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by James Van Hise

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The "Blade Runner" Screenwriters: Hampton Fancher & David Peoples

By JAMES VAN HISE

In STARLOG #55, the interview with Philip K. Dick (who authored the novel "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?" from which "Blade Runner" is adapted), detailed his involvement with the project and his views on how it has been handled. This time we go further behind the scenes to trace the development of the screenplay from the viewpoint of the two men who, independently of the other, made their contributions to its development.

The history of the *Blade Runner* screenplay is as interesting as it is complicated, and adds to the perspective of Phil Dick to further demonstrate just how involved the transition of a novel to the screen can be.

Hampton Fancher has been involved with the film business for some time, having many credits as an actor, which includes a hundred TV shows and 10 feature films. His real interests, though, lie in writing and directing and he declines to name any of his specific acting credits as he is not entirely satisfied with them—even though they have enabled him to earn a good living.

Fancher originally approached Phil Dick about optioning *Androids* for feature film production in 1975. "I got the impression originally—and more than the impression—that Dick was not only reluctant to get involved but also reluctant to have that particular book done. I think that at that time he was a bit queasy about getting involved with any kind of movie projects."

When Fancher originally approached Phil Dick the novel in question was already under option, but by 1978 it was free and this time, Hampton's partner Brian Kelly (executive producer of *Blade Runner*) succeeded in optioning it. Kelly submitted it to Michael Deeley who rejected it twice—first, feeling that the novel wouldn't translate well as a film, and then, on the basis of an eight-page treatment of those aspects of the book that Fancher felt would translate well. Although he had not intended to write the screenplay himself, his friends talked him into it because it seemed the only way to get the project launched. "It took almost a year to write the screenplay, but when I was finished, Brian took it back to Deeley and he loved it and the three of us made a deal," Fancher explains.

"Then it was all sales work. Deeley was in good shape to represent it—he'd just gotten the Academy Award for *Deer Hunter*. He started going to the studios with it and everybody was interested but nobody would commit. People were interested, but they'd want changes—they'd want a happy ending or something else changed and it got very close to losing the strain of the thing and it was pretty precarious there for a while. I kept changing it because there was intelligent input, especially from a couple of people who were very instrumental in their critiques. I think that there were four or five drafts written before Ridley came to it. When Ridley came in that sort of wrapped it up because of the *ALIEN* reputation. That's what it needed for the studio to get down to business with it. I guess I wrote three or four more drafts based on that time with Ridley and his people, so it was a long process."

Regarding Phil Dick's criticisms of those early drafts (see STARLOG #55), Fancher states, "It was never intended, I don't think, except maybe in the first draft, to stay close to the novel. The novel had a lot of impossibilities as far as movie-making goes. Basically, the novel was just a diving board premise to jump from that was originally taken, and then from that point, after the first draft, it sort of acquired a life of its own and never delved too much into anything that the novel was dealing with. It was a different animal almost from the beginning. I don't see any similarities with it, now, at all.

"The way I saw *my* story of it, finally, was that of a man who discovered his conscience in the process of this search, and that was the psychological lot of it and what excited me about it and what I was trying to achieve. That's the spiritual architecture of it for me. How the house turns out after the construction people get through is another story sometimes, but I hope it has some of those elements because to me it was a love story."

A Positive Addition

Regarding why he left the project and why David Peoples was brought in to continue writing in his place, Fancher explains, "I found Ridley's ideas that came out of the revision meetings to be very good. The scripts seemed to improve with each draft. But along the way he was a very stubborn man. I mean, I wasn't like a hired writer. I was a part owner of the project so I wasn't involved on that level where he could just say, 'Write this,' and

I would go away and write it even if I didn't agree. I'd only write it if I agreed, not that I wasn't open to agreement because I learned a lot working with him and I think a lot came out of it. But there were several elements that would always come up and I would respond negatively, and it seemed to me that I was winning but then in the next meeting those same elements would be brought up. They were things that I wasn't in love with and felt that I just couldn't deal with them. They weren't the story that I was doing. Finally it just became obvious that the only way to get those things done was to bring in another writer. There was then a collaboration between Ridley and Peoples and David wrote a lot of interesting things. In fact I was surprised because when I got Peoples' script, those things that Ridley had wanted that I thought couldn't be integrated into the concept had been rendered by Peoples in ways that were original, tight and admirable. I really liked it and that's why I've become friends with Peoples. I liked what he did a lot, but we never actually collaborated. He came in on very short notice and he had a lot of work to do, but he did it very fast and very well."

