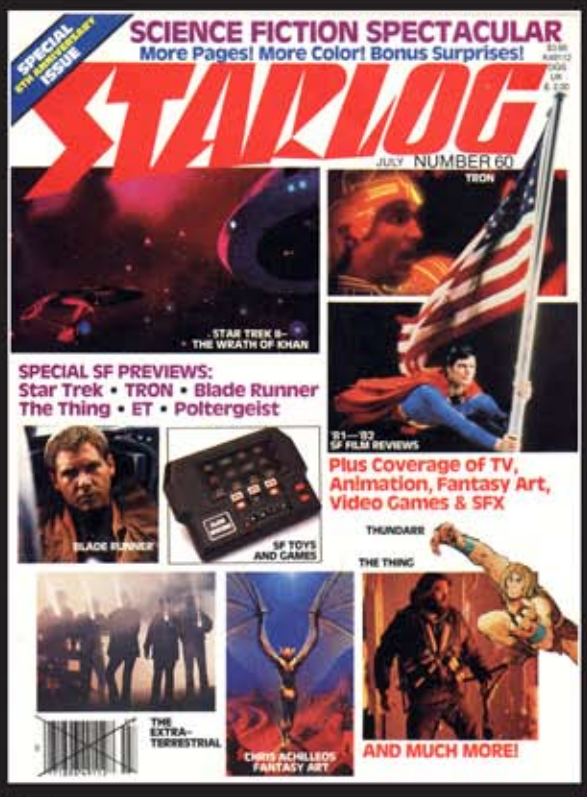
THE
BLADE RUNNER
PRINT ARCHIVE



notes:

July 1982 #60

by Robert Greenberger

Ridley Scott

A talk with the director of **Blade Runner**, sure to be one of the brightest spots in this summer's film offerings.

By ROBERT GREENBERGER

*There are only three feature films to Ridley Scott's credit but he has already established a distinctive style. His movies—*The Duellists, ALIEN, *and the upcoming* Blade Runner*—have atmospheric sets that the audience can practically smell and touch. He has tightly designed sets and lighting that help evoke this gauzy feeling. Scott also brings out character traits that seem to play on the look and feel of the atmospherics, adding an extra touch.*

Scott received praise for his strong character statements when ALIEN *was released in May 1979. The film was the first major science-fiction film to get almost as good press as* Star Wars, *which brought about the latest cycle of genre films. Both were produced at Twentieth Century-Fox under the watchful eye of Alan Ladd Jr., a man who knows talent when he sees it.*

But long before Scott even heard of the Nostromo, *he was a respected maker of British television commercials. Scott learned his trade after spending seven years at the West Hartlepool College of Art and the Royal College of Art in London. It was there that he learned how to design sets and create the necessary feeling to make them believeable. He worked in television at first and then went out to make a name for himself as one of the most prolific and successful commercial producers in England. Besides the hundreds he personally made, his company, Ridley Scott Associates, made thousands more.*

Ridley Scott relaxes against a Spinner during *Blade Runner*'s production.

At 39, Scott made The Duellists, *an adaptation of the Joseph Conrad short story. The movie took a Special Jury Prize at Cannes bringing him international attention.*

ALIEN *was already in pre-production at Twentieth at the time but no director had been found. Fox's Sandy Leiberson brought up Scott's name and the rest, as they say, is history.*

Since ALIEN, *Scott's name had been associated with several projects including, at one time or another,* Dune *and* Conan. *When he finished* ALIEN, *he told people he was developing* Tristan and Isolde *but then came the script for* Blade Runner *and he changed his mind.*

When we spoke with Scott in March, he was in the cutting room in Los Angeles making the final changes before the film's June 25th release. It had met with extremely positive previews and his changes were just minor tinkerings to improve a project Scott feels very good about.

STARLOG: What was the reaction at the previews?

RIDLEY SCOTT: Very good. We sold out of both previews in Denver and Dallas in 20 minutes. They were big—there was one 1000 seater and one just underneath that, like 950, in two separate cities.

SL: How did you first get involved with the movie?

