Directed by Ridley Scott
Written by Hampton Fancher, David Peoples, Philip K. Dick (novel)
Produced by Michael Deeley
Cinematography by Jordan Cronenweth
Edited by Terry Rawlings
Production Design by Lawrence G. Paull
Art Direction by David L. Snyder
Visual Futurist Syd Mead
Special Effects supervised by Douglas Trumbull
Music Composed by Vangelis

Harrison Ford... Rick Deckard
Rutger Hauer... Roy Batty
Sean Young... Rachael
Edward James Olmos... Gaff
Daryl Hannah... Pris
William Sanderson... J.F. Sebastian
Brion James... Leon Kowalski
Joe Turkel... Dr. Eldon Tyrell
Joanna Cassidy... Zhora
James Hong... Hannibal Chew
Morgan Paull... Holden


“Interview with Ridley Scott in which the director reminisces on Blade Runner fourteen years after the fact and answers some of the film’s most frequently asked questions”

RS: No. That unicorn was actually filmed prior to any thought of making Legend. In fact, it was specifically shot for Blade Runner during the post production process. At that point in time I was editing the picture in England, at Pinewood Studios, and we were heading toward a mix. Yet I still, creatively speaking, had this blank space in my head in regards to what Deckard’s dream at the piano was going to be all about.

That was distressing, because this was an important moment for me. I’d predetermined that that unicorn scene would be the strongest clue that Deckard, this hunter of replicants, might actually be an artificial human himself. I did feel that this dream had to be vague, indirect. I didn’t mind if it remained a bit mysterious, either, so that you had to think about it. Because there is a clear thread throughout the film that would later explain it.

Anyways, I eventually realized I had to think of an image that was so personal it could only belong to an individual’s inner thoughts. And eventually I hit on a unicorn.

You mentioned the word “dream,” which is interesting. Because the way you staged that scene in Blade Runner, it’s almost as if Ford’s drifting off into a reverie.

Yeah. Well, actually, he’s pissed. He’s drunk. On a rather strange bottle of twenty-first-century Johnny Walker Red. Which he took with him, you may remember, when he went to get his hard copy from the Esper.

Unfortunately, I don’t think I really played Deckard drunk enough in that scene. What I mean by that is the Deckard character was supposed to be somewhat Marlowesque, after the Raymond Chandler antihero, you know? And Marlowe was always a little tiddly. So I thought that that scene would be a good opportunity to see our own hero a bit drunk while he was trying to work, as he was puzzling over these old photographs.

Ah, Blade Runner’s infamous photographs. Why did you choose that particular device to associate with the film’s replicants?

Because photographs are essentially history. Which is what these replicants don’t have.

One final question regarding the replicants’ fascination with photographs—couldn’t these snapshots also be interpreted as hard-copy analogs of the artificial memories implanted in the androids?

Definitely. Don’t forget that just prior to the unicorn scene, Deckard has told Rachel that her memories are not hers. Then he gives her a couple of examples of these implants, like the spider giving birth outside her window. At which point Rachel basically breaks down and leaves Deckard’s apartment. And he feels, I guess, guilty about that process.

We next find Deckard poring over the photographs and noodling at his piano. And of course what we do then is reveal an extremely private and innermost thought of his, which is triggered by the music Deckard is playing. Now, music, in my mind at least, is a very visual medium. It can provoke intense imagery. So when Deckard kind of drifts off at that moment, I thought that the image which came into his mind ought to be something which we would otherwise never see in the movie.

I must confess that when I first saw the completed film at the San Diego preview, I felt the exclusion of the unicorn scene seriously disrupted the connections you were trying to make. I picked up on the other clues that Deckard might be a replicant—his collection of photographs, the scene where Ford’s eyes glow—but without that specific shot of the unicorn in the woods, I felt more inclined to accept Olmos’ act of leaving behind the tinfoil unicorn as merely an indication that Gaff had come to Deckard’s apartment and decided to let Sean Young live. But then, when I saw the Director’s Cut, the inclusion of the live unicorn made a more emotional impact. Now I could see that the tinfoil origami was a sign Gaff knew Deckard’s thoughts.

So it’s almost as if there are two different movies there. In the original theatrical release, Deckard, might be a replicant; in the Director’s Cut, he is one.

They are two different movies. But the Director’s Cut is closer to what I was originally after.

What I find interesting about that unicorn scene is that while so much has been made by the critics of the unicorn, they’ve actually missed the wider issue. It is not the unicorn itself which is important. It is the landscape around it—the green landscape—they should be noticing.

I understand what you’re saying. But, to be fair, I can also understand the confusion. The original prints of Blade Runner did, in fact, conclude with green landscapes. Even if they were tacked-on ones.

Tack-on, as you say. By some of the producers, and by the studio. Which I’m sure we’ll talk about later.

But before that happened, my original thought had been to never show a green landscape during Blade Runner. We would only see an urban world. But I subsequently figured, since this moment of Deckard noodling at the piano offered the pictorial opportunity of a dream, why not show the unicorn? In a forest? It’s an image that’s so out of place with the rest of the picture that even if I only run it for three seconds, the audience will understand that they’re witnessing some sort of reverie.

Given the confusion that that unicorn has raised in some circles, I’m not sure your faith in the audience was justified.

I know what you mean. Maybe I should amend that to say, I was sure that the part of the audience which was paying attention would understand it! [laughs]

Besides creative differences, I understand another reason the unicorn shot was deleted from the original theatrical prints had something to do with the fact that you’d filmed it relatively late in the game.
True. Besides the tacked-on ending, the unicorn scene was more or less the last thing I shot for the picture. By that time, the pressure had grown quite intense to just get the bloody film into theaters.