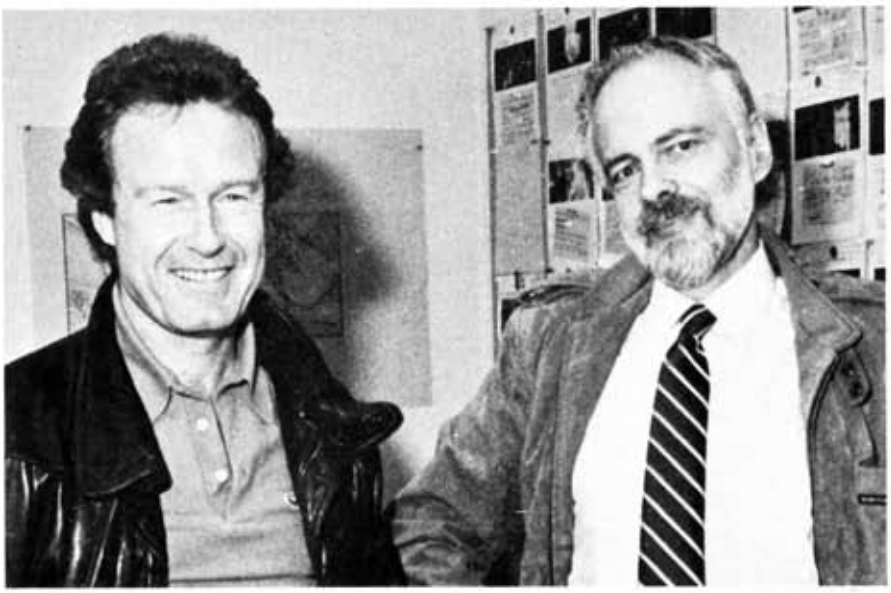
Fancher's departure as sole screenwriter left no ill will and he was called back to lend a hand toward the end of the production. "I wasn't involved at all in the shooting, but just before they finished shooting I got a call. I went over, looked at some dailies, heard the problem and wrote a couple of scenes, but that was the only involvement that I had during the making of the film. Lots of times the writer is not wanted on the set, unless they're in trouble, of course, and then there's a desperate call."

David Peoples entered the *Blade Runner* project in November 1980, which was when it was still with Filmways and before photography had begun. "I read the script and I immediately felt that it was so good that I was disappointed because when they came to have a meeting I told them that I can't make this any better — it was a terrific script!

"I don't know which ones Phil Dick read that he didn't like, but certainly the one I read was absolutely brilliant, and that's the one I worked from to make changes that Ridley wanted, to make it more his vision.

"The thing that can be confusing about all this is how enormously collaborative all of this stuff is, especially at the stage that I was involved. I was brought in when there were sets already being constructed. One time I changed a scene and somebody said, 'Jesus, you wrote the ambulance out!' I said so what and they said, 'Well, it's already built.' So this was a source of some aggravation. There's enormous pressure, a lot of people involved and lot of things going on. So if anybody was authoring it at this stage it was Ridley. He was dominating, supervising and caring about what went on here. He always had fresh and new ideas. Then down the line Harrison Ford and Rutger Hauer made some really nice contributions in the way of dialogue. I would sometimes be writing a scene that Ridley would be shooting the following week, and twice I guess I was writing stuff that was going to be shot that day and just frantically trying to make certain changes to solve this particular thing or that particular thing.

"When I first became involved with the film, there was a bunch of scientific jargon about genetics in it that I had no grasp on. I don't know anything at all about science, but my daughter is a chemistry major at UCLA in microbiology. So I called her up and she said that it was more or less right. She corrected one small bit of chemical talk which was well beyond me. Subsequent to that I felt that the script could use some more jargon in terms of making it sound like we were dealing with things that these people dealt with in their every day lives and that they would naturally have a language for referring to things. I called my daughter again and she started talking about replicating cells, and it was she who gave me the idea of calling these people replicants instead of androids. I felt that android was a word that had been used so much that it no longer meant anything because it had been sullied by being used in jokes and so on and I thought that the picture needed a fresh word."



