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by James Van Hise

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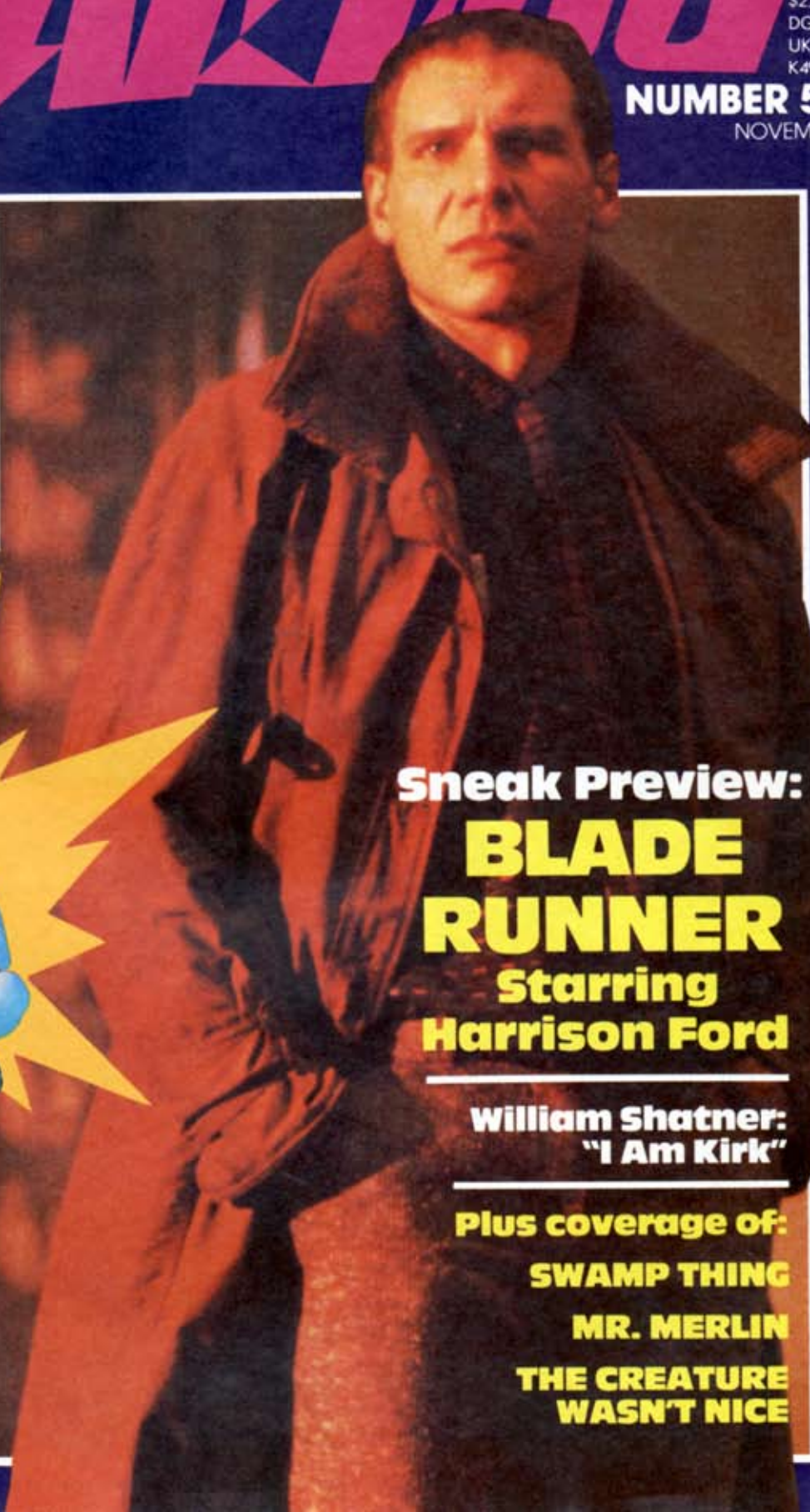
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# BLADE RUNNER

## An Inside Look at Ridley Scott's Next Major Science-Fiction Film

By JAMES VAN HISE

**A**lthough some industry prognosticators predict that the science-fiction film boom is running out of steam, firm studio plans are now indicating a new tide of SF film entertainment to come.

One of the new films (set for a May, 1982 release) is *Blade Runner*, Ridley Scott's first film since *ALIEN*. The film is loosely based on Philip K. Dick's novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, which was first published in 1969.

