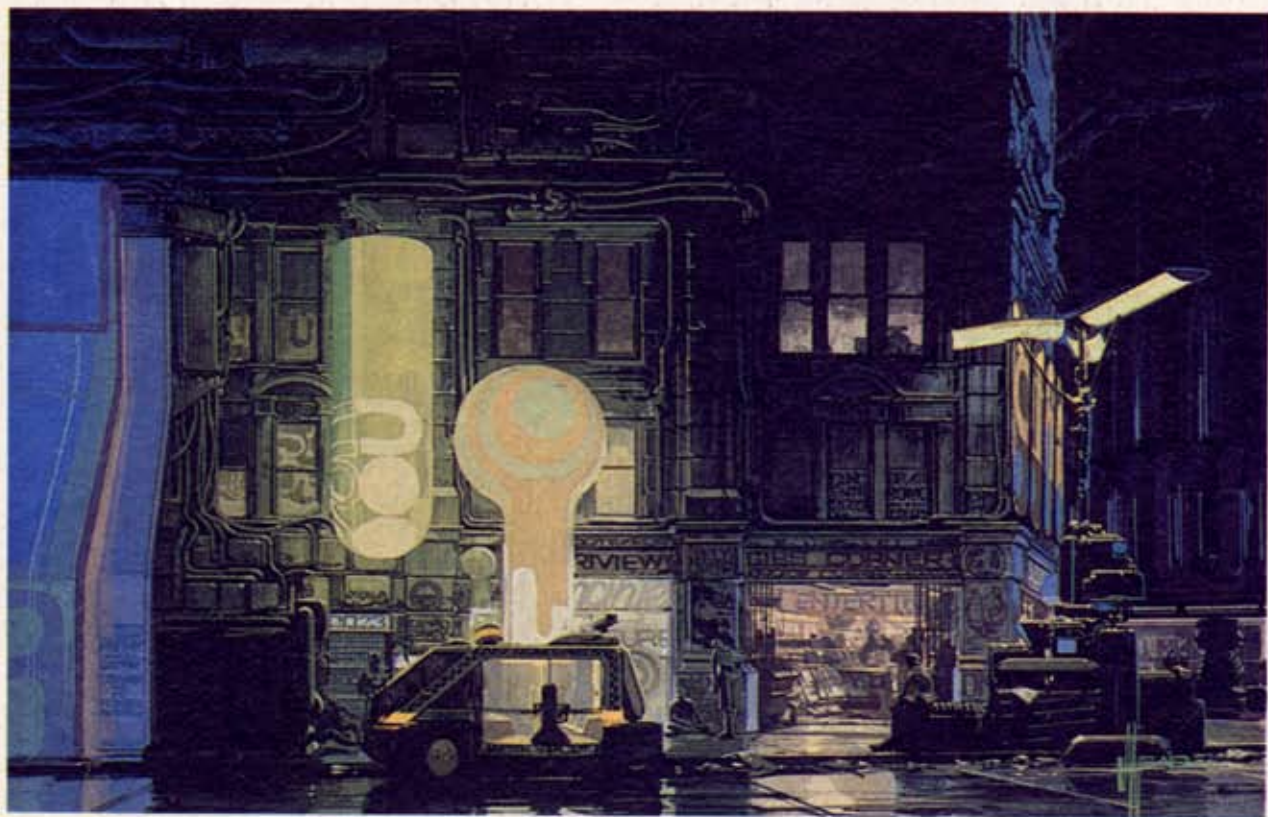
Lou Stathis



Production paintings by Syd Mead of two city streets from *Blade Runner*.

BLADE RUNNER

THIS IS THE CITY



Although Mead was originally asked to design just vehicles for the film, his subsequent work included not only the vehicles, but the street environment as well. After Ridley Scott saw the initial paintings, he had Syd elaborate on the designs of the entire cityscape and urban lifestyle.

Harrison Ford as Deckard—a hard-boiled detective of the year 2019 whose specialty is tracking down renegade replicants (genetically engineered people) who have infiltrated the city.