Top: David Peoples (left) and Hampton Fancher. Above: Ridley Scott (left) is joined by author Philip K. Dick at Douglas Trumbull's EEG effects facilities.

The Film Belongs To Ridley

But on the subject of who's really responsible for how good the film or the screenplay is, Peoples feels that Ridley Scott's contribution cannot be overestimated. "It was Ridley's vision ultimately that we were serving. I think it's terrific and important that Philip K. Dick likes the end result — I mean it's his baby. Without him there's none of this. This is where it comes from. It's terrific that he was happy, but he really gave me much more credit than I deserve. I'm flattered but it's really an enormously collaborative venture.

"When you're taking a novel to a movie, there's so much sort of hammering and sawing and banging and fumbling around that really, what it is, is that if Phil Dick likes the end result it's because his stuff was so good that it withstands that kind of treatment. I really think that he does Hampton an injustice in that article, although I'm sure not intentionally, because really the script is basically Hampton. He's the guy who adapted it from the novel.

"What happens in this process is that ev-

erybody's trying to get a good story to go on the screen and we would go in different directions. But always I think that the book was very much in Ridley's mind and there were themes that were very important to him in it. He always felt very strongly about the animal theme, but we never licked it in the way of making it a prominent part of the script. I know there's some drafts of Hampton's that had more of it in it, but we were never able to make it as important as Ridley wanted it to be and still keep a story that was flowing and moving foward.

"The theme that appealed to me the most in writing it was just the theme of, what is a person? When is somebody a person and when aren't they a person? The fact that somebody wasn't born from a womb—is that the definition? I was very interested in that theme. But as the things would get written, the shape and everything would change, but I can't emphasize enough that it was Ridley who was in charge, and it's Ridley's picture and his storyline. Philip K. Dick is the author of the book and Ridley is the author of the movie.

"Ridley is sort of the Hieronymus Bosch of our time. He goes way beyond what's on the paper. I mean, you can't imagine it—in the sense of you write down a bunch of things and then you go see what's shot and it just blows your mind."

Returning to the subject of Hampton Fancher, Peoples gives an example of something that he felt proved how compatible their writing styles were on *Blade Runner*. It involves a scene that was to take place between Deckard and a character named Holden that Ridley suggested at a revision meeting. "I listened to what he was saying and I started to think about it and Kate Haber, a production executive, said, 'Waitaminute, I think Hampton wrote a scene like that in one of the other drafts,' and she left the room. I was sitting there thinking that Deckard says this and Holden says that and all of a sudden Kate was reading my dialogue that I was thinking and I couldn't believe it. It was like somebody'd opened my brain up or something and I look around and she was reading from an old draft that Hampton had written. In other words, I was writing exactly the same dialogue that Hampton had written months before because I'd just been presented with the same situation. So I felt that I had picked up and gotten right in tune with what he was doing."

PHOTOS ©MCA DISCOVISION

Roy Batty (Rutger Hauer) is the dangerous replicant being pursued by the hard-boiled Deckard (Harrison Ford) below. Both turn in powerful and complementary performances.

When asked about how much at variance the character that Harrison Ford plays in *Blade Runner* is in comparison to his previous roles, Peoples observes, "Harrison is an absolutely maginificent actor. He's amazing. He blows my mind. He's like the great old guys—he becomes Deckard. I mean, you don't see him act like Deckard, he *is* Deckard, and Deckard is entirely different from Han Solo, for example, and enormously different from Indiana Jones. In *Blade Runner* he's a seething guy with a lot inside him. He's a guy who's got problems, who's holding a lot in, and Harrison does it brilliantly.

"Rutger Hauer is terrific in the picture. When I first saw Rutger, he was so good as Roy Batty, such a big and dangerous figure, that I thought, 'Boy, how's Harrison gonna' hold up to this?' Well, Harrison does it. Harrison is fantastic in the picture and he just has this enormous broad range. Harrison can become a different person without adopting a strange accent or a different costume or strange mannerisms or anything like that. He doesn't need that crutch. The reason I hadn't realized it before is because he plays adventure roles and you just make assumptions that are perhaps unfair and incorrect."