That raises another question. Over the years, you’ve been quoted as saying that you very much wanted that unicorn footage back in the film. Yet my own research indicates that when certain producers originally requested that you delete that shot, you didn’t necessarily object. What’s the real story here? Had the Blade Runner pressures grown so great, the problems so numerous, that you finally just threw in the towel?

No. You see, by then I’d been through the whole process of going to war. Which was making the movie, with all its attendant budgetary problems and “clashes with certain producers” and so on. Still, I really thought I’d got it with Blade Runner, you know? I genuinely felt I’d made an interesting movie.

Then came the confusion that followed the previews in Texas and Colorado. Which created—I guess the word is insecurity, A certain insecurity was going around at the time between myself and the Ladd Company and Michael Deeley and Yorkin and Perenchio, the film’s other producers. It was that insecurity which led to the original deletion of the unicorn sequence.

Frankly, I’m not surprised. Blade Runner is quite an unusual, stylized and, if I may say so, artistic product. Especially for the studios. That must have been difficult, particularly since you and I are both well aware of the fact that—at least in terms of the Hollywood commercial mindset—anything smacking of “art” automatically breeds insecurity.

I never thought about it that way. My way of thinking was, hey, I just made the movie.

Moving on, why did you decide to primarily film Blade Runner on the Warner Brothers back lot? That seems an unusual choice for you, given the penchant for location shooting I’ve noticed in your other pictures.

Actually, Michael Deeley and I did quite a bit of location scouting on Blade Runner—Boston, Atlanta, New York, even London. Funnily enough, today I could probably shoot Blade Runner in the city of London, because of the way it’s being developed. It’s as spectacular as New York.

In any event, we had done all this location hunting before I finally realized I’d never be able to control the two or three real city blocks we’d need to dress as a set for the length and space of time I’d need them. Which would have been months. We never could have done that in a genuine city and kept a lid on the situation. Therefore, it became very apparent that my only alternative was a studio back lot. Which I was really scared to death of, because back lots always look like back lots.

You managed to make it not look like a back lot.

Well, the fact that we were shooting at night was certainly a helpful factor. But Warner’s back lot isn’t that big. So if we hadn’t filmed Blade Runner at night, you would have been able to see beyond the margins of our set to all those small hills which surround the Warner Brothers’ studio. That’s also the reason it’s raining all the time in Blade Runner, you know. To disguise the fact that we were shooting on a back lot.

Were the constant rain and night-time exteriors purely pragmatic decisions? I mean, that ubiquitous damp and darkness certainly adds to Blade Runner’s atmosphere.

It does help lend a realistic quality to the story, yes. But really, a lot of the reason we finally settled on all that rain and night shooting was to hide the sets. I was really paranoid that audiences would notice we were shooting on a back lot.

This is a basic question, but how did you latch onto the actual title for this film? I do know you bought the rights to the words ‘Blade Runner’ from Burroughs and Norton, but who initially discovered those words? And why did you choose them?

That’s a good question, but a long answer.

We actually spent months, in early 1980s, when I first came here to Los Angeles—Hampton Fancher and I, and sometimes Michael Deeley—spending every day slogging through the Dangerous Days script. Now, Hampton had composed a clever screenplay about a man who falls in love with his quarry. But for budgetary reasons, he’d kept it very internal. So I said to him, “You know, Hampton, as soon as this Deckard character walks out a door, whatever he looks at must endorse the fact that his world has reached the point where it can create replicants. Otherwise this picture will not fly. It’ll become an intellectual sci-fi.”

This was the point where we began to create the architecture of the film. Not long after, we’d arrived at a screenplay which I think nicely integrated Hampton’s original storyline, characterizations, and dialogue with what we’d managed to logically decide what Blade Runner’s outside world had to be like.

But then I finally said to Hampton, “You know, we can’t keep calling Deckard a goddamn detective.” And he said “Why not?” I replied, “Because we’re telling a story in 2019, for Christ’s sake. The word ‘detective’ will probably still be around then, but this job Deckard does, killing androids, that requires something new. We’ve got to come up with a bloody name for his profession.”

That was on a Friday. Hampton slunk in the next Monday. We had our meeting, and he said, “By the way, I’ve come up with a name.” And I asked “What is it?” But instead of telling me, he
wrote it down. And as he handed the slip of paper Hampton said, “It’s better you read it than hear it.”

Of course, it read “Blade Runner.” I said, “That’s great! It’s wonderful!” But the more I enthused about it, the more Hampton looked guiltier and guiltier. So I asked, “Where’d it come from? Is it yours?” [laughs] Finally he said, “Well…no, not really. Actually it’s William Burroughs’. From a slim book he wrote in 1979 called Blade Runner: A Movie.” And I said “Well, we gotta buy it, we gotta buy it!”

Burroughs, who turned out to be a fan of Philip Dick’s, then said “Sure!” when we approached him, and gave it to us for a nominal fee. So that’s how the title was acquired. I thought the words “Blade Runner” very well-suited our needs. It was a nice, threatening name that neatly described a violent action.

It also neatly describes Deckard’s character, which runs on the knife’s edge between humanity and inhumanity.

Yes, it does. What’s more, there are a lot of delivery services in Hollywood that now have exactly the same style of typeface. [laughs]

How did you get along with Hampton?

It used to vary a bit day by day, but basically I thought we got along extremely well. Incidentally, I think Hampton’s definitely got a touch of genius. He’ll be amused to hear me say that.