RS: I have known the producer Michael Deeley for a number of years. He came and saw me when I was dubbing *ALIEN* and he brought this script in, which I thought was very interesting. It basically and essentially started that way, though I was in the process of doing something else. This script kind of stayed with me and so, months later, I went back and said, "Listen, is that still around?"

SL: How long did principal photography take?

RS: About 17 weeks.

SL: That's fairly long, isn't it?

RS: Not for this kind of movie. It is fairly short.

SL: You've said that you were attracted to *ALIEN* because of the script. You just said *Blade Runner*'s script attracted you. What sort of qualities do you look for in a script?

RS: It's a peculiar thing because I had never really been drawn to science-fiction reading or, in fact, science-fiction movies. I finally got thrilled by *Star Wars*—it was not just a film, it was the whole thinking—it was the kind of film which shifted gear into another dimension of filmmaking. It was totally courageous. In its own way, really, it's a kind of art movie and that really summed it up. I was in the process of doing something else, let's say more normal, and at that particular juncture *ALIEN* just happened to walk through the door—which was an odd piece of casting in a way because the only film that I had done before was *The Duellists* and in fact, I think it was Sandy Lieberson at Twentieth Century-Fox who thought to send it to me.

I think the whole joy of science fiction sunk in and touched me in a sense that I find now that, even when I am developing for the future and in the process that I'm doing now, I'm coming along with another movie and I'm still in a very exotic area. I find that a straight

piece of writing and an idea which is more related to normal contemporary life has to be really quite special in some way or have some special slant, to make it interesting. I find that these exotic films are much more fascinating. If you are going to go through a process involving 18 months to two years of your life, working on something, you've got to be totally entrenched with it for something to hold you that long.

SL: *ALIEN* represented Dan O'Bannon and Ron Shusett's vision of the future and *Blade Runner* is a presentation of Phil Dick's vision. How do they match your vision?

RS: I think that these things are all interpretations of what I bring to the film. I guess the visual overlay, which is in the sense the presentation of what it's like, is therefore not really their vision of this particular future. Both films are a process of shooting through the camera with one's own taste. Therefore what one gets in blueprint or screenplay is hopefully a good story or a thrilling story or a touching story or a sentimental story, well told. After the blueprint, things are wide open for interpretations. It can be screwed up or enhanced, whichever way you like to go, whoever is handling it, basically.

I think that the strength of your balance in the screenplay—which in *ALIEN* was contributed to by Walter Hill—determines the film's outcome. *ALIEN* had a very sharp sledgehammer of a screenplay which drove along at an incredible pace and which had some shocking ideas about sequences and the actual thrust of the whole thing was there, but the interpretation of how you go about it is another thing.

The concept of the future is—I'm afraid when you get into these things it's always a battle because you are dealing with unknown quantities and people. A lot of people are involved when you are trying to convey an idea of what *you* want. It then has to be interpreted by someone else, until finally something is built and then filmed within the piece of that structure. The idea may be there for the story but the actual execution is really seldom anything like the screenplay.

SL: It is our understanding that Hampton Fancher's original screenplay has gone through quite a number of changes. (See STARLOG #58 for details.)

RS: Not really. Hampton's screenplay was the one I had read initially and we did a lot of work with Hampton, god, over a period of nine months while we were preparing preproduction. So, in other words, we were preproducing as well as refining the basic structure, the basic screenplay. David Peoples was brought in to put another layer of element in—involving the detection work and a certain kind of dialogue.

SL: How close is the finished project to the original screenplay?

RS: If we are going back to the original two years ago, then I guess it has changed quite a lot, but the screenplay I read from Hampton, the one we finished with, has changed somewhat. It's difficult to say. . . it's kind of settled down. There are good elements from both sides.

During the showdown between Rick Deckard (Harrison Ford) and Roy Batty (Rutger Hauer), things get violent.

SL: Had you read Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* beforehand?

RS: I haven't read it. In fact, the film itself has a slight resemblance to the novel, in terms of the basic idea, obviously. The Dick novel is very complex, very convoluted. A brilliant piece which in book form would never make a film. It's too complex, a very special piece of literature. I think very seldom does the screenplay compare with the book. There are always drastic changes that have to take place, again in terms of the story's drive and thrust of the film. If you just filmed the book, normally you would have a very slow movie.