THERE ARE
106,000,000
STORIES IN
THIS
NAKED CITY—
AND BLADE
RUNNER IS
ONE OF THEM.

If you're still in the dark, *Blade Runner* is this coming summer's main contender. Based on the late Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, directed by Ridley Scott (*Alien*), with production art by Syd Mead (*Sentinel*), special effects by Douglas Trumbull (*CE3K, 2001*), and starring Harrison Ford.

Ford plays Rick Deckard, an ex-police detective, late of the Rep-Detect Division—street moniker, Blade Runner. Before he quit, Deckard was the top Blade Runner in the city, charged with the highly sensitive task of tracking down and eliminating escaped replicants—manufactured people you can't distinguish from the real thing. These genetically engineered "humans" were developed for combat and space colonization—man-made labor, they like to call them—but occasionally some manage to get back down to Earth. The problem is, they got no feelings, no remorse, no guilt. They'll do anything to stay free, and that's why the Blade Runners were formed. They're the only cops trained to tell the difference between reps and real people.

Harrison Ford and director Ridley Scott



Photographs by Steve Vaughn



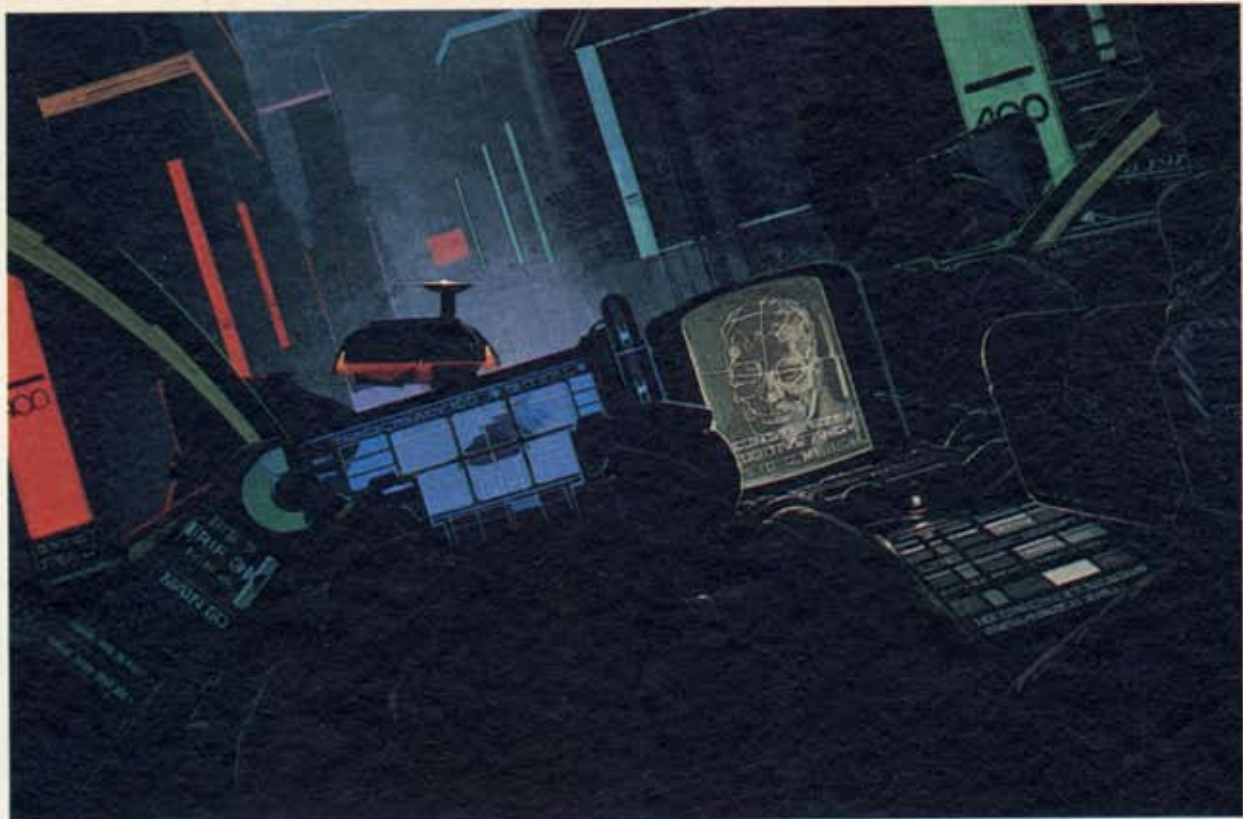
Deckard and police Lt. Gaff (Edward Olmos—*Zoot Suit* and *Wolfen*) in the Spinner cockpit.