One thing I’ve always found amusing about the response to this picture is how it’s perceived as being such a deadly serious work. Now, don’t misunderstand me—I think you’ve created a motion picture which is both thought-provoking and mature—but I also remember you telling me you were trying to create a live-action version of Heavy Metal. A comic book, in other words. And Blade Runner is a comic book.

It is indeed. I really made a film which is a comic book, and you’ve got to remember that. But people always misinterpret this aspect of the production.

They also underestimate the huge problem of taking a comic strip and adapting it to the screen. That’s a difficult process, because the comic strips work on a two-dimensional level. You’re looking at one line here, one line there, some terrific art work and dynamic layout, and your brain supplies the rest. But to duplicate that experience in a film requires enormous discipline and preplanning. This is one reason that I won’t even touch a futuristic picture until I get its script into reasonable shape. Because everything else springs from that, including the film’s visual aspects. Which in turn creates the concrete environment of that future.

Therefore, if I do a science fiction, it’s got to somehow not be wasted, if you know what I mean. Sci-fi presents a wonderful opportunity, because if you get it right, anything goes. But you’d better have drawn up your rulebook for the world you’ve created first. Then you’d better stick to it.

What about the ethical problems regarding the replicants in Blade Runner? More than once, they’re compared to slaves.

I always felt I’d been a bit fanciful with the underlying concept of the replicants, really. Because if a society decided to produce a second-class species, that society would also probably develop it with subhuman capabilities. You wouldn’t want your twin objecting to your going to its cupboard to remove its kidney. The fact that the replicants in Blade Runner are indeed intelligent complicates the situation. You immediately have a huge morality problem. But I must say that I’m not comfortable with these issues. If I’d gone into them in Blade Runner, I would have had a totally different picture. So I didn’t.

Why not?

Two absolutely essential considerations are critical to the success of any so-called Hollywood picture. The first is that the end result of any film is communication with its audience. And the second is, the larger the film, the larger your budget—which also means the larger audience you have to consider. I think a lot of people actually don’t realize that.

So what you’ve got to set in your mind, right up front, is what kind of audience you’re hoping your subject will reach. Therefore, unless you’re a fool, you construct your story and budget and the scope of your film accordingly. In other words, if you’re going to end up in an art cinema, you should stay within the confines of a small budget movie, which will allow you to explore most any esoteric idea you wish. But if you’re going to attempt to follow along the path of a Spielberg, then your choice of subject matter and the way you’re going to explain and communicate your story to that larger audience is, of necessity, going to be on a slightly more simplified level. I wouldn’t say on any less intelligent level, just less esoteric.

Choosing to present your subject matter in this manner sounds like a delicate balancing act.

Well, it all gets down to instinct. If you apply pure logic to your choice of subject, that’s dangerous. Potentially sterile. So to a certain extent you’re drawn into a film by your own instincts. And I think that my own instincts happen to be fairly commercial ones.

Moving on to a plot point, one that’s constantly discussed, is the matter of how many replicants Deckard’s supposed to be hunting. Specifically, I think you know what I mean—the confusion from Bryant saying that out of the six original escaped androids, one was already dead, leaving five. But Deckard only retires four. I think I know the answer to this question, but could you officially put it on the record?

I assume you’re speaking of Mary, the sixth replicant we had to drop. I’d actually cast that part. Given the role to an interesting young lady about the same age as Daryl Hannah, whose name I can’t recall—

Stacey Nelkin?

That’s it. Actually, we removed Mary’s scenes because we couldn’t afford to do them. We suddenly realized, about the third week into filming, that with the kind of detail I work with, we were going to have to build in a hedge against going over budget. In

...
other words, we’d have to remove some scenes, remove some action. Mary’s action, as it turned out.

So all this confusion resulted from a money issue.

Yep. Stacey was devastated, poor thing. I still feel a bit badly about that. I’m also sorry the character itself had to be written out; Mary was going to be the only replicant that the audience would have gotten to see naturally fade away. What we’d come up with was a situation that took place early on in the film. In a dark room, with the other replicants watching Mary die. That’s how we were going to introduce the replicants.

That’s interesting, because in the last draft of the script I have mentioning Mary, she survives up until the end of the film. At which point we see her hiding in a closet in Sebastian’s apartment. Until Deckard shoots through the closet door, killing her.

We’d rewritten that. Mary’s primary scene was now going to take place very early on. You’d witness all these replicants hovering over her deathbed before you even met Roy Batty. So it gave these replicants an instant sort of sympathy. I was sorry to see that go—it was rather a sad scene, actually.

Let’s discuss an interesting visual motif that runs throughout Blade Runner. It begins with that giant eye at the start of the film, the close-up of the blue iris which is intercut with the wide shots of the industrial landscape. Was that meant to be a symbolic or literal eye?

I think it was intuitively going along with the root of an Orwellian idea. That the world is more of a controlled place now. It’s really the eye of Big Brother.

Or Eldon Tyrell?

Or Tyrell. Tyrell, in fact, had he lived, would certainly have been Big Brother.

I ask this because Blade Runner’s special effects storyboards suggested that the eye belonged to Holden, the Blade Runner shot by Leon in the Interrogation Room.

That was the early intent, yes. But I later realized that linking that eye with any specific character was far too literal a maneuver and removed the particular emotion I was trying to induce.

Inserting that gigantic, staring orb up front set up an interesting paranoid vibe, I thought. Because instead of the audience watching the film, the film is watching the audience....

You hit it. Blade Runner, in a sense, actually is about paranoia. And that eye underscores Deckard’s dilemma, because by the end of the film, he believes he may be a replicant himself.

