

BLADE RUNNER

Science-Fiction's Greatest Film and the Man Who Made Me a Fan

by Glen Ryan Tadych

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FILM CLIP FROM
BLADERUNNER

We all have those moments when we're introduced to a classic film, and after watching we find ourselves asking, "Where the hell have I been and why haven't I seen this?" These are often moments we treasure because we unexpectedly develop powerful bonds with timeless films, similar to that feeling of nostalgia we get with films we watched as children. These types of bonds are one of the reasons why we love movies.



Glen Ryan Tadych

The most significant of these experiences for me was my viewing *Blade Runner* (1982) for the first time, five years ago this October. I have to admit *Blade Runner* was one of those films which took a couple viewings for me to truly realize

its greatness and significance. And I don't just mean the significance in the history of cinema, but the industry as well.

Technically, the first I ever saw of *Blade Runner* wasn't when I watched the film in its entirety, but when one of my college professors showed a clip to demonstrate the power of film visuals. The clip featured a scene from the film's final act, giving me no clue as to the film's context. That combined with the film's production value caught me off guard, and since my professor chose to not inform us of the film's title, my first thought was, "What the hell am I watching?" And I wasn't in any better a state of mind upon his revealing the title, as I simply had a name and nothing more.

Some nine months later, I spent a long after-

noon and evening with my late uncle, indulging in jumbo boiled and fried shrimp with home-made hush puppies the size of baseballs, all while watching *The Hangover* (2009) and *Iron Man 2* (2010). Once these festivities concluded, my uncle, brother and I engaged in one of those spontaneous conversations that makes life worth living; one of those situations where you start out discussing a particular topic, and in five minutes land on a subject bearing no relevance whatsoever. Somewhere in that conversation we discussed science-fiction and the future, of which my uncle took a keen interest in. I like to think of him as being a man of the future, having a broad yet focused vision of our place in the world. He was intrigued by the possibilities of "tomorrow," all while living each day at a time.

In that very conversation, my brother and I dove into our appreciation and love for the *Star Wars Trilogy* (1977-1983). My uncle, who generally came off as more of a *Trek* fan, without any intention of putting down *Star Wars*, pointed out that *Star Wars* was simply the hero's journey, while *Star Trek* "could be tomorrow." What fascinated him was the idea of where we're going and our overall capabilities, and this fascination was most prominent in regard to *Blade Runner's* depiction of a dystopian society, set only four years from now.

All of this arrived at the inevitable question: "Have you ever seen *Blade Runner*?" Our answer being no, my uncle became determined, if not adamant, to ensure we saw what he referred to as "the greatest science-fiction film ever made." In his mind, he didn't needn't say anything else. It all happened so fast, I don't even recall him telling us the film was about a detective (Rick Deckard, played by Harrison

Ford) hunting rogue replicants (the film's term for androids) in a dystopian future. He simply fetched his Blu-ray copy of *The Final Cut*—released in 2007 for the film's 25th anniversary and popped it in.

My initial perception of *Blade Runner* was certainly one of awe, but not quite in the way one might think. I found the film interesting, and by that I mean the kind of interesting which lands between intriguing and weird. I honestly have to say what I found the most odd about the film was Ford's haircut, and I am completely serious. I'd never seen Ford with hair so short, especially being used to him as Han Solo for so many years. This was actually the element that delayed my recognizing Ford the first time I saw the clip in my class. But the haircut weirdness aside, I thoroughly enjoyed *Blade Runner* on my first viewing. I wasn't lost or confused at any point during the film. Parts of it were funny, and a lot of it was just plain awesome.

Eventually, I purchased my own copy of *Blade Runner*, and I was able to experience the film in a brand new way. I was able to observe its many elements, both thematic and visual, and get a better grasp on what the film was doing. *Blade Runner* is more than a film about a man (or is he?) hunting androids. From my perspective, it's a clear depiction of "tomorrow." It may not necessarily be 2019—as 2001 in reality was nowhere in the same arena as what Stanley Kubrick demonstrated in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968)—but our current path will most definitely arrive at *Blade Runner*, barring significant habitual change. And just how close we actually are to that point, society-wise, is rather horrifying when one thinks about it.

Blade Runner is a film that not only changed

science-fiction cinema forever, but it became a demonstration of just how a studio's intervention can distort the creative vision of a film. The various versions of *Blade Runner* released over the years prove this, and having seen the theatrical version, I can say I am glad Ridley Scott was eventually able to deliver *The Final Cut*, and that I was able to watch it first.

