Thin Story a Contrast to Visuals in ‘Blade Runner 2049’

Submitted by PatrickMcD [1] on October 5, 2017 - 9:36pm

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Rating: **3.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – It comes down to compelling an audience with a story riff that’s a hook. “Blade Runner 2049” doesn’t possess either the riff or the hook, but what it does do is create a dystopian world that is beautiful in its bleakness, and unsettlingly weird in its twists and turns.

Ryan Gosling takes the torch as the main character, who in 1982 was Harrison Ford – returning as Rick Dekard – and they both frolic in a future world that is wilder, more graphic and more unhinged than its predecessor… which was cutting edge back in 1982. Again, with the seemingly infinite possibilities on the digital palette, a film can be anything now, anything apparently but connective and accessible. The story in this Blade Runner is barely there, content to float on predictable situations that could barely pass a TV drama test. If you love production design, “Blade Runner 2049” is cool enough and weird enough to satisfy. If you’re into the storytelling of science fiction, the film may be more anticipation than delivery.

Officer K (Ryan Gosling) is a Blade Runner, a future cop whose assignment is to hunt down rogue “replicants” (lab created bio-humanoids) and destroy them. One such assignment, a raid of a remote farm, opens up a Pandora’s Box of mystery. The replicant there is discovered, but not before it reveals a witnessing of a miracle.



Officers K (Ryan Gosling) and Deckard (Harrison Ford) in ‘Blade Runner 2049’
Photo credit: Warner Bros.

Eventually K is chastised by his superior, Lt. Joshi (Robin Wright), for getting in too deep, and realizes that he needs to find former Blade Runner Rick Deckard (Harrison Ford) to get more answers. This is contrary to what a new industrialist (Jared Leto) is doing with the replicants, and both the police and the corporation are gunning for K and Deckard.

The film is directed by Denis Villenueve, who helmed the excellent “Arrival” in 2016, which had both the superior design and story. He took over from director Ridley Scott (the director of the original 1983 film), and maintained the core story of the assignment, but wanted to add more of his style to it. This style blurs the lines of that core narrative, but it certainly added an anxious bizarreness to a disconnected future world.

Ryan Gosling is doing his blank expression thing in this film again, after cracking a smile in “La La Land.” I don’t think he adds anything as the proprietor of the mystery, and seems to be sleepwalking through the whole thing. Harrison Ford also doesn’t add that much, and seems disconnected from the character that Deckard was… but in fairness it is 30 years later, and the character has lived in a familiar-yet-surreal city of the future.



Strangeness in a Strange Land in ‘Blade Runner 2049’
Photo credit: Warner Bros.

In the machinations of making a film this visually complex, I think the story becomes an afterthought, which is happening to many of the extreme science fiction franchises (the “Jurassic Park” reboot, the second “Star Trek” film and the “Alien” redux comes to mind). They all need to use the new “Star Wars” films as a model… story is king. The visuals are mind-blowing in “2049,” but once that is established the overlong narrative path is daunting.

Harrison Ford is having a last act career arc as older versions of all his movie characters. Jones, check. Solo, check, Deckard, check. Henry Turner, John Book, Dr. Richard Kimble, Jack Ryan, checks are potentially in the mail. He needs some more planes to crash, people.

“Blade Runner 2049” opens everywhere on October 6th in IMAX, 3D and regular screenings. See local listings for IMAX and 3D theaters and show times. Featuring Ryan Gosling, Harrison Ford, Jared Leto, Robin Wright, Ana de Armas and David Dastmalchian. Screenplay by Hampton Fancher and Michael Green, based on characters from the book by Philip K. Dick. Directed by Denis Villeneuve. Rated “R”

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