Continuing with Blade Runner’s use of vision, there seems to also be a definite “eye motif” in the film. I mean, besides the giant eye in the first act, you have the Voight-Kampff machine that looks into eyes. Chew works at an eye lab, Batty holds up artificial eyes in front of his own. Tyrell’s eyes are gouged out, the replicants eyes glow...this sort of thing persists throughout the picture. Was this insistent repetition intentional on your part?

Well, who was it said that the eyes are the windows to the soul? I believe that. Just as I believe that they are the windows in your head.

But the basic reason I started out the film on an eye and then continued to emphasize eyes through action or dialogue was because of the Voight-Kampff machine. It just sat there and focused on the windows in your head. Therefore, it was logical that I begin the film on this window and attempt to develop and sustain that imagery throughout the film.

Also, you know, when you think about it, the eye is the single most vulnerable aperture in your body. Without your eyes, man, you’ve got nothing. And sticking something through someone’s eye is a very simple way of killing somebody. That feeds right back into the atmosphere of paranoia I was attempting to create.

So it all comes back to the Voight-Kampff machine. Which was a stroke of collective genius. First came Philip K. Dick, who invented this totally believable instrumentality and term—“Voight-Kampff” sounds like a real piece of equipment, like an Arriflex. Then Hampton Fancher brilliantly expanded and deepened Dick’s concept. Finally, Syd Mead came up with a marvelous design for a working model of this imaginary thing. All of these accomplishments were quite extraordinary.

The use of the Voight-Kampff instrument raises a basic question, though. If Blade Runners have photographs and videotapes of what replicants look like—and you establish both of these facts early in the film—why do they have to give them a Voight-Kampff to determine if they are indeed replicants?

If replicants have been replicated from human beings, then I guess a law would have to be passed as a “fail-safe.” Zone demanding that all replicants had to be tested in case you found the real thing. Either way, they would deny being replicants.

Obviously, the glowing eyes of the replicants were meant to be a dramatic and not a literal device, correct?

Yes. Because if you could walk into a room and see someone’s eyes shining away at you, why take the trouble of testing them? You’d just blow them away where they stood. So that retinal kickback was primarily a cinematic technique, mainly used as a tip-off for the audience.

However I’d also intended a couple of other, more subtle things with the replicants’ glowing eyes. One was semihumorous and slightly ironic—the fact that, despite all their technology, the genetic designers of Blade Runner’s world still hadn’t quite perfected their products’ eyeballs. So that kickback you saw from the replicants’ retinas was a bit of a design flaw. I was also trying to say that the eye is really the most important organ in the human body. Its like a two-way mirror; the eye doesn't only see a lot, the eye gives away a lot. A glowing human retina seemed one way of stating that.

Your casting of Sean Young was an interesting choice—she’s almost too beautiful to be true.
But that was the point, you see. If this patriarchal technology could create artificial women, then they'd surely design them to be young and sexually attractive. Blade Runner even obliquely comments on this, through Pris' designation as a "pleasure unit." That’s a totally fantastic concept, by the way, and I don’t agree with it. I do’t even want to discuss it. But that would be the reality of this civilization.

Also [laughs], when Sean was made up in her forties outfit, she somewhat reminded me of Rita Hayworth. She had that look. And Hayworth had been my ideal of the sphinxlike femme fatale ever since I saw her in Gilda [1946, and an important film noir]. So I suppose you could say Rachel was my homage to Gilda in a way.

I’m sure this has been brought up to you before, but the only people Deckard kills in the film are women. And the first one he kills, Zhora, he shoots in the back. Now, the film noir hero was always cynical, but Deckard’s actions seem to carry things beyond that. Was this further deconstruction of the film noir protagonist intentional on your part?

Yeah, but you know, I was going down this avenue of exploring Hollywood. The first real Hollywood movie I’d done was Alien, and Alien was pretty dark. So I decided to make Blade Runner a further inversion of Hollywood values.

What I was really dealing with in BR was an antihero, an almost soulless man who really didn’t give a shit whether he shot these artificial humans in the front or shot them in the back. He’s simply there to do the job. But what we learn at the beginning of the film through the voice-over, which is now gone, thank God, is that he’s also begun to act with a certain amount of remorse. Deckard starts the picture realizing he’s getting touched by his work. Which of course sets up the ensuing situations that turn his world upside-down.

So I walked into Blade Runner from Alien, believe it or not, with a tiny reputation for being excessive. And I thought, “Well jeez, if that’s all it takes to get this reputation, guys, I’ll be excessive.”

Anyway, it was some time before I decided to saddle up back into science fiction. It took me almost two years to kick off with Blade Runner, and that was after a lot of hemming and hawing and trudging around looking at various locations. At which point I decided that the only way for me to do BR was to somehow fake it up on a studio back lot. So we budgeted it out and I think it came out at somewhere near $15 or $20 million.

Now this figure was already well above what had been projected for the original Dangerous Days script. But Hampton had written a certain type of film, of a certain scale, and then Blade Runner grew. Really, I think, in terms of what I wanted to add to it.

Finding that initial $15 or $20 million, though, wasn’t easy. First we had Filmways drop out, although they were actually quite nice about the way they handled that. Then we couldn’t find the start funds we needed, because at this point in time it was about two years after 1941 [Stephen Spielberg’s costly WWII comedy], and about one year after Heaven’s Gate. Both of which had cost considerably more than our estimated budget, and both of which had flopped. So there was some financial hesitation going on in the industry. Yet $15 or $20 million certainly wasn’t inordinate, it was about medium high.