The premise of the novel involves a futuristic bounty hunter who works for the police department and is assigned the task of tracking down and "retiring" (killing) six rogue androids. The androids were con-

structed on Earth and then sent to Mars as part of a colonization program. For reasons never really made clear in the story, some of the androids wanted freedom, and so killed their masters and fled back to Earth to attempt to live as normal human beings. As the novel progresses, we discover that these androids are not robots or even what we usually think of as artificial constructs, but bonafide artificial human beings, right down to cell and tissue structure. They are so human, in fact, that a delicate psychological test is required to tell an android from a human. This is an *empathy* test, used because androids are not capable of natural empathy, but can only mimic that emotion. The other major dif-



ference between human and android is that android life is imperfect and only lasts for two years. Bounty hunter Rick Deckard succeeds at his tasks, but also begins to question the purpose of his job. Are these androids human or not? Why kill them? Also, even though androids are theoretically lacking in empathy, and aren't supposed to be capable of genuinely caring about what happens to other androids, Deckard's last two kills are a male and a female who are clearly in love. This questioning of his own actions plagues Deckard up until the climax and conclusion of the story.

### Not the Novel

For the film, much of the plot of the novel has been discarded by screenwriters Hampton Fancher and David W. Peoples, so that only the hunt for six rogue androids remains. Even this has been altered, in that the brief-lifetime aspect has been removed and the word android is not used in the film. Instead, the creatures are called "replicants."

The post-holocaust Earth of the novel has been replaced by an equally grim, crime-ridden Earth where high technology contrasts sharply with the squalor of many of the Earth's inhabitants who are forced to live in the streets on the very fringe of this advanced, dangerous existence.

The "Blade Runner" of the title is a code name used to identify the bounty hunter, Rick Deckard. In the film, rather than being a part of the police force, Deckard (played by Harrison Ford) comes out of retirement to track down the "replicants" because he's the only man who can do the job.

Despite rumors to the contrary, Harrison Ford *did not* shave his head for this role. The accompanying photos clearly show his hair only slightly shorter than it was for *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, and on the set he looked just as he does in these photos.

The main supporting actor in the film is Rutger Hauer, who plays a deadly "replicant" named Batty, the film's chief antagonist. Hauer is known to American audiences for his classic portrayal of villainy as the terrorist Wulfgar in the recent film *Nighthawks*. For *Blade Runner*, his brown hair is bleached blond and he exudes an air of cold menace equal to what he achieved in *Nighthawks*. But despite his portrayal of killers in his first two American films, he feels quite removed from that sort of character. In a recent interview in the *L.A. Times* he explained, "I was born in the middle of the war, and I think for that reason I have deep roots in pacifism. Violence frightens me. I once owned a gun, but the thought of using it so appalled me that I threw it away. I am very strong, but the only thing I could kill is a fly."

Rutger Hauer was born in the Netherlands village of Breukelen 37 years ago and has made films in both Holland and Germany. He made his film debut in 1973 with *Turkish Delight*, which received an Oscar nomination as best foreign language film for that year. His film *Soldier of Orange* received a similar Oscar nomination in 1977, and brought him increasing recognition.

## A Visit to the Set of Blade Runner

On May 20, 1981, I was finally able to see what *Blade Runner* would be like up close. Jeff Walker publicist for the Ladd Company, invited me to visit Burbank Studios to watch some night shooting which was then in progress.

We arrived at the studio at about 11:00 p.m., and while walking the short distance from my car onto the set, I could see lights and a crowd about a block away. This was the New York exterior set which had been transformed into a seamy, crowded futuristic street scene. Remember, in *Blade Runner* the technology may be advanced, but sociologically the world is in a tailspin.

The buildings looked like your average New York storefronts and hotels, but they had curious corrugated pipe systems (a couple of feet wide) winding up the cement and concrete facades, apparently as part of the air-conditioning systems for the residents of the futuristic city. Garish neon displays, including a girl wearing a cowboy hat, whose left leg moved continuously as if she were on an unseen bucking steed, decorated several of the buildings. These displays were largely part of the Red Light district. The focus of this section was a neon sign for an establishment called "The Snake Pit" which had two cylindrical bubbles about four feet long attached to the building's second floor, built to project out over the sidewalk. Inside the clear bubbles were strangely garbed manikins, and on street level was a window with two more manikins: one decked out in leather and suspended by chains, and the other draped with a huge ersatz python.

