

Review: Blade Runner 2049

It's finally here, and it doesn't disappoint, writes [Andrew Young](#)

Sunday 8 October 2017



Image: Columbia Pictures

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Director: Denis Villeneuve

Starring: Ryan Gosling, Ana de Armas, Harrison Ford, Jared Leto

Length: 2hr 43m

Rating: 15

There are probably very few people in the film world flying higher than Denis Villeneuve right now. After garnering critical acclaim with several French-language dramas, the Canadian director got himself noticed with Jackman-Gyllenhaal starring *Prisoners* and since then has been both prolific and adored. More thrills with big-name stars followed with *Enemy* and *Sicario*, before he made an intelligent, gripping and honestly human sci-fi with the Oscar-nominated *Arrival*. It was a film that made him as beloved as ever by critics, gave him his biggest box-office success and marked him out as the perfect man to direct *Blade Runner 2049*.

Now, this is a tough one. One of the most popular and revered sci-fi movies of all time, *Blade Runner* is a film to which there should have been no sequel. It's been too long. It's impossible to replicate the brilliance of the original. One false move with the mythology and the *Blade Runner* cult will be upon you. How do you make it a blockbusting spectacle and retain the thoughtfulness that makes the first film a classic? How do you find a lead to replace Harrison Ford? How do you continue a story that ended with one of the most talked-about and ambiguous shots of all? There was, then, a considerable number of difficulties for Villeneuve and his team. But, with the help of some serious cinematic heavyweights, they've done it. They've actually bloody done it; *Blade Runner 2049* is good. It's very good. In fact, it's a triumph – a film of overwhelming spectacle and ideas aplenty.



Image: Columbia Pictures

Set 30 years after the first film, Michael Green and original writer Hampton Fancher have fashioned a story that feels miraculously compelling in itself, yet wonderfully tied to the original film. It pulls off the feat of taking away none of the first film's mystery, only amplifying its consequence and meaning. Whilst Ford's original protagonist Rick Deckard does feature, the main focus is instead on an always great Ryan Gosling. He plays Officer "K", a new breed of blade runner. With the original wave of replicants mostly wiped out, a newer version of limited-lifespan replicants has been designed, a version that is less prone to going rogue than before. K is himself one of these replicants, and aware of it too.

Tasked with "retiring" any of the few original replicants still in existence, even K's job sets up an interesting philosophical problem; his self-awareness means that every day he wakes up with the task of killing one of his own kind - how long until he's in their position? On top of a new wave of replicants that make up a good portion of the Los Angeles population, there is another form of almost-human being out there. K's "wife" is Joi (Ana de Armas) a sort-of operating system akin to Scarlett Johansson's character in *Her*, except Joi can take on human form short of being touched. The relationship between these two levels of artificial intelligence is not one of the film's main focuses, but it utterly fascinating in itself. There are still humans, though, right at the top, pulling the strings. There's Robin Wright's police chief, tough and tasked with averting disaster, for one. The big bad this time round is a marvellously creepy Jared Leto as Niander Wallace, the businessman behind synthetic farming and the new wave of replicants. To discuss any more plot details would be to spoil the shocks, surprises and ever-increasing depth to the future world we see on screen.

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Without giving anything away, then, let's just say that *Blade Runner 2049* is a magnificent synthesis of form and content. Both the thematic weight and the aesthetics of the film are daunting, compelling and overwhelmingly impressive. Following *Her* and *Ex Machina*, more questions than ever are being asked about what it means to be human and what artificial intelligence means for humanity. That trend is clear to see here, with our protagonist himself, the man who ponders these questions for us on screen, not in fact being human, and knowing it. By creating a world with degrees of artificiality, *Blade Runner 2049* creates a new kind of class system. The script makes it so easy for the audience to forget that K is a replicant, yet reminds us of it frequently, creating an odd relationship between viewer and protagonist that is carried off by Gosling's perfectly pitched performance. On top of the pervading issue of what "human" really means, Villeneuve's movie, like its predecessor, presents a dark vision of our future. A wasteland of an environment and the role of capitalism loom large over the remnants of society. A ruined, deserted Vegas and Joi's relationship with K are lovely inclusions. The Beatles once sang "Can't Buy Me Love", but here, in the future, with new technology but the same desire for money, *can you?* Is it possible to manufacture and to program true romance?



Image: Columbia Pictures

These magnificent levels of depth are encased not only in a story that feels organic, deeply felt and thrilling, but in some of the most stunning technical filmmaking in recent memory. A swelling, grandiose score from Hans Zimmer and Benjamin Wallfisch give the film a real heft, somehow staying just the right side of over the top. Perhaps they get away with it because the music is matched by such outrageously stunning visuals. It lessens the impact slightly that everybody has hyped up cinematographer Roger Deakins' work here, but it is truly magnificent. The darkness, the twinkling lights, that bright orange desert, the fallen statues, the swirling water fight – this is simply a triumph of cinematography. I defy anyone to not be delighted to see him win the Oscar at the 14th time of asking.

By assembling a team of some of the hottest talents in the business, *Blade Runner 2049* has surpassed all expectations. Every element is in its place, but a special mention must be given to Harrison Ford, whose grizzled Deckard is a standout in a high-calibre 163 minutes. A strong story, plenty of philosophical meat and a tremendous symphony of sound and vision – *Blade Runner 2049* has proved that it *is* possible to live up to the hype.



3 comments

Dave Taylor

9 Oct '17 at 10:27 am

Magnificent: https://www.picturehouses.com/cinema/York_Picturehouse/film/blade-runner-2049

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10 Nov '17 at 7:01 am

It's exhausting to find educated individuals on this topic, however you sound like you realize what you're speaking about! Thanks

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Miguelnam

26 Oct '18 at 6:19 am

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