SL: You've said that you're intrigued by a sense of inevitability in *The Duellists* and in *ALIEN*. Is that sense in *Blade Runner*?

RS: Yes it is. My central character, Rick Deckard, is a sardonic kind of character who prefers to live down here, even though he has opportunities to go off-world. He is encouraged to go off-world where there is a better kind of life, cleaner air, high pay, more opportunities, etc. In his own words, in a voice-over that we used to have in the film, he said, "But then, I preferred it down here." He preferred to take his chances down here because he still had a kind of faith in the idea that everything would pull itself together again. We seem to feel that he knows it won't change and we know it won't change—in fact it is an inevitability about the way the world is going—and so, yes, I think it is portrayed a little bit like that. I hope it's not taken too seriously, but actually I'm hoping to have fun with it! It's not a lecture.

SL: Can you tell us about the role of the replicants in that society?

RS: There are little ground rules that one has to create for one's own logistics. Sometimes in literature one can get away without necessarily explaining something because one isn't explaining things right through. In film terms, one has to ideally explain things, certainly in commercial cinema. I think that when it's working right, it's the best. It's for a big audience and people have to understand it and therefore you're talking about communications. One of the ground rules that we decided upon is the word "replicant." It's a word we came up with—it wasn't originally in the book.

SL: No, they were androids.

RS: Yes, they were androids. Now, initially my reaction to seeing androids is that the word "android" was being overused and therefore rather cliche. People immediately expect a character with nuts and bolts coming out of its head. You are talking about robotics or androids and the next stage is humanoids—in other words, a replica of a human. Let's say, then, that we created one little ground rule which was to say: Industry and conglomerates moved out into space both for industrial and military purposes. Whether it was for weaponry, mining, fighting. . . maybe we decided it was better to fight in space than to blow up the world. If you are going to have a battle, have a fight out there.

Some of these conglomerates were involved in genetics, genetic engineering, and I guess there will be an actual process somebody will bring about, creating lifeforms at some point in time and indeed they might even figure out how to create human life. It might even become an industrial process. I mean, industrial genetics in the sense that one could easily allow the rules to slip a little bit and start creating a second-class generation—second class citizens who are used for these services off-world, deep in space. There is going to come a point in the near future where, for the sake of developing a space program, they are continually running out of volunteers to go off into space with a view of never returning. That is a pretty rough pros-

Deckard is called into service, above, and investigates a murder, opposite.

pect so maybe it is better to have replicants do that—they can be totally conditioned since they have no particular father or mother or background except for the laboratory process and it would not have too many psychological problems about going off into deep space. So that was a little ground rule we created and some of our replicants are military, some are ex-soldiers, some have to do with deep space exploration, some probably used in the process of mining, looking for minerals.

SL: How much personality are they allowed to have?

RS: Precisely what you find essentially in human beings. That is one of the points of the movie.

SL: They wanted to be treated as humans.

RS: They want *life*. Because what humans have done in the process of building the replicants genetically is they have also built in the systems where they are terminated automatically from a disease which is built into their body chemical structure. The disease is triggered after a period of four years.

Now this all sounds terribly serious and it sounds like it's a film about genetics and genetic enegineering but it's not that at all. It's essentially an adventure in a near-future period. It's a kind of future people watching the movie might experience in 40 years' time. The environment is this massive city which could be on the eastern seaboard or could be the west coast with this massive conglomerate of people. Within, we find Rick Deckard who is a detective of a special kind we call a blade runner. A blade runner is a special branch, he is licensed to deal with specific individuals and one of his tasks is to cover police things... fugitives, renegades, replicants that might somehow or other find their way down here from off-world. His job is to get them back out or kill them, exterminate them.

SL: You have an extensive background as a designer. Can you tell us about how you worked on designing this particular future?

RS: I always pick the people that I want to work with and it's up to the degree of choosing people in different roles... in a funny way it's like casting an actor because if you choose the right people, you're halfway there, you know what I mean? In other words, my task becomes a little bit easier. I always hire as good as I can get. People can then be pretty well left alone. They report and they show you what is happening and it becomes a moderating process which makes life easier—as opposed to having to sit down and spend every second of the day saying this and this and this.

