

**Blade Runner (US, 1982, Dir. Ridley Scott)**  
**NMAT-G 411: New Media Theory**  
**Instructor: Paul Cook**

*"It's too bad she won't live. But then again . . . who does?"*  
*-Gaff*

**Blade Runner** (1982), rising director Ridley Scott's follow-up to his hit [Alien \(1979\)](#), is one of the most popular and influential science-fiction films of all time - and it has become an enduring cult classic favorite. But the enthralling film was originally a box-office financial failure, and it received negative reviews from film critics who called it muddled and baffling. It also wasn't encouraging that it faced Spielberg's [E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial \(1982\)](#) during its opening release.

It received only two Academy Award nominations *without* Oscars: Best Art Direction/Set Decoration, and Best Visual Effects. The evocative, inventive, stylistic film has improved with age and warrants repeated viewings. The dense, puzzling, detailed plot of the film is backed by a mesmerizing, melancholy musical soundtrack from Greek composer Vangelis - undeservedly overlooked for an Oscar nomination.

Stylistically, the film was arresting with fantastic, imaginative visual effects of a future Los Angeles conceived by futurist design artist Syd Mead, and influenced by the vision of Fritz Lang's [Metropolis \(1927\)](#) and Kubrick's [2001: A Space Odyssey \(1968\)](#). [Mead had also been production designer for the same year's visually-pioneering *TRON (1982)*, teamed with famed French futuristic illustrator Jean "Moebius" Giraud.] Another inspiration for the film was the 1974 science fiction book by novelist Alan E. Nourse titled *The Bladerunner*, set in the year 2014 about people who sold medical equipment and supplies to 'outlaw' doctors who were unable to obtain them legally. Many films have attempted to duplicate the dystopic, cyberpunkish look of *Blade Runner*, including *Batman (1989)*, *Johnny Mnemonic (1995)*, *Strange Days (1995)*, *The Fifth Element (1997)*, *Dark City (1998)*, *The Matrix (1999)*, and *I, Robot (2004)*.

The ambitious, enigmatic, visually-complex film is a futuristic *film noir* detective thriller with all its requisite parts - an alienated hero of questionable morality, a *femme fatale*, airborne police vehicles called "Spinners," dark sets and locations in a dystopic Los Angeles of 2019, and a downbeat voice-over narration. The film mixed in some western genre elements as well, and is thematically similar to the story in [High Noon \(1952\)](#) of a lone marshal facing four western outlaws.

The main character in *Blade Runner* is a weary, former police officer/bounty hunter who is reluctantly dispatched by the state to search for four android replicants (robotic NEXUS models) that have been created with limited life spans (a built-in fail-safe mechanism in case they became too human). [Dustin Hoffman and many other actors were considered for the role of the title character, blade-runner Deckard.] The genetically-engineered renegades have escaped

from enslaving conditions on an Off-World outer planet. Driven by fear, they have come to Earth to locate their creator and force him to prolong their short lives.

The film's theme, the difficult quest for immortality, is supplemented by an ever-present eye motif - there are various VK eye tests, an Eye Works factory, and other symbolic references to eyes as being the window to the soul. Scott's masterpiece also asks the veritable question: what does it mean to be truly human? One of its main posters advertised the tagline: "MAN HAS MADE HIS MATCH - NOW IT'S HIS PROBLEM."

The film's screenplay (originally titled *Dangerous Days* and *Android*) by Hampton Fancher, and later supplemented by David Peoples, was based on science-fiction writer Philip K. Dick's 1968 novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

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