Like many, I find Ford's narration in the theatrical version awful, and the emphasis on whether Deckard is human or a replicant—absent from *The Theatrical Cut*—is one of the elements which significantly contributes to the film's story. Vangelis' soundtrack is one of the greatest film soundtracks ever produced, in my opinion, and not just for a solo artist, but period. It's one of my favorite soundtracks to listen to when writing or for leisure, "Memories of Green" [click here to listen] being my favorite track. His musical choices are, at times, just as abstract as the accompanying visual elements, making the film all the more unique.

Blade Runner also introduced me to writer Philip K. Dick, author of "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?" (1968), on which *Blade Runner* was based. And while I've only read one of Dick's novels—"The Man in the High Castle" (1962)—his ability to paint intricate images of possible timelines with the most inconceivable attention to detail has inspired me as a fiction writer more than just about any other author I've read.

Most importantly, *Blade Runner* stands as a historic feat in filmmaking. When watching *Dangerous Days: The Making of Blade Runner*

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FRESH FILMS THIS WEEK &...



AMERICAN ULTRA



American Ultra

R 95 min Action | Comedy

Small-town stoner Mike Howell (Jesse Eisenberg) spends most of his time getting high and writing a graphic novel about a superhero monkey. What Mike doesn't know is that he was trained by the CIA to be a lethal killing machine. When the agency targets him for termination, his former handler activates his latent skills, turning the mild-mannered slacker into a deadly weapon. Now, the utterly surprised Mike must use his newfound abilities to save himself and his girlfriend from getting wasted.

Director: Nima Nourizadeh

Stars: Jesse Eisenberg, Kristen Stewart, Connie Britton, John Leguizamo

Sinister 2

R 97 min Horror

A woman (Shannyn Sossamon) and her 9-year-old twin sons encounter the evil spirit of Bughul in a rural house that's marked for death.

Director: Ciarán Foy

Stars: James Ransone, Shannyn Sossamon, Robert Daniel Sloan, Dartanian Sloan

NEW FILM THIS WEEK continued on page 31

...NEXT WEEK



WE ARE YOUR FRIENDS



We Are Your Friends

R 96 min Drama | Music | Romance

Young Cole Carter (Zac Efron) dreams of hitting the big time as a Hollywood disc jockey, spending his days and nights hanging with buddies and working on the one track that will set the world on fire. Opportunity comes knocking when he meets James Reed, a charismatic DJ who takes the 23-year-old under his wing. Soon, his seemingly clear path to success gets complicated when he starts falling for his mentor's girlfriend, jeopardizing his new friendship and the future he seems destined to fulfill.

Director: Max Joseph

Stars: Zac Efron, Wes Bentley, Emily Ratajkowski, Jonny Weston

No Escape

R 103 min Action | Thriller

In their new overseas home, an American family soon finds themselves caught in the middle of a coup, and they frantically look for a safe escape in an environment where foreigners are being immediately executed.

Director: John Erick Dowdle

Stars: Lake Bell, Pierce Brosnan, Owen Wilson, Thanawut Kasro

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(2007), one learns of all the extreme difficulties, political messes and personal hardships faced during the film's production. Like with *Jaws*

(1975), the film risked never reaching a public audience. But even with all of *Blade Runner*'s obstacles, the film survived production, reached

audiences, and despite not receiving praise upon its initial release, the film gained a cult following like no other in later years, especially upon release of *The Director's Cut* (1991) when the most significant edits were made to the film—the removal of Ford's narration and the "happy ending," which drastically alter the film's tone.

Blade Runner's greatest feature though, is without a doubt its special and visual effects. Pre-dating CGI, there isn't one visual element in the film that wasn't created or achieved practically. And while previous films accomplished this, such as *2001*, *Star Wars*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), *Alien* (1979) and *The Empire Strikes Back*, *Blade Runner* took what each of those films did to levels beyond what anyone had seen in a film at that time. The use of such techniques makes the film just as visually captivating today as it was in 1982, and is why *Blade Runner* remains a must-see for newer generations.

Although I initially watched *Blade Runner* against my will, I in no way regret any part of that October evening. Not only was I introduced to this amazing film, but it was one of those times when I really learned more about who my uncle was. His undying love and intrigue for the societal philosophies in films like *Blade Runner* serve as a reminder for what makes film and science-fiction so special. His way of thinking in regard to society, as well as my experiencing *Blade Runner* at the age of 20 rather than as a child, ignited that flame in my mind which, everyday, asks the question, "Where will we be tomorrow?"



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