Shortly before this interview, Phil Dick had said that he's been told that *Blade Runner* was going to shoot for a "PG" instead of an "R" rating. When asked if this would change the slant of what he'd written, David Peoples said, "I don't think so, no. You never know about that stuff, though. In other words, there's some pretty scary stuff in there, but I don't know the fine lines that people make. There was some pretty scary stuff in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. There's some moments in *Blade Runner* that are scary and pretty fierce, but I don't have the kind of mind that can distinguish what is alright for children and what isn't, or however that goes."

To underscore his feelings about Phil Dick's reaction to the scripts, Peoples sums up by saying, "Reading what Phil Dick had to say, I gather that what he's saying is that the script turned back toward the novel, but I think that's really just the force of his ideas turning everybody back. I don't think that there's really anything unusual in that, because when you're writing a script you begin somewhere, drift away from it, drift back again and it just keeps moving—and it has even changed since the draft of mine that he read. I hope that ultimately he's happy with the movie. I hope we all are." ★

BLADE RUNNER'S Syd Mead

An Artist with Designs on the Future

By ED NAHA

Actors Harrison Ford and Edward James Olmos slog their way through a metropolitan street scene gone haywire. The street is not only a home for some of the seediest pedestrians seen since *Tobacco Road* but is populated, as well, by a tangle of industrial tubing and pipe fixtures. Taxis resembling tanks chug by. Tenement buildings have their windows blotted out by large television screens which flash slices of exotic, tropical lifestyles onto the macadam below.

Ford and Olmos are "hunting" genetically created human replicants on one of the strangest sets to be created in the history of futuristic films.

The film is Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*.

The set is constructed in Hollywood, U.S.A. and much of its nightmarish ambience arose from the fertile mind of artist Syd Mead. Although he is not physically present at the Warner Brothers' studio, Mead's touch is certainly felt.

Artist/designer Mead stands beside one of his concepts come-to-life, the Spinner.

At no time, for instance, does any part of the set conjure up cinematic memories of such films as *Funny Girl* or *The Way We Were*. Yet, this New York street scene was indeed part of those films, as well as most of the James Cagney and Humphrey Bogart films produced at Warners during Hollywood's golden years.

For director Scott's adaptation of Philip K. Dick's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, the standard New York backdrop had to be transformed into Any-Metropolis U.S.A., circa 2020.

That's where Mead came in.

A uniquely individualistic graphic artist-turned-consultant-turned futurist, Mead parlayed a few preliminary sketches into a wide-screen vision of a near Dystopian tomorrow. Not bad for a fellow not usually associated with motion pictures.

"I feel pretty responsible for the final look of the film," says Mead from his West Coast headquarters several months after production has stopped. "The way the street scenes are dressed is right off my sketches. I walked around the set one morning and it was like being in one of my drawings. It was pretty eerie."

Mead's impressive cinematic triumph actually came about quite accidentally. A commercial artist best known for his futuristic designs for U.S. Steel, the Ford motor company and other corporations, Mead was lionized by many science-fiction fans a few years back when a collection of his drawings, *Sentinel*, was published. He then was asked to design the inside of the Voyager craft for *Star Trek—The Motion Picture*, his lone film credit before being contacted by director Ridley Scott during *Blade Runner*'s embryonic period.

"Ridley called and came over to the house with Ivor Powell (the film's associate producer)," recalls Mead. "They had Chris Fosse's book, Roger Dean's book and mine. Ridley was aware of my work and when he was shopping around for special-effects people, he talked with John [*Star Wars*] Dykstra who wound up re-enforcing Ridley's opinions about my possibilities."

Mead and Scott hit it off. "Initially, he was interested in me only in terms of automotive design. Although I had only done a little bit of work on the *Star Trek* film, I felt comfortable accepting the assignment. I don't mind working on vehicles for movies. I'm comfortable with that, having done it for corporations countless times."

And so, Mead set off to work. Before long, however, he discovered that it was impossible to ignore the challenge of inventing an entire futurescape as opposed to just elements within it. "I never like to sketch a vehicle on a blank page," he shrugs. "I'll toss in background settings. I had read the script to *Blade Runner* and wanted to give the city a shot. After some discussions with Ridley and art director Larry Paul, I began putting in backgrounds that fit the tone of the picture.