Just up the street from this was a corner newsstand featuring many magazines with Oriental titles, as well as a few in English with names like *Kill* and *Thrust*, the former featuring a snarling attack dog on its cover.

Parked in the street were several of the full-sized working vehicles designed by Syd Mead. These included not only a futuristic car (with a dusty interior and electronics exposed in the rear for easy access), but also a huge yellow garbage truck of the future, small yellow-and-black taxis called Megacabs, and a long silver bus with an open section in the middle partitioned from the outside by a rail which allowed passengers to leap onto the vehicle directly from the street. This was apparently what was happening in the scene being filmed that night because Harrison Ford as Rick Deckard was standing next to the bus railing on the side farthest from the camera. A stage hand was spraying Ford's hair with water so that his appearance would match the weather during the scene. The bus was stopped in front of the "Snake Pit" and behind it were two of the taxis. Milling all around were the extras, mostly Orientals. The clothes they wore looked very old and threadbare to convey the impression that these people were of the lower classes.

The scene being shot while I was there was of Deckard (Harrison Ford) chasing someone. Just before the cameras began to roll, the smoke-pots around the areas were started and thick clouds of white smoke drifted through the scene. As the cameras rolled, Ford ran across the width of the bus and out the other side, then through the

The romantic interest in *Blade Runner* appears in the person of Sean Young (*Stripes*, *Jane Austen in Manhattan*) as Rachel, an enigmatic woman who may or may not be a "replicant."

Other supporting players include Edward James Olmos, M. Emmet Walsh, Joe Turkel (Lloyd the bartender, from *The Shining*), Daryl Hannah, Brion James, William J. Sanderson and Morgan Paull.

### Scott's Involvement

Despite its \$15 million budget and special effects provided by the Entertainment Effects Group (the company recently established by Douglas Trumbull and Richard Yuricich), *Blade Runner* will have a sincere concentration on characterization. Ridley Scott was sensitive to criticisms by some people that *ALIEN* was peopled by cardboard characters. Thus, *Blade Runner* will delve deeply into the persona of Rick Deckard—a troubled man attempting to deal with his own problems while also carrying out his assignment.

The inevitable question arises as to why Scott chose this particular film out of the many he was undoubtedly offered in the wake of *ALIEN*'s smash success. Although Scott is unavailable for interviews at present (principal photography completed on June



Rutger Hauer as the villainous "Batty."

PHOTO © THE LADD COMPANY



crowd up the street while the slowly moving bus and cabs paced him. This was shot a couple of times, not only to do more takes (I don't know how many times it had been shot before I arrived), but also to make the chase up the street look longer than it really was, since the street was quite short. The crowd and the bus moved along with Ford as he ran to maintain the feeling of choking crowds everywhere. When they broke for lunch at about 12:30 am, they began setting up for more of the chase in which Ford followed a woman into a subway entrance (in actuality it was only a blind staircase that lead just a few steps down from street level).

This relatively small section of street would be used as various outdoor locales in the unnamed city where all of the action was to take place. Stores whose windows had been loaded with oddball bric-a-brac just the day before (including the kind of Americana antiques the Japanese were so fond of in Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*) were already being cleaned out to be redressed for other scenes.

Everything on this set had a rather grim feel to it—the shabbily dressed milling crowd, the newsstand with its depressingly violent magazines, the dirty sidewalks and the grubby futuristic vehicles. Since this was supposed to be outdoors in a polluted, run-down part of town, nothing was clean. The futuristic cars were all badly in need of a scrubbing—this was due in part to the fact that the exterior scenes called for relentlessly rainy weather. Nothing on the set looked new, however advanced its design.

Just a short distance from the set was a parking lot filled with different Syd Mead-designed cars, all still shiny and new. Included here was the *Spinner*, the special flying police car used by Harrison Ford in the film. It had huge, wing-like doors, and a



The above set clearly shows the stormy, grimy street ambiance described below. Note the *Spinner* (upper left) as it takes off on official police business.

very serviceable-looking control panel. The unusual steering wheel, made from a rigid circle of thick, chrome chain, gave the vehicle an offbeat, customized look. This car looked more advanced than any of the others, even to the revolving wheels on the front which could change into a tread or any other surface to adapt to changing terrain. The *Spinner* looked good enough to get in and drive away—no plastic and cardboard prop fashioned solely to impress the camera. It was a skillfully tooled and crafted vehicle, detailed down to the metal emblem on the back identifying the car as the *Spinner*, just as if a manufacturer had affixed its label there on an assembly line. This was one of four *Spinners* built for the film by the Gene Winfield Company, an outfit which has also built such full-scale

movie props as the Shuttlecraft on the *Star Trek* television series, and the operating *Man from U.N.C.L.E.* car. What I saw was apparently the lightweight *Spinner* which could be lifted by a crane to simulate flight in certain scenes. There were two operating ground *Spinners* with Volkswagen engines inside, and a fourth which could be separated into sections for tight photography of the interior (called the process car). The flying special effects for the *Spinner* will be done under the auspices of Douglas Trumbull and his Entertainment Effects Group.