Blade Runner is not just another hardware movie. It's not one of those gadget-filled pictures where the actors are there only to give scale to the sets and special effects.

Blade Runner takes place about forty years from now in a major American megalopolis that looks like one of today's cities gone mad. All the street signs are in several languages, the parking meters give off lethal jolts if tampered with, the phone booths have tv's and so do the traffic intersections. Most animals are extinct, but you can buy artificial pets down at Anamoid Row (if you got the bucks) and the only fresh meat is fish—the age of junk-food sushi. The sky is yellow with poisonous pollution and the acid-

rainfall is constant. The cars and buildings are fitted with whatever it takes to keep them in working order; but decent folks don't live below forty stories—most fashionable apartment buildings climb up to 400 floors. And if you're a cop or some high-society politico, you get to drive a Spinner, the state-of-the-art flying car, capable of vertical lift-off, hovering, normal street driving and soaring through the canyons of the city and on out to the industrial wastelands surrounding it.

Production painting by Syd Mead of interior cockpit of Spinner in flight showing another spinner and various vid-screen read-outs.

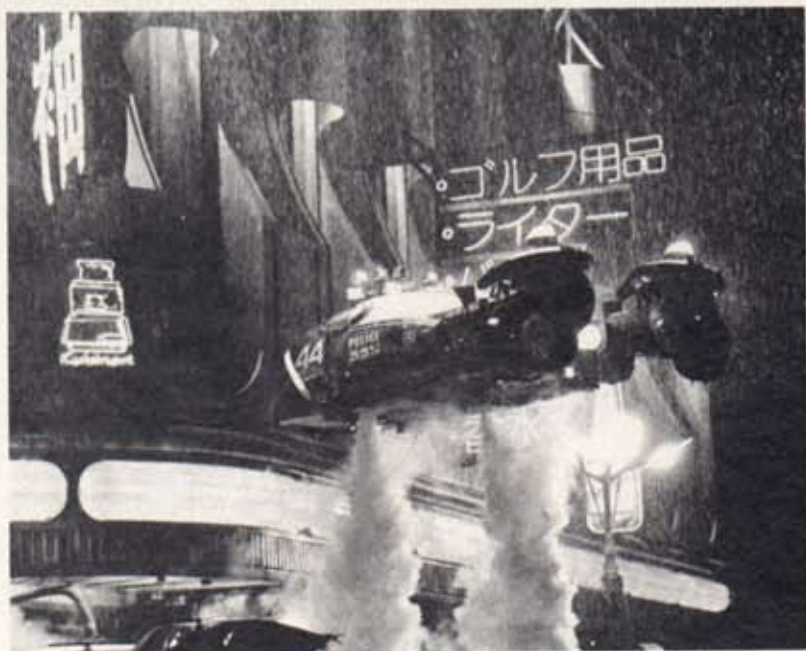


"The sort of future romanticism," Syd Mead admits, "that satisfies a desperate longing to do certain things. Like when you're sitting in a traffic jam for two hours on the Santa Ana Freeway and you wish you could just lift your car off the ground and zip away... fantasy wish-fulfillment. It also gives whoever's driving the car, whether it's the hero or villain, an advantage that's tremendously exciting."

But, veteran industrial designer Mead notes, "*Blade Runner* is not just another hardware movie. It's not one of those gadget-filled pictures where the actors are there only to give scale to the sets and special effects. We've created an environment to make a story believable. The machinery and effects appear only when needed and fit tightly into the plot."

Ridley Scott also insisted on a "familiar atmosphere, a Sam Spade-type environment. While this story takes place some forty years hence, it's being made in a style reminiscent of forty years ago."