Ridley liked them. He had me expand on them and sketch a few street sets and, then, some interior sets. Before it was all over, I wound up working on the look of almost all the articles in the film from hand-held hardware to more elaborate articles."

In short order, Mead was immeshed in the laborious process of launching a motion picture. "To get this movie really rolling in terms of design," he says, "it took at least three months. The actual preproduction lasted a year. That's pretty long. I worked on the vehicles first because they took the most time. Then, I did the street sets. Then, I did the detailed objects like coin slots and parking meters. . . all the gadgetry you need to make a non-existent society seem realistic down to the last detail. Ridley is a stickler for detail."

Future Cars

As much as Mead wanted to dive into envisioning a futuristic society, he labored long and hard on *Blade Runner*'s automotive designs first. "After all," he laughs, "that's what I was paid for in the first place. I came up with five basic designs that seemed to please everyone.

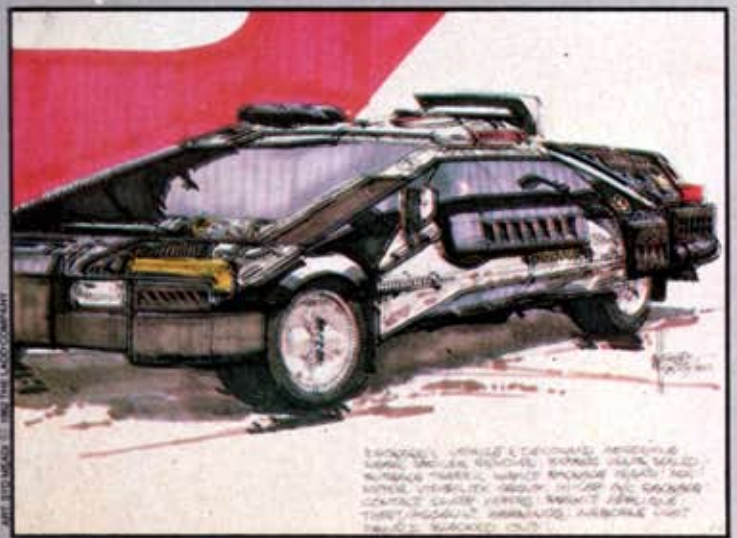
"The *Spinner* is the star vehicle. That's the

Concept art showing a Spinner airborne.

From the film: the Spinner sits in surface traffic.