So Michael Deeley said to Filmways, “Okay, okay,” and quickly bailed out and went and saw a few people, and then brought back the Ladd Company and Tandem. Tandem, basically came in with expenses money, which is the money that you are short of. With a view to also picking up any money we went overbudget on as well. Right?

Yes?

So I think that by the time Tandem signed on we’d finally budgeted the film out—and I’ll get to the point in a moment—to about $22.5 million.

Which ultimately ended up costing a little over $28 million.

Yes. So I think Jerry Perenchio and Bud Yorkin were originally obliged to put in somewhere between $3 or $4 million for Blade Runner, which then rose by another $3 million or so. Which in those days was a lot of money. But for those guys, I think, it was a drop in the ocean.

Anyway, eventually I was rightly beaten up because of our involvement with Tandem. And that was the crossover point for me. Because when I looked around—and this is not being superior in any form, and mustn’t come out as being superior—I realized I was essentially with, for the most part, the wrong kind of people to make this movie. We’d started the process with people who, on the surface, felt pretty supportive. On reflection, however, and I discovered this fairly quickly, I found out that Tandem and I just didn’t think on the same wavelength. They were people who were basically—well.

Let’s call them sophisticated television people. People who weren’t capable of visualizing the type of accurate film budget I required for a film. Tandem, I think, always felt that my asking for additional funds while we were shooting Blade Runner, was, to some degree, some kind of indulgence. It wasn’t. It was me, as the director of that film, having a certain vision. And I was sticking to that fucking vision!

You were simply being true to your project.

That’s right. Something else Tandem didn’t understand.

I know you also had problems with your crew while you were filming Blade Runner. To what do you ascribe that?

Well, I didn’t have problems with everyone on the crew. But you know what? I think it might have been something as simple as certain people on the crew not understanding what I was trying to get.

I mean, Jim Cameron [Terminator 2], when he makes a film, nobody asks a fuckin’ question. Because the world is educated.
as to special effects and such. But in those days, they didn’t know what the fuck I was doing! I was the only one saying, “We do this, we do that, we paint it gold, we paint it black…” And people around me were giving me blank stares and saying “Gold? Black? Why?” Eventually, I would get really angry and say, “Just do it!” Which was frustrating, believe me.

In Future Noir, I mention the tension that grew up between you and Harrison Ford while you were shooting the film. It’s certainly not my main focus in the book, but I’m curious—what do you think caused this rift?

I think it’s honest to say that doing Blade Runner wasn’t tremendously smooth in terms of a working relationship with Harrison. There’s no point in pussyfooting around that.

Harrison’s a very charming man. But during the filmmaking process I think we grew apart, mainly because of the logistics of the film I was trying to make. In concentrating on getting Blade Runner’s environment exactly the way I wanted it, I probably short-changed him.

By not giving him as much attention as the environment?

Yes. That was a failure on my part, I suppose.

But when a film is being made, nobody ever thinks about the director, you know. In fact, there were times when I could tell Harrison was displeased with me, and I’d think, “What about me?! I’ve got nineteen thousand other things to think about and deal with.”

I actually said something like that to him once. I said, “Listen, this is my movie, I have my performance as well as you have yours. And, you know, both will be brought together. That’s all I can promise.” Because if I hadn’t, a lot would have gone out the window. To put that kind of thing on screen requires enormous attention to detail. And it can only finally be accomplished through one pair of eyes.

You still sound conflicted about the experience.

Well, our collaboration was an exciting one, because Harrison is so smart. He’s a very intelligent, incisive, and articulate man. At the end of the day, though, as I say, I think I probably short-changed him.

Funny enough, we got along much better after the production was over and during the process when we were doing our Blade Runner press junkets. Even though those junkets varied between the film getting thrashed and people kind of eulogizing it. That was very confusing—when you get that sort of response, you don’t believe anybody.

In any event, Harrison and I did get on better later. So it’s not as if we parted mortal enemies. I was never really able to talk to him in depth to find out whether Harrison liked the film or not, however. Or liked what we had done.

Another controversial aspect of Blade Runner was Harrison’s voice-over. Now, in almost all of the scripts I read, Deckard does narrate the story in one form or another. Which I always assumed was a nod toward the old Marlowesque, film noir convention of the hard-boiled private-eye narrating his story in a world-weary voice. But I understand you were never really comfortable with Deckard’s voice-over.

No. Nor was Harrison. Apocalypse Now was made—when?

It was released in 1979. Why?

Because I always felt that one of the main backbones of Apocalypse was its voice-over. Which actually gave another dimension to Martin Sheen’s character, by letting you inside his head. That voice-over worked very well; it was somehow well-written and well-delivered. But voice-over is extremely difficult to pull off, because in a way it has to be totally internal and reflective. If the tone of what you’re saying is just a bit off, it’s never working. And then you start to struggle with the performance—it is not functioning because it is tonally incorrect, or what?

The bottom line of Deckard’s narration was that we just couldn’t get it. We wrestled with it and wrested with it. Which frustrated Harrison to no end, because he’s clearly a talented and formidable actor. So neither he nor I were comfortable with it. The trouble is, the more you do it, the more you start to convince yourself that, well, it’s going to be okay. You don’t become pragmatic. That’s unfortunate. Its only when you really view and hear these things later that you think, “Oh my God! It’s awful!” Because, A) Blade Runner’s voice-over was overexplanation, and B), the narration, although admittedly influenced by Raymond Chandler, wasn’t Chandleresque enough.