According to the combined visions of Philip K. Dick and Ridley Scott, this is how the future will appear in *Blade Runner*. All at once, it is a world that is ugly, strange and fascinating. **J.V.H.**

28 and he is now deep in post-production work), Scott told another interviewer last fall that Hamton Fancher's screenplay was "one of the most striking scripts I've ever read." Another clue as to why Scott chose this film and what his future directorial choices will be, can be gleaned from a conversation he had a year ago with writer Harlan Ellison. Scott expressed the opinion that "now is the time for there to be a John Ford of science-fiction films," and Scott felt that with his credits he had as good a chance of achieving this goal as anyone. John Ford was a director of Westerns who had a great deal of respect for the genre and regarded it as much more than just a vehicle for "shoot-'em-ups." Ford made "A" films such as *Stagecoach* and *The Searchers* which still hold up today because of story, while other horse operas of the period are all but forgotten. Apparently Ridley Scott wants to make science-fiction films of such style and substance that they will transcend the current cycle, however long it lasts, and continue beyond it because of their strength as films rich in texture, character and event.

Perhaps the most amazing aspect of *Blade Runner* is that it almost wasn't made. Originally announced as a Filmways production, Scott and company were just completing all of the lengthy and detailed preproduction work and were literally days away from filming when, as associate producer Ivor Powell put it, they began reading "alarming reports in the trades" concerning the financial instability of Filmways. When Filmways said they could not guarantee coming up with the necessary \$15 million budget, producer Michael Deeley (*The Deer Hunter*) spent several weeks finding a new backer, which he finally did in the Ladd Company. Despite the casual manner in which the changeover is discussed now, at the time Ivor Powell expressed grave concern over whether the film would even be made. The producers had to find a new backer quickly in order to keep the production crew from dangling; if the lag dragged on for months, the producers would have had to face the difficulty of reassembling the crew. There was also the question of Ridley Scott's

availability; since he was set to begin work on *Dune* right after completing *Blade Runner*, he might not have had the chance to film the adaptation of the Philip Dick novel.

### The Look of The Future

The preproduction design art for *Blade Runner* is largely by Syd Mead, an artist whose astonishing capabilities are displayed to full affect in the 1980 art book *Sentinel* published by Dragon's Dream. Mead is not only capable of creating a fluid futuristic look, but his imaginary hardware also appears functional, as if it already exists.

Other design art on the film is by Mentor Huebner, whose work in the industry goes as far back as *Forbidden Planet* for which he worked on many aspects of production, including the final design of Robby the Robot.

Scott, who is a fine artist in his own right, has also done several pre-production paintings for *Blade Runner*. Scott has his own particular vision that he brings to a project, and he applies his ideas and insights at every juncture. This was evident in the set's futuristic



detailing of everyday items, such as parking meters and even a phone booth.

According to pre-production and production material, *Blade Runner* takes place 40 years in the future in a setting known only as "The City," a locale which is never identified with a specific name. A constant rain will give most exteriors a glistening sheen. This is all part of the movie's planned *film noir* look wherein many scenes will be at night, sometimes amid lightning and driving rain. Harrison Ford's hair was continually wet down with a spray bottle of water to match the actor's appearance with the ominous look of these scenes.

The air car which the bounty hunter uses is a special police cruiser called a *Spinner*. Despite the existence of air cars, the film will also feature a lot of conventional street traffic because the 40 years between the present and the time of *The Blade Runner* will not have produced a total technological revolution. Included among the more mundane vehicles will be heavily armored police pursuit cars.