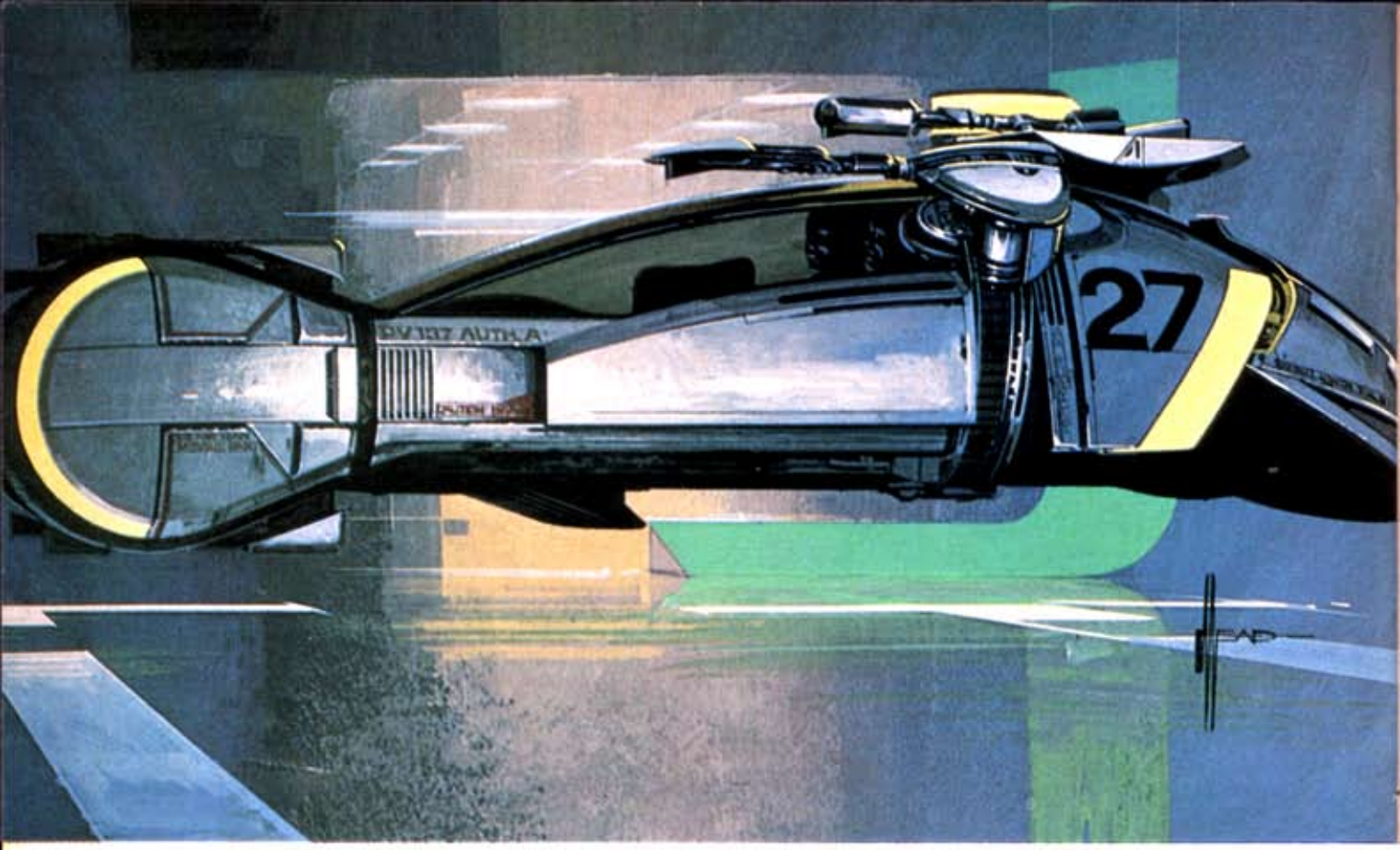
Concept art for new city cab.

From the film: "Metrokab" awaits passengers.



Concept for Deckard's vehicle: A grounded Spinner.

From the film: An almost perfect realization.



Concept art for one of Mead's finest creations—the Spinner. It's a unique flying-car design, having no wings or stabilizer fins. It was the most expensive and complicated prop in the film. Mead calls it an "enclosed lift vehicle."

A typical downtown scene in the *Blade Runner* mega-city. Mead designed the vehicles first and then took a shot at the city. The vehicle on the right is Sebastian's van. Mead describes Sebastian as "an electronics wizard and tinkerer."

car that actually flies. Right from the start, I tried to stay away from stereotypical approaches. I thought that folding wings and helicopter blades had been done to death on vehicles in futuristic films. I thought we should think of it as an enclosed lift vehicle.

"It would look like a car all the time, whether it was flying or just rolling down a street. That seemed more logical and easier to handle dramatically than a thing with all sorts of attachments that unfolded or popped out for take-off. The *Spinner* was the most expensive vehicle to build and, dramatically, the most important. In the film, it's only used by authorized personnel because it flies and, therefore, is involved with complicated, three-dimensional travel patterns.

"The second most important vehicle was Deckard's [Ford's] sedan. It's about the size of a contemporary medium-sized car. The theory behind this model is that it's a decommissioned flying sedan. All the exterior flaps and air directional panels have been removed and it's now only used for street travel. It still has all the original bumpers, light patterns and overbuilt windshield wipers, though. It's a sleek sedan.

"With those two out of the way, I had to come up with a means of mass transportation, a People's Vehicle. It's a little cart that anyone can rent or lease. You climb in, insert a card and only pay for the time you actually use the craft. You drive it and, then, simply leave it in the street when you're through. Eventually, some other customer walks by, inserts his or her card, and just zooms off.

"I also had to come up with a pretty crazy-quilt kind of design for Sebastian's van. In the movie, the character of Sebastian is sort of an electronics wizard, a super-hobbiest and tinkerer. He patches his truck together by taking a commercial chasis and adding things onto it, making it an enclosed truck with a bed in the back and everything.