The architectural look of the city is based on the principle that eventually it will become too cumbersome and expensive to tear down old buildings and erect new ones. Mead explains, "The overall visual idea was a society where the normal supplies had broken down. Life had be-



Full-scale Spinner lifting off from the midst of a virtual "Times Square of the future" where a climatic chase scene takes place.

Blade Runner takes place about forty years from now in a major American megalopolis that looks like one of today's cities gone mad.



Top: Deckard tries to locate a suspect from atop Syd Mead's taxi of the future.

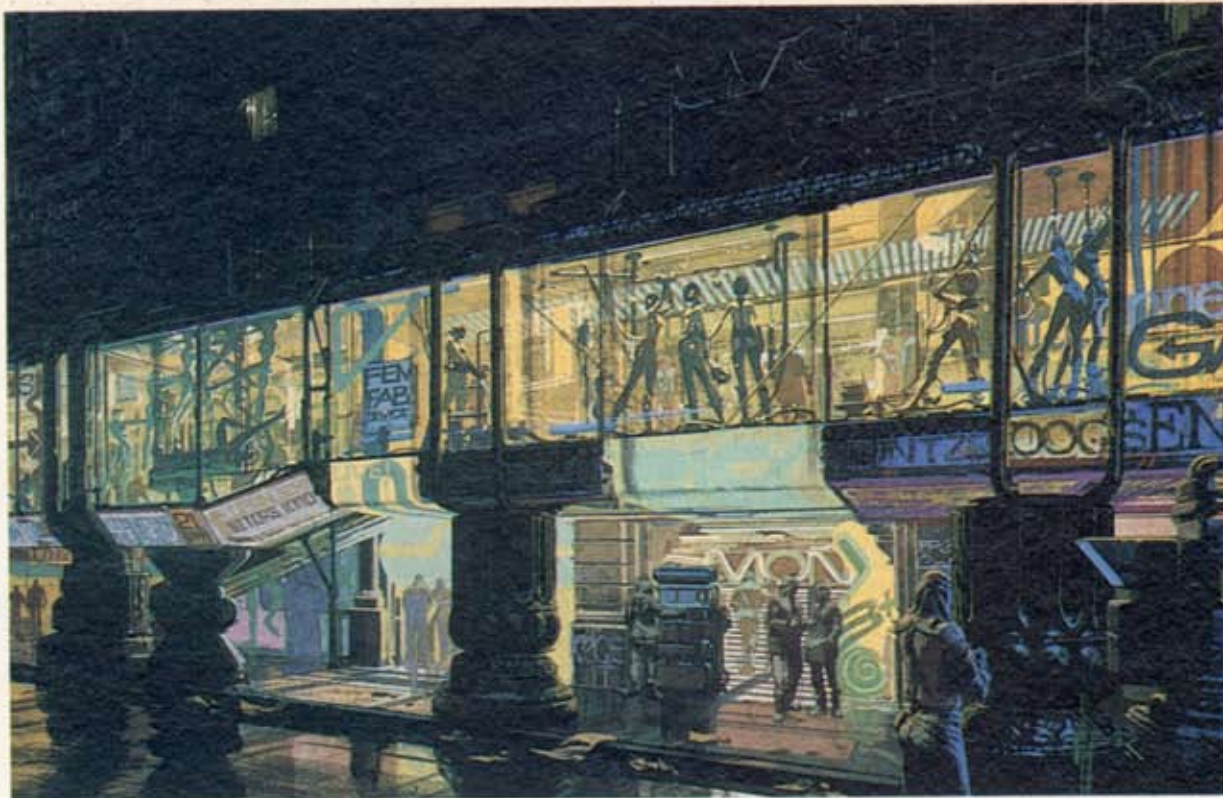
Bottom: Deckard in a rooftop chase, several hundred stories above the street.

come very difficult—mechanical fixtures, automobiles, buildings—the whole urban plant had become like a trap. Starting with cleanly designed concepts, we layered on details, fixtures, repairs, and extra equipment to achieve this accumulated fix-it-because-it-won't-run-and-it-has-to-run visual flavor."

