

Left to their own devices, will humans create a better world? In general, science fiction attempts to answer that question.

Sometimes the answer is yes (example: *Star Trek*). But far more often — for dramatic purposes as much as pessimism — the answer is a resounding no. From *Brave New World* to *1984*, from Kurt Vonnegut to *Spider Robinson*, from *Metropolis* to *Planet of the Apes* to *Soylent Green*, the future has acquired one bad reputation.

Ridley Scott already had one landmark sci-fi film (*Alien*) under his belt when he undertook 1982's **Blade Runner**. This detective story played out against the startling backdrop of a mammoth, choking, urban landscape is being re-released for the big screen. The new version, cut by the director, includes never-before-seen footage and a revised ending.

Taken from a story by Philip K. Dick entitled *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, **Blade Runner** introduced us to Rick Deckard (Harrison Ford), one of a select few law-enforcement officers, nicknamed blade runners, trained to detect "replicants," powerful humanoids genetically engineered to do the grunt work of humans in space. More than mere robots, the replicants have begun to ask basic questions about their own existence — questions made urgent by the limited life span programmed into their cells.

So it is that a desperate band of killer replicants make their way back to Earth, looking to have their programming reversed. Deckard's assignment is to find them and terminate them.

With a cast of soon-to-be household names — including Rutger Hauer (as the philosophical and murderous replicant leader), Daryl Hannah, Sean Young and Edward James Olmos — Scott's **Blade Runner** is a tightly wound work of suspense and unsettling violence that has gained increasing respect from critics over the past decade.

"**Blade Runner** is like today, only more so," Scott says. "Most films depict the future as pristine, austere and colorless. Our city is rich, colorful, noisy, gritty, full of textures and teeming with life. This is a palpable future, not too exotic to be believed. The movie is first and foremost a detective story, a thriller. It's not so much science fiction as futuristic, or better yet, of the future. It's not about genetic engineering. It's not a speculation on the rights and wrongs of this new science. The movie touches on the

subject, uses it to create a story situation."

"It was totally unlike anything I'd ever done before," says Ford, who was best known to that point as Han Solo in the *Star Wars* series. "*Star Wars* was science fiction, but it was a space fantasy.

Blade Runner is real. The story has an element of psychological drama I'd never dealt with before in a film, and it takes place in a world no one has ever seen."

A grim world, to be sure. But Scott (who's since gone on to other genres in films like *Thelma & Louise* and *Someone to Watch Over Me*) maintains he is an optimist at heart. "A genetic explosion is happening right now. We're going to see all sorts of things affected, probably to the good. But we decided not to do that kind of movie."

— Jim Slotek

Harrison Ford plays the beleaguered antihero in a future that is colorful, chaotic, and frightening.

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