"The trick with Sebastian's van was to come up with something that looked patched together using pieces that audiences wouldn't recognize as being available today. I figured that Sebastian could give his truck a real armadillo look by using a whole bunch of flawed deflector panels as the basis for a body.

"After that, the film began using a lot of cross-over vehicles. They took Sebastian's truck and modified it into an ambulance. Deckard's sedan became the basis of police cruisers and staff cars. There's a bus in the film that I didn't actually work on but the look was extrapolated from the style I had already established."

Even while designing the movie's auto horde, Mead was coming up with ideas about the environment that would make the vehicles both plausible and necessary. He found his inspiration in contemporary New York.

"The city in the movie is not named," he cautions. "There's no particular setting. But, let's face it, New York is *the* example of what's going on in cities today with buildings going up over 1,000 feet.

"We used that as a springboard. We drew a profile of a city taking the two World Trade Towers as the norm. We figured that, as you went up higher, the street level as we know it today would become some sort of massive service alley sequestered beneath these enormous megastructures.

"That would, in turn, give the streets a sort of subterranean sewer look. You'd have generators and tubes and gigantic pylons supporting the sides of those buildings and taking up space on ground level. You might wind up taking a whole city block, leaving the old building structures in place, and building a large structure inside that block that would represent a pylon supporting a 3,000 foot skyscraper. Heck. That single pylon might extend for several city blocks on the side of the building. Using that idea, you eventually come up with a street filled with a lot of *stuff*. It would be transformed into a maze of pipes and tubes.

"By inference, the crime and the congestion present on this ground level would be an enormous problem, making it almost necessary for all decent citizens to avoid it, to not venture below the 40th level of the megastructures. The streets would really be *low*, in every sense of the word.

"That sort of *low* crime vs. an elevated society would lead to the creation of a second level of between-building accesses for normal citizens; freeways and people carriers looming high above the original street level. In essence, you'd have a second society built upon the remains of a past one."

Artist/Philosopher

Quite heady stuff for a designer. Listening to Mead speak, one wonders if he was hired to sketch or philosophize. In Mead's mind, it's all part of the same process.

"I approached *Blade Runner* as a classical industrial design exercise," he says. "We reinvented things to solve the problem; the problem being the script.

"The script called for us to come up with new ideas that would support the action realistically. We had to come up with objects that *looked* like what they were supposed to be. In corporate work, when you're asked to design the inside of a train or a plane, the problem is clearly delineated for you. In that type of work, however, you're dealing with reality. For this film, I had to invent things that might not be realistic by contemporary standards, but fit the dramatic reality of the story. In essence, everything had to have a dramatic, emotional or technological reason for being.

"For instance, the state of the art today for entry into an enclosed space is through the use of a little plastic card that has a magnetic code buried in the plastic. That card, however, isn't very dramatic visually. It doesn't look like it's doing anything special to allow you into that enclosed space.

"So, for the movie, we invented little 'keys' that lit up and rolled down something that resembled a watch fob or a key chain. You roll this little wheel down a fob and if the lights twinkle in the right sequence, you're allowed to enter the room. It's *waaay* past what you'd actually need, but it's more visually intriguing for the purpose of plot."

Also on tap for *Blade Runner* are parking meters (at three bucks per minute) that give off a red glow when your time is up and deep fry your hands should you try to cross them; pollution control devices for the tops of cars; a Voight-Kampf machine that measures "empathy" and a series of tools used by Deckard in tracking down renegade replicants.