Ridley Scott elaborates, "Think of New York or Chicago right now, how impossible it is to actually maintain many of the buildings. Think how expensive it would be to tear down the Empire State Building. Eventually they'll just have to 'retro-fit' things on the face of buildings instead of being able to rebuild or renovate."

"And the street level will become like the sewers or underside of the city," Syd Mead continues. "Being trapped on the street will be a thoroughly nasty way to spend your life. The streets will be nothing more than a service access to the city's mega-structures, and those who can't afford to move up will simply be forced to live in this left-over society."

Another streetcar by Syd Mead. The pillars are a recurring architectural image, as is the second-story level of boutique display windows.



However, all these dire depictions aside, Scott insists that *Blade Runner* is not doom-saying. "This film is very simply a thriller set in slightly futuristic terms," he says. "It's not a warning in any sense."

As Syd Mead likes to point out after painting this bleak picture, "I think life forty years from now will be fabulous. Over 90 percent of all the scientists who ever lived are alive right now. Our technology is able to process information and construct alternatives faster than ever. If we let technology do what it's supposed to do, I think we'll go back to a very humanistic, personal-scale lifestyle that's nice enough so you can think about other things than just survival."

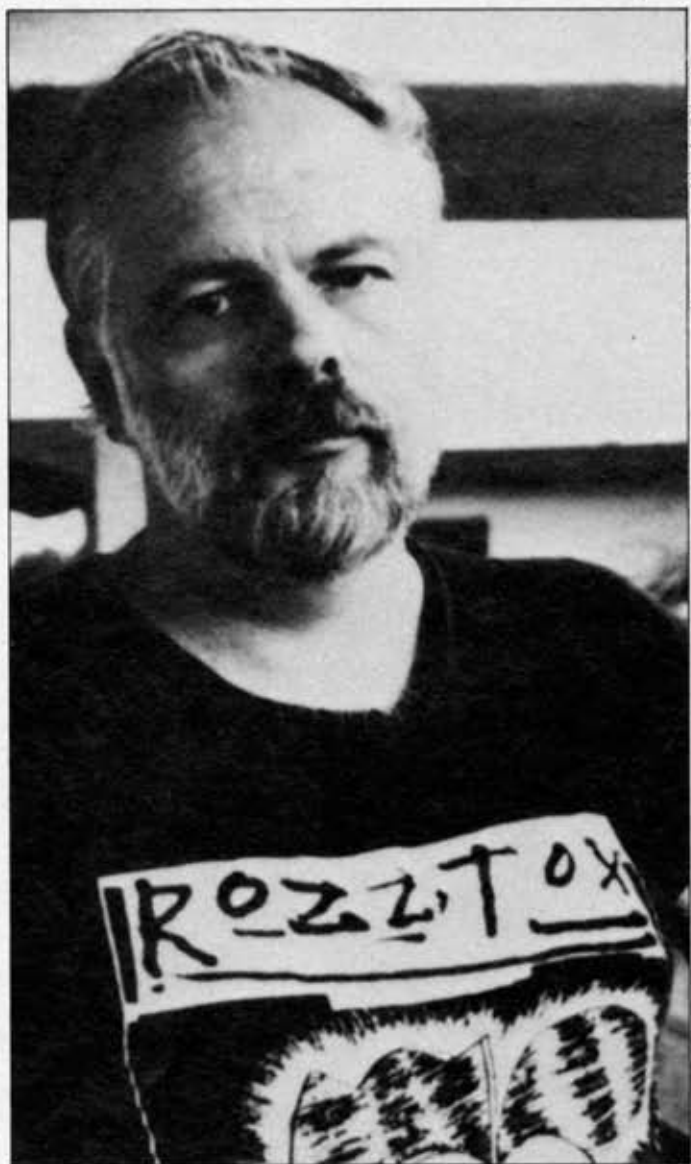
And in creating the first hard-boiled, science-fiction detective suspense thriller, Ridley Scott assures us that *Blade Runner* is "meant to be good fun, a kind of comic strip. The films that have fascinated me most over the last few years are those that have derived from comic strips . . . and some of the great comic strips have been the first to spot emerging truths and enlarge upon them. That's the direction I've chosen to go in with my films . . . lots of broad strokes, fast, bold action, and very colorful characters."