Do you see what I mean? I felt Deckard’s narration could have been more lyrical. Because Marlowe, I always felt, was a little bit of a street poet. Blade Runner’s narration wasn’t really written that way. We struggled to have it written that way, but nobody could put that spin on it.

Were the weaker elements of the narration also influenced by the Denver/Dallas sneaks?

Actually, we dropped most of the voice-over at first, and then reviewed that version without it in Denver and Dallas. But the studio felt there were certain areas of confusion within the storyline. People didn’t know this and didn’t know that. To which my initial response was, “Well, that’s the whole point of watching the goddamn movie. To find out what Blade Runner’s all about!”

But frankly, I then became puzzled myself by the preview audience’s reactions. Because I’d felt that Blade Runner might have been subtle, yes, but also comprehensible. So I think I let myself be swayed by my own confusion.

Anyway, I was losing wicket at that point. So we ended up struggling to put the voice-over onto Blade Runner not for street poetry, which was our original intention, but to clarify things. Which I think became ridiculous. So did Harrison.
How did the idea for tacking on Blade Runner’s happy ending with helicopter footage from The Shining come about?

By this point you had a new happy ending on the film. So now you’re at the San Diego sneak preview—and you cut a few scenes after that sneak as well, including a shot of Deckard reloading his firearm and a couple of other shots. Were these moments edited out after that preview because they were deemed unnecessary padding?

—A very particular star, of a very particular type.

As you say. An action hero. And I had done a film without action, with visual density substituting action, with essentially an unsympathetic character. Blade Runner taught me that the American public tends to favor a high-fiber diet. Which infers that the American system is one containing a certain degree of optimism.

I’m sure this has something to do with my own heritage. I am a Celt, after all. And the Celts are traditionally fascinated by melancholia.

Anyway, so what circa-1982 audiences got from Blade Runner was not what they expected. It’s funny. I remember going to the very first BR preview, and since Harrison was now a known face, he had to be snuck into the back of the theater. He came with his wife Melissa Mathison, a very sweet lady who’s a good writer.

After the preview was over, Harrison and I were sitting in this little office in the cinema. And I was depressed. Because there had been a kind of silence emanating off the people who were watching our movie. Harrison was a little confused and a little worried as well. But then Melissa came over—and I’ll never forget this—and she said, “I just wanted to tell you how much I loved your movie.” She said it very quietly, and she really meant it. That was great. It helped a lot.

Professionally speaking, how did you react to the initial failure of Blade Runner?

Relatively philosophically. Remember, not long before Blade Runner I had done The Duellists, to very good critical acclaim and virtually no box office. Then came Alien, which in one sense was almost the reverse situation. So I had already experienced both extremes in my professional life.

How did you take the film’s failure on the personal level?

I think it’s safe to say I was quite disappointed. Because I had done a film that was quite unique.

We began this discussion with an examination of one of Blade Runner’s most controversial elements: the unicorn. I’d like to wind our talk up with its other most high-profile ingredient: the question of whether Deckard is or isn’t a replicant.

Well, in preparing the storyline, it always seemed logical to me that in the full turn of events, which pertained to a film of
paranoia, that Deckard should find out he was a replicant. It seemed proper that a replicant detective might begin to wonder whether at some point the police department hadn’t done precisely the same thing to him.

So I always felt the amusing irony about Harrison’s character would be that he was, in fact, a synthetic human. A narrative detail which would always be hidden, except from those audience members who paid attention and got it. But Tandem felt this idea was corny. I said, “I don’t think it’s corny. I think it’s logical. It’s part of the full circle of the original idea. Ties it off with a certain elegance, in fact.” That’s why, at the end of *Blade Runner*, Deckard picks up that teeny piece of foil—

—the tinfoil unicorn origami—

—right, the unicorn, which visually links up with his previous vision of seeing a unicorn. Which tells us that the Eddie Olmos character A) has been to Deckard’s apartment, and B) is giving Deckard a full blast of his own paranoia. Gaff’s message there is, “Listen, pal, I know your innermost thoughts. Therefore you’re a replicant. How else would I know this?”

*But how can Deckard be an android when he’s physically outmatched by the replicants, whom you’ve previously established as being stronger than humans?*

Deckard was the first android who was the equivalent of being human—with all our vulnerabilities. And who knows how long he would live? Maybe longer than us? Why build in the “aging” gland if you don’t have to?

*Now you’re bringing immortality into the equation, which is a completely different factor—*

—one I find fascinating—

—but I must say I better appreciate the more subtle suggestions that Deckard must be a replicant. Such as the fact that he collects photographs, which you see scattered over his piano. And of course the most significant visual clue is that over-the-shoulder, out-of-focus shot in Deckard’s kitchen, when you see Ford’s eyes briefly glowing. *Was that setup intentional?*

Totally intentional, sir. I was hoping there’d be those who’d pick up on that.

Since *Blade Runner* is a paranoid film, throughout there is this suggestion that Deckard may be a replicant himself. His glowing eyes were another allusion to that notion, another of the subtle little bits and pieces which were all leading up to that scene in the end where Deckard retrieved Gaff’s tinfoil unicorn and realizes the man knows his secret thoughts.

Actually, though, my chief purpose in having Deckard’s eyes glow was to prepare the audience for the moment when Ford nods after he picks up the unicorn. I had assumed that if I’d clued them in earlier, by showing Harrison’s eyes glowing, some viewers might be thinking “Hey, maybe he’s a replicant, too.” Then when Deckard picked up the tinfoil unicorn and nodded—a signal that Ford is thinking, “Yes, I know why Gaff left this behind”—the same viewers would realize their suspicions had been confirmed.