I discussed my ideas and saw what the people designed, brought back to me and we discussed it. I was totally involved in the design process but was open to other interpretations.

SL: Did it bother you that when you cast Harrison Ford, you also cast Han Solo and Indiana Jones?

RS: Not at all. In fact, I think that was a kind of attraction. I knew Rick Deckard, the central character of *Blade Runner*, was so different from Han Solo that it represented a kind of challenge to Harrison. He would most certainly have played against the central character that we know him for, plus the fact that, from my point of view as a filmmaker and someone who is actually trying to aim a movie at an audience, people were familiar with Harrison [even though *Raiders of the Lost Ark* hadn't been released yet]. I thought it was double-edged. It was a great choice, you know, because I knew Harrison wanted a change of pace and he certainly has done that.

SL: How did you approach the rest of your casting?

RS: I have always gone through the process of casting with a totally open mind, with no preconceived notions about anything. It's funny, I've never had anybody laid on me—when a studio has come in and said you *must* use this person if you are going to do the movie. That has never happened, therefore, I always go into a casting session with a view that you should aim for one or two stars in the lead. There is a kind of insurance in that. But I know frequently that that is impractical when there are few available.

SL: Are you the kind of director that works closely with the actors on developing the characters?

RS: Yes, as much as we can. There is always a period of rehearsals before the film and I at least try to get a couple of weeks for casting and reading through the script. I usually take a certain amount of time and tell them all about the overall film, not just about their particular parts. It's usually a lengthy process, but then it is worth it because they know how they sit, how they figure within the overall piece. It is very important that they understand the entire thing rather than just asking someone in to read a scene.

SL: How was it working with Doug Trumbull on the special effects?

RS: Wonderful. Doug's company, EEG, got the whole thing going in terms of effects. Then Doug was trying to set up *Brainstorm*, so he left us and we continued under the supervision of David Dryer, the special-effects director, who is terrific. That whole process was great... it was very enlightening for me because I love getting involved with the effects. They were absolutely fascinating.

SL: Did you and Doug work out the effects way in advance?

RS: Oh yes. In the early days, but then Doug moved on but I am hoping to do my next film with Doug as well.

SL: A lot of movies are very reliant on the role of special effects. Does this bother you?

RS: No, not at all. I think that what's happened is that a lot of directors in the early days seemed to have connotations of science fiction or thriller—I don't like to use the word "horror"—movies being "B" movies. If you're in a relatively exotic area then one is vaguely "B-movieish." I think that now it is kind of turned about. The movies I like to make are for an audience, obviously, not just a few people. Therefore I am talking about a very big cinema and the big cinema movies of the last few years, that I have particularly enjoyed, have all been filmed involving special effects where they were integrated totally. It's interwoven to such a degree that the special effects are like a character. I think that any director who thinks about it in any other way doesn't know how to handle special effects.

Special effects to me are like in *ALIEN*... they were the eighth member of the cast. I don't think of the alien in terms of being a monster. In *Close Encounters* the effects were remarkable and I think it was one of the

Ford as Deckard and Sean Young as Rachel, his replicant lover, left, and Hauer as the crafty Batty.

greatest optimistic viewpoints that you could have.

SL: Had your work in commercials prepared you for feature filmmaking?

RS: Yes. Commercial films were my film school. I totally learned there about the technique, presentation and how to communicate.

SL: You've been able to apply all of that to the sets and the actors, but what about the post-production process? How closely are you working with your editor Terry Rawlings (who also edited *Chariots of Fire*)?

RS: Totally. Obviously it's been difficult because one has one's load spread out. I've been going into the Los Angeles offices and then back to London for editing and I've been post-producing in London while Trumbull's company was still doing the effects here in Los Angeles. I was going backwards and forwards, really, twice a month.

SL: You also find music very important, don't you? Can you tell about your discussions with Vangelis [who won the Academy Award for his score to *Chariots of Fire*]?

