

Review

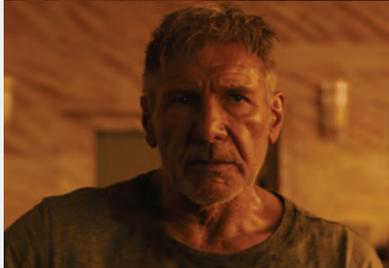
film: *Blade Runner 2049*

The only reason you can do this is that you have never seen a miracle'. These are the dying words of Sapper Moreton moments before he is killed. His murderer is K, a Blade Runner charged with hunting down and killing (or 'retiring') rogue replicants.

This encounter, at the very start of Dennis Villeneuve's long-awaited sequel to *Blade Runner* (1982), sets in motion a series of events that sees K charged not only to hunt down this 'miracle', but also to start the journey to discover his own soul. For K is also a replicant – a genetically engineered slave, with a limited lifespan and range of choices and embedded, artificial memories.

Indeed, the whole of this near-future society is run on the backs of this artificial race of slaves. It is a world that is both sumptuous (Roger Deakin creates some of the most stunning cinematography in recent cinema history) as it is bleak, decaying and brutal. In this world, 'what we call Man's power over Nature turns out to be a power exercised by some men over other men with Nature [or technology] as its instrument'.¹

This is not an easy watch – it is not only nearly three hours long, but it is violent, and has a troubling amount of unnecessary (and always female) nudity. While the film clearly depicts an exploitative society where female replicants are



used as sex slaves and the males as disposable heavy labour or soldiers, the camera does linger unnecessarily at times, colluding with the objectification of women.

But for all its faults, *Blade Runner 2049* actually asks some vital questions. Is it our memories that define us, or our actions? Is love just a set of pre-programmed responses? And even if they are, does it matter? Does it make our love and our connection to one another any less real? Who am I, do I matter, why am I here? In short, without offering any answers, it asks the deepest questions of the human soul. Science fiction writers have explored these themes ever since Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein: A Modern Prometheus*, or in more recent TV series such as *Westworld* or *Battlestar Galactica*. The most profound of all the questions raised in all these stories is 'is this all there is? Is this all I am?'

However much the modern world tries to pretend these questions no longer matter, films like *Blade Runner 2049* remind us that they really do, and that the world has no real answers. Fortunately, we know someone in whom all those answers are to be found. ■

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REF

1. Lewis CS. *The Abolition of Man (Collected Letters of CS Lewis)*. London: Harper Collins, 2015 (first published 1943) Kindle 444