Despite the forboding atmosphere de-

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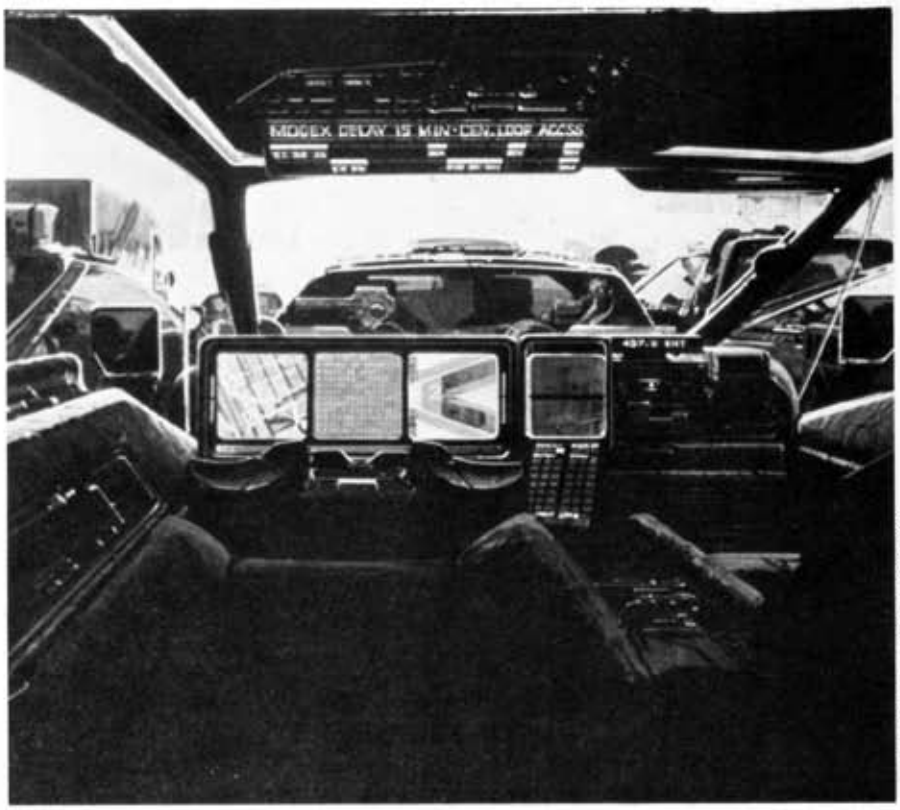

ALL ART SYDMEAD © 1982 THE LADD COMPANY

This incredible piece of artwork shows the view from inside a Police Spinner, including the complex read-outs and monitors showing aerial views.

Syd Mead

(continued from page 39)

picted in *Blade Runner*'s vision of the future and Mead's enjoyment in the work, he does confess, "This is someone else's story. I was hired to visually represent it according to the dictates of the script. Personally, I don't see the future going that way. I'm an optimist."

In Mead's eyes, cities will flourish, not decay, in years to come. "I *know* that we're going to have 3,000 foot buildings," he declares. "That idea jibes with the current trends of enclosing space. But I think that, once you're inside the future skyscraper, the building will represent a variety of spaces from parks and zoos to business centers. Right now, we're just building artificial cliffs in cities, dull structures.

"In the future, we'll probably go back to the concept of artfully constructed vistas that will take some of their cues from nature. We all like nature's randomness in terms of design. We like that visual variety. If everything becomes architecturally too streamlined or cubistic, there will be a negative effect on people. It won't seem *human*. The architecture of the future will have to be very creative.

"I see the next generation of people growing up being able to contribute to that creative element. They will be much less intimidated by technology. Right now, technology is hamstrung because of the so-called flower children; the 1960s youth who are now in their 30s and 40s. Right now, I believe what we're experiencing is the last wave of technology-inspired paranoia as this final remnant of the hippie generation moves into politics.

"They're the last group of sad, disillusioned people who just can't figure out how to bridge the gap between a thoroughly technologically supported natural society and the old industrial revolution machinery. Technology isn't a villain. Even in our movie, the robot replicants are actually people."

Mead sincerely believes that society's well-being depends on humanity's pushing for a more productive lifestyle through the use of technology. "Nature isn't really very efficient," he says. "I've always been fascinated with organic/mechanical crossover." He talks for a few minutes about new developments in protein-molecule computers before returning to the subject of his film career.

With *Blade Runner* now part of past history, Mead is turning to a few new movie assignments while keeping in touch with the corporate design world. He's not in the field of design for the glamour. His biggest reward lies in solving a problem. "I don't really have to see my designs rolling down the street in order to be fulfilled," he states.

He pauses for a moment before reconsidering, "But there IS one scene in *Blade Runner*... The *Spinner* takes off from the street. It's moving down the block. The rain is falling, illuminated by all this strange lighting. The scene is really a moving sketchbook of all the designs I did for the film; vehicles, buildings... everything." He finds himself lost in visualizing that single segment of the movie and says with a laugh, "It's pretty super."★