—Claude Rathbone



Zhora (Joanna Cassidy), a suspected replicant, tries to elude Deckard in the teeming streets. Note that in this view of the future, Atari continues to thrive.

Philip K. Dick (1928–1982)



Photograph by Nicole Oliver Panter

It's almost impossible to write an obituary for someone you care about deeply without sounding maudlinly sentimental. Inevitably, the first thoughts to arise are selfish, and the pain ripping at you caused by the sense of *your* loss. It's a personal and private thing.

Philip K. Dick died this past March 2, from a stroke he had suffered eleven days earlier. Expressing the shock and rage fired in me by Dick's untimely death has proven excruciatingly difficult, the anguish knife-twisted by the stabbing realization that my chance to meet face-to-face the person whose work most influenced my life is gone. I've blown it, and it hurts.

So this won't be an obituary or eulogy. The only salve for the very tangible ache I feel is to ignore it—shut out the self-pitying selfishness and probe the special qualities of Dick's writing that so profoundly touched me and a great many people I know as well. Communicating a sense of this unique power might offer a small consolation.

Dick's thirty-year body of work (forty published books, of which six collect most of the 100 short stories not adapted into novels) yields a compassionate and sensitive man's complex response to an absurd world that sometimes seems out to get you. Individually, the books are inconsistent; crankily idiosyncratic, frequently brilliant but hastily written, and occasionally so full of holes that your fingers stick through. But you can't let that matter. The effect seeps in gradually over the course of several books, leaking through the cracked walls fortifying your worldview,

taking root in your subconscious like some insidious contagion. Unaware of this steady erosion of complacency, you're jolted by the sudden-dread realization: *Reality is not what it seems.* In *UBIK*, common items form-devolve into their mechanistic ancestors. In *Time Out of Joint*, a soft drink stand in a park disappears, and a piece of paper flutters to the ground. Printed on it are the words: "SOFT DRINK STAND," and the façade crumbles. In *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*, the title character's leering visage of menace, slot-eyed and iron-jawed, intrudes into every

aspect of the hallucinogenic-distorted reality of the protagonist. In "Faith of Our Fathers," the hero stops taking his mandatory dose of hallucinogens and begins to perceive things as they *really* are. In *The Penultimate Truth*, the world's population labors in subterranean factory-habitats manufacturing weapons for use in the devastating, aboveground war. Until someone climbs to the surface and discovers something quite different. . . .

The cumulative impact is devastating. In Dick's universe you take *nothing* for granted. Not only have all authority figures lied to you, but *reality* has

lied to you as well. Says a character in *Galactic Pot Healer*, "In our society, *everybody* is aced out." But however paranoid, Dick's vision isn't despairing. There is always hopefulness within the entropic decay, humor in the absurdity, and redemption in the superhuman abilities of ordinary humans to cope with extraordinary circumstances. We can make it. We may not triumph heroically (who the hell does, anyway?), but, goddamn it, we'll survive. Humans will survive as long as they retain their humanity, Dick says, and the measure of humanity is the capacity for caring. In both *The Zap Gun* and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* the characters' ability to feel empathy both marks them as human (distinguishable from near-perfect simulacra, in the latter) and assures their salvation (learning empathy from a children's toy saves them from an alien invasion, in the former).

And it's all so fucking ironic. . . a writer most concerned with the power of human caring was cared for so little by the rest of us. . . and now just as he had achieved some measure of comfort in his life, recognition and appreciation for his value as a contemporary American writer, and seemingly imminent mass-culture success (courtesy of *Blade Runner*—by all accounts, including Dick's own, an accurate portrayal of his vision). . . he dies. It's so maddening it's almost funny—and as Dick was driven to find the humor in even the most hopeless of circumstances, I'm sure somewhere he's getting one goddamn big laugh out of this. I hope I will at some point.

—Lou Stathis