RS: Obviously one always goes through a process of discussion with a musician and one tries to communicate as much as one can, by playing other music. It drives them crazy because, Terry Rawlings, whom I've always worked with, edits the film and he has a particularly strong musical vent, therefore we always had a track for the film before the composer really comes near it. It helps because you see where you are headed and what it will be like with all the layers filled in and sometimes that is totally frustrating for the composer. It's frustrating when the composer hears the other music and the composer has to try and shut his ears off from that because, otherwise, he becomes influenced by the music. Frequently one will cut it and then not show it to the composer with the music behind it. One wants his own original, fresh input. So, it is difficult work. It's kind of abstract. It's also how much you demonstrate, how much clarification you need before you leave him with it. He is an artist in his own right and you must leave him a lot, actually, in terms of what you feel, providing one has briefed him in a certain way, saying "I want a romantic feeling here, a certain thrust there and not much here."

SL: So how did your discussions with Vangelis go? What were you looking for?

RS: I'm not as musically involved, actually. I used him once for a commercial about two years ago and I kind of like that electronic sound anyway. I like that kind of music from Vangelis and others, like Brian Eno. I think that music's interesting because it's so, in one sense, sounds manufactured and yet, it's music with a very definite, warm personality. I think Vangelis uses a combination of all sorts of things; I think he uses electronic instrumentation as well as real instruments and it's a rather nice mixture.

SL: I know what you're saying. I was listening to his *Chariots of Fire* soundtrack last night and was surprised to hear how many real instruments were brought into use.

RS: Yes. His music is absolutely perfect for the film. He is a legend himself at this moment. If synthesized music had been more forceful when Stanley Kubrick was doing *2001*, he may have used it. I'm sure he was well aware of that kind of music, aware of everything. Somehow or other, synthesized music has seemed to develop more sophisticated forms and is somehow less arty and more communicative. Especially in the last five years, let's say. It's been this small group of people trying to push their way through and they are suddenly being noticed. I mean, they have gone on using something like this kind of music; these artists would have been an extraordinary choice on the part of Kubrick. The music he did choose was a great counterpoint and that is what I like about Vangelis: he counterpoints things. He goes against the grain and gets an effect that way rather than going with the flow.

SL: With *Blade Runner* finished, are you still pursuing your goal to become a producer?

RS: Yes. I think that the process of directing is frustrating.

SL: In what ways?

RS: You're kind of at the center of the nervous system and you're kind of the central artery. When there is a lot of blood flowing through, you get a headache frequently. I think a producer experiences this as well. But it's not quite as on-the-line as the director's position. The director is channeling through him or they should be. It's a very hard process, a hard physical process and it would be nice to have a change of pace. It would be nice to stand off and watch it rather than being right out here in the front.

SL: You wouldn't want to try the producer/director route, then?

RS: Oh god no. I think that is a very complex process. I think you need two people.

SL: What about writing and developing properties?

RS: Oh sure, I do it all the time. I've done only a little bit of writing actually. I find the process not particularly rewarding. I find it very frustrating, and it would take too long for me. I've never really gone through or sat down for a long period to write. You kind of get into a groove as a writer and writing is not something you just jump into, I think. You gradually just slide into it and then become obsessed by it and then you are a writer and that takes time. The process, therefore, to slide in and out of writing for me would be very difficult. It would need to be on a more prolonged, constant basis. I don't think I would enjoy it.

I'm much better at dealing with writers in an editorial sense or story sense. I find it is much cleaner; it's essential to stand back off it.

SL: So you see directing as interpreting the screenplay into something visual.

RS: No, not just visually. Every way. You use every sense one can and if the viewers are there, then you can develop *everything*, but certainly one of the processes as a director, from my point of view and the way I work, is that because I lean very strongly and I'm interested very much in the visual side of the film, then a lot of that goes into the screenplay.

SL: Ok, here's the obvious question: what's next?

RS: Very simply, it's a fairy story.

SL: A fantasy?

RS: It's a fairy story. It's called, at the moment, *Legend of Darkness*. It's a fairy tale—a very, very beautiful fairy tale. In fact, it was a novel and now a screenplay. It's original. ★