The powerful, sleek designs created by Syd Mead emphasize what the filmmakers refer to as their "Heavy Metal" look (from the magazine of the same name). Although some sources have claimed that up to one hundred full-sized, fully operational vehicles would be built for the film based on Mead's designs, in fact the number is closer to 30. Dean Jeffries, whose automotive design company built the cars, as well as vehicles for other films (such as



Above: Concept painting of the *Spinner* by Artist Syd Mead. Below: Deckard in pursuit.

the *Landmaster* in the movie *Damnation Alley*, which now resides in the parking lot of his Hollywood business) confirmed that he only built about 15-20 full-sized vehicles for *Blade Runner*. Most of them are operational,

with a few non-operational types made just for background atmosphere. One preproduction design shows a large, heavily armored taxi with an armed guard, but his idea apparently didn't make it beyond the concep-





tion stage; most of the taxis on the set were neither that large nor that elaborate.

One aspect retained from the novel is the use of off-world colonization. Although the story takes place in a city on Earth, we are made aware of colonization as a background detail in an almost subliminal fashion. For instance, in a diner a television will be playing in the background with commercials trying to recruit people into the colonization movement and a better life off of a crime-ridden Earth. They have seen the future and it is dangerous.

A new character was also created for the film. He is Sebastian, a very wealthy toy-maker who constructs toys for the rich and is mysteriously tied to the androids.

There are also other touches in the film which are not derived from the book. For instance, there is an elderly elevator operator who looks to be about 150 and who wears an apparatus consisting of tubes feeding from his mouth to his intestines. In one sequence, a uniformed gorilla stands sentry duty in an office. No explanations will be given for these characters; they are added for effect and atmosphere.

### Special Effects

As mentioned earlier, the special effects for *Blade Runner* (which will be quite extensive) are being helmed by the Entertainment Effects Group, the special effects facility formed by Douglas Trumbull and his longtime effects producer Richard Yuricich. This facility, which houses most of the technicians responsible for *Star Trek—The Motion Picture* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, is claimed by Trumbull to be bigger and better than even the special effects units operated by George Lucas and John Dykstra.

The SFX work for *Blade Runner* began in August, 1980. Mark Stetson, who is in charge of miniature construction for *Blade Runner*, explains that his group of technicians was assembled by Greg Jein, even though Jein is not actually working on the film. Jein, an Academy Award nominee for his miniature work on *1941*, has other impressive credits including *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *Star Trek—The Motion Picture*. Jein was approached by Trumbull and asked to helm the miniature crew for *Blade Runner*, but Jein was tied up working for Francis Ford Coppola's Zoetrope Studio. What Jein actually did was bring in Mark Stetson and set up the core of the miniature crew so that it could build from there. Jein had known Stetson's abilities from his work on *Star Trek—The Motion Picture* and *The Special Edition of CE3K*.

The miniature crew grew to 23 people during the preproduction phase. When special effects actually started filming then the miniatures had, by and large, to be finished, so that the miniature crew was starting to gear down while other technicians were just gearing up.

How was the special effects work affected by the problems with Filmways and the changeover period? Stetson explains that although they were forced to slow down their pace around December, 1980, it wasn't until



Director Ridley Scott goes over a piece of action with Harrison Ford.

after New Year's that the real problem hit. At that time most of the technicians were laid off for two weeks while only Stetson and other people in key positions remained on the payroll. After the two-week period they were able to reassemble most of their crew with no trouble.

Stetson is very enthusiastic about his work and the unusual and different things which *Blade Runner* is doing with miniatures. There will be no space scenes in the film; he confirms that everything involving the story and the special effects centers on "The City," with many miniature cityscape buildings. These 15-20 buildings are rearranged for different shots, and although they were first conceived as just mood pieces, they have since become much more integral parts of the film. One huge building is a pyramid-shaped headquarters structure which will appear to be a half-mile high on screen. (A glimpse of part of this structure can be seen behind Douglas Trumbull in the photo of him on page 91 of STARLOG #48.)

Regarding miniature vehicles, there are

four different scales of the *Spinners* made for the film, and four other different kinds of vehicles... or five, if you count the blimp. Blimp? That's right, a regular blimp which will be an ever present element in the film, featuring bizarre advertisements which light up its surface in the dark, nighttime sky over The City.

Although The City doesn't have a name in the film, it almost had one. At one point a proposed title for the movie was *Gotham City*, which captured the mystique the filmmakers wanted to achieve in the film. But Bob Kane (the creator of *Batman*) raised objections over that, feeling that he was responsible for popularizing that term in the public mind and such a film title would constitute an illegal infringement.

When the film is finally released in May of '82, it will carry an "R" rating and may emphasize the mystery/detective angle more than the science fiction aspect. But with Ridley Scott at the helm, it's certain that *Blade Runner* will be an original and different journey into the future. ★