*The only problem I have with Deckard being a replicant is that if he’s a replicant to begin with, it rather undercuts his moral evolution as a human being. Because when the film starts, Deckard’s clearly on the cusp of a change—he’s trying to get out of his profession. But he’s still the macho jerk. Then, as the story progresses, he just as clearly gains insight into the wretchedness of his profession, not to mention the growing empathy he displays towards the replicants. Which, to me, are demonstrably human characteristics. But if Deckard’s a replicant—well, it almost wipes out his spiritual rebirth.*

Unless he’s a more sophisticated replicant and has had a spiritual implant. And is a Nexus-7.

*Interesting thought! What do you mean by that?*

Well, it’s not exactly an action-oriented idea. Because now we’re getting into the notion of a world and a situation which at some point is going to fail us. But that’s the value of science fiction, going into these interior philosophies.

Expand on this idea of Deckard being a “Nexus-7.”

If Deckard was the “piece de resistance” of the replicant business—“more human than human,” as Tyrell would say—with all the complexities suggested by that accomplishment, then a Nexus-7 would, by definition, have to be replication’s perfection. Physically, this would mean that the Tyrell Corporation would be prudent in having Deckard be of normal strength, but extended lifespan-resistance to disease, etc. Then, to round off their creation, the perfect Nexus-7 would have to be endowed with a conscience. Which would in turn suggest some kind of need for a faith. Spiritual need. Or a spiritual implant, in other words.

*That sounds like the perfect idea to pursue in a Blade Runner sequel. A course I understand you’re thinking of taking, because, in a Newsday article (dated October 6, 1992) you’re quoted as saying: “I’d really like to do that. I think ‘Blade Runner’ made some very interesting suggestions to the origins of Harrison Ford’s character, addressing the idea of immortality. I think it would be a very intelligent sequel.” What are the sequel possibilities for Blade Runner?*

Well, that’s partly a game. The Hollywood thing. It’ll cost a lot of money to buy the title off the original producers, and the question remains, is the title worth it. Or should I prepare another project that’s along the lines of the same genre? Notwithstanding the question of using an actor named Harrison Ford. Because by the time you end up paying $2 million just for the bloody rights and another $15 to $20 million for Harrison, it’s kind of crazy, you know? I don’t know yet—it’s something I’d certainly like to do,
and science fiction is certainly something I want to get into again. Because as we all know, the arena of science fiction, if you attack it correctly, or whatever way you address it, is an area in which anything can happen.

Despite its potential cost, the proper Blade Runner sequel could, I think, be immensely profitable. You wouldn’t have to fight the same battles in trying to get the audience to understand the picture, for instance—Blade Runner’s now a well-known piece of entertainment history.

Well, I definitely feel that if I went back to a sequel, any such project would have to further perpetuate and explore the idea that instead of a four-year lifespan, he has an indefinite lifespan.

There could also be the idea of a Blade Runner sequel which contains a situation where they’ve perfected the process of cryogenics to prolong lives—in a world that has a big population problem. Following that line of thought, the next thing you’d have to develop would be of Off-world angle—you certainly couldn’t have hordes of people with extended lifespans living on an overpopulated Earth. So perhaps Off-world in a Blade Runner sequel really means “the frontier.” A place that maybe has become so perverse that the right to die a normal death becomes the thing to seek for.

What about this “Metropolis” picture you’re planning on doing in a couple of years? Rumor has it that this is actually a Blade Runner sequel.

They will say that, won’t they? That sort of talk’ll get me into trouble.

All I can say at this point is that Metropolis is indeed a science fiction picture. We’ve got rather a good first-draft screenplay, which was better than I expected. But, you know, like all these subjects, Metropolis requires a lot of preplanning. Big preplanning. We’ve got to go on one more draft, well, several more drafts. But this project actually looks more than promising.

I guess we’ll have to wait and see... Two last questions. First, have you watched Blade Runner lately?

You know, it ran on BBC in mid-1995, when I was home for a short time. And I thought, “I’m going to sit down and watch this thing, to see if I can last twenty minutes.” Which is what usually happens after you’ve made a movie—you bail out. You think “Oh God, I’ve seen this.” So when you hear that people never watch their movies again, there’s a very good reason for that.

Anyway, I watched my so-called Director’s Cut. And you know what? I was absolutely stunned by how clear it was in terms of story. The removal of the voice-over also makes a tremendous difference.

But my final impression was of how much of Blade Runner was Hampton Fancher’s movie. I think you’ve got to lay it with Hampton, because the script is his. David Peoples did some colorful stuff with Hampton’s blessing, and these two guys got on very well. But really, it’s Fancher’s motion picture.

Blade Runner works on a level which I haven’t seen much—or ever—in a mainstream film. It works like a book. Like a very dark novel. Which I like. It’s definitely a film that’s designed not to have the usual crash-wallop-bang! impact.

Last question—what do you think is the film’s most important quality?

I think Blade Runner is a good lesson for all serious film makers to “stand by your guns.” Don’t listen to acclaim or criticism. Simply carry on.

Hopefully, you’ll do some worthwhile work which stands the test of time.

Changes in the 2007 Blade Runner: The Final Cut version (from IMDb):

In 2007, Ridley Scott released "Blade Runner: The Final Cut", digitally remastered with improved visual and sound effects, and with numerous revisions to the 1992 Director's Cut. The more noticeable differences between The Director's Cut and The Final Cut include:

The overall film has been brightened considerably, revealing previously hidden details in many shots. Additionally, the digital enhancement reveals many heretofore obscured details, such as dirty dishes in Deckard's apartment and a freeway high above Pris as she approaches the Bradbury.

The opening credits have been completely redone, although in the exact same font as in the original film. The noticeable shimmer effect from the theatrical cut and the Director's Cut has been removed.

In the opening shot, the flames shooting up have been re-animated to look more synchronized with the associated light play on the smokestacks.

In the shots of the staring eye, you can briefly see the pupil react to the setting of 2019 L.A.

A couple of shots were trimmed (such as Deckard's intro reading the newspaper).

Additional smoke was added behind the cook when Gaff (Edward James Olmos) and a police officer are talking to Deckard while he is eating at the White Dragon.

All spinner wires have been removed and matte lines erased.

Bryant's (M. Emmet Walsh) line "I've got four skin jobs walking the streets" has been improved so it's not obviously an inserted recording.

Bryant says that "2" replicants were fried in the electrical field (as opposed to the theatrical release and Director's Cut, where he says only 1 was killed).

Bryant describes Leon's job during the incept tapes scene. New Cityspeak and other chatter comes over on the police scanner in Gaff's spinner rides both to the police station and the Tyrell building.
The original shot of Roy (Rutger Hauer) in the VidPhone booth that had been recycled from the later confrontation with Tyrell (Joe Turkel) has been digitally altered so that it truly does look like Roy was in the booth. The thumb on his shoulder has also been digitally removed from the shot.

The hotel manager mutters "Kowalski" as he opens the door to Leon's (Brion James) room for Deckard and Gaff.

The new Unicorn footage is longer and shows Deckard to be awake during the sequence. This is how Ridley Scott and editor Terry Rawlings originally conceived of the scene. Deckard is shown staring into space, and there is a cut to the unicorn. The film then cuts back to Deckard and again cuts back to the unicorn, before returning to Deckard once more. The shot of the unicorn which appeared in the Director's Cut has also been recolored, and the sound mix has been completely redone.

The blue grid lines on the Esper machine have been reanimated, to make them look less smooth.

When Deckard finds Zhora lying down in the back room on the photo, the image is now that of Joanna Cassidy; previously, it was clearly someone else.

New footage of the LA streets before Animoid Row and Taffy Lewis's club, including the hockey-masked geisha dancers. The serial number on the snake scale now matches the Animoid Row lady's dialog. There is a shot of Deckard asking for directions to Taffy Lewis' from a uniformed policeman.

The lip flap between Deckard and Abdul Ben Hassan has been digitally corrected (using Harrison Ford's son, Ben, as a stand-in for his mouth movements).

In Zhora's death scene, you can tell it is her the entire time; previously it was obvious that her stunt double, Lee Pulford, was in the shot. Joanna Cassidy's head was digitally superimposed over Pulford's.

Deckard's cut after retiring Zhora was digitally removed (it wasn't supposed to be there until after the fight with Leon).

The marquee inconsistencies on the Million Dollar Theatre have been corrected.

During Roy's confrontation with Tyrell, he says, "I want more life, father", as opposed to "I want more life, fucker".

When Roy kills Tyrell, the footage is the same as that found in the International Cut, with the additional violence. Additionally, when Roy turns to Sebastian, he says "I'm sorry, Sebastian. Come. Come", as he walks towards him.

When Pris (Daryl Hannah) attacks Deckard, she reaches down and grabs him by the nostrils

When Deckard shoots Pris, he shoots 3 times instead of 2.

The music which plays over the end credits is a newly composed piece by Vangelis; a different version of the 'End Credits' theme as heard in all other cuts.

In the closing credits, David L. Snyder is now listed as 'David L. Snyder', instead of 'David Snyder'. Additionally, Ben Astar is now credited for playing the role of Abdul Ben Hassan.

The graphics in the physical Goldenrod Handouts are all greyscale. For the past few years, all the versions of the Handouts posted online have been full-color. To access them, go to http://csac.buffalo.edu/goldenrodhandouts.html
That’s it for Buffalo Film Seminars 22. Have a good summer. We hope to see you Tuesday, August 30, when the Buffalo Film Seminars begins its 23rd series with Mervyn LeRoy’s GOLD DIGGERS OF 1933. Here’s the current version of our fall schedule. We’ll email the final version out once the bookers are done with it. If you’re not on our email list, send us an email address and we’ll add you to it.

August 30: Mervyn LeRoy, GOLD DUGGERS OF 1933 1933
September 6: Anthony Asquith & Leslie Howard, PYGMALION 1938
September 13: Jean Cocteau BEAUTY AND THE BEAST 1946
September 20: Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger THE RED SHOES 1948
September 27: Marcel Camus BLACK ORPHEUS 1959
October 4: Arthur Penn BONNIE AND CLYDE 1967
October 11: Robert Bresson MOUCHETTE 1967
October 18: Frantisek Vlacil MARKETA LAZAROVÁ 1967
October 25: Peter Weir THE LAST WAVE 1977
November 1: István Szabó, MEPHISTO 1981
November 8: Wong Kar Wei CHUNKING EXPRESS 1994
November 15: Richard Loncraine: RICHARD III 1995
November 22: Julie Taymor FRIDA 2002
November 29: Götz Spielmann REVANCHE 2008
December 6: George Cukor MY FAIR LADY 1964

Don’t forget to check out Dipson Amherst’s spectacular Culture in Cinema Series which will soon be presenting As You Like It (April 28), Aida (May 3), the Bolshoi Coppelia (May 29), Verdi’s Macbeth from the Royal Opera House and much more. Visit http://www.dipsontheaters.com/events/ for details.

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