

REPLICANT

Story proposal by Gary Whitta

Blade Runner was a profoundly formative experience for me; it's one of those special films that caused me to fall in love with cinematic science fiction and inspired me to write my own. For me it is an archetypal example of how a classic narrative can and should be driven by powerful, resonant themes and big, thought-provoking ideas. True science fiction!

I see a follow-up piece to *Blade Runner* as an opportunity to delve even deeper into the themes and ideas presented in the original. What does it mean to be human? We all want to believe that we are more than just the sum of our parts, but in a future age in which even memories and emotions can be artificially manufactured, how can we even feel secure in our own humanity? What responsibility do we have to the sentient Replicants we so casually mass-produce? And how can we engineer something genetically indistinguishable from a "real" human and not expect it to be driven by the most fundamental of human instincts - the desire to exist, to survive - and to reproduce?

I propose a new original story, with all new characters, set in the *Blade Runner* universe but not dependent on the original movie - although it will include some small pieces of its specific DNA that will connect the two films and be pleasing to the fans. And whereas the original film featured a human protagonist hunting Replicant villains, this one flips that dynamic by telling the story of a Replicant protagonist in a world of human villainy.

BACKSTORY

In the years following the events of the original *Blade Runner*, society has grown increasingly uncomfortable with the idea of Replicants, having decided that they ultimately create more problems than they solve. The slave labor they provide has been cheap and

convenient but it has also created mass unemployment and poverty among the lower human classes. And the murderous rampage by Roy Batty and his band of Replicant fugitives proved to be not just an isolated case but the beginning of a growing tide of Replicant uprisings as more and more sought to claim the same rights as humans, and to live beyond their designated four-year lifespans - by any means necessary.

With Replicant insurrection and violence becoming epidemic, a law is passed declaring Replicants illegal, not only on Earth but altogether. The new law essentially legislates an entire species into extinction. No new Replicants may be manufactured; those currently in service will be the last of their kind. Replicants working Off-world are systematically hunted down and “retired” by special Blade Runner units, while those who manage to escape this genocidal purge are simply forgotten, human society confident that they will die soon enough anyway, inevitable victims of their genetically-encoded four-year lifespans.

2029 - NOW

All over the world - and Off-world - humanity breathes a collective sigh of relief and celebrates the four-year anniversary of the incept date of the last batch of Replicants manufactured before the passage of the law outlawing them. Today, the four-year lifespans of those last remaining Replicants expire, and for the first time since the dawn of the NEXUS-6, society is entirely free of Replicants. Entirely human. “Pure”, once again.

The TYRELL CORPORATION, sole manufacturer of Replicants, almost went bankrupt in the years following the prohibition of its core business, but diversified and adapted and now prospers as one of the leading companies in Off-world colonization.

In those Off-world colonies the impoverished working classes are put back to work in the hard-labor construction jobs that had until recently been performed by Replicant slaves.

Among them is WALT MURPHY (30s, think Ryan Gosling), an honest, hard-working laborer who grew up harboring contempt for Replicants after their introduction into the workforce put his father out of a job, leading to his eventual depression and suicide.

Walt hates his mind-numbing job, digging vast underground caves for future colony habitats, but does it all for his young wife AMY and the baby they have on the way. He adores them both and would do anything to protect and provide for them. Walt's life is predictable and unspectacular; he is a nobody, but he is content.

Until one day his life is turned suddenly upside down. A massive underground construction accident kills several colony workers and sends many more to the infirmary with life-threatening injuries, including Walt. He is not expected to survive - but as the other wounded workers die from their injuries, Walt miraculously recovers, healing faster than medical science says is humanly possible. His doctors are baffled, and as Walt recovers they call in a Tyrell Corporation consultant, a cool business executive in a sharp suit who claims to be a health insurance adjuster who needs to examine Walt to make sure he hasn't suffered any psychological damage from the accident. But when he opens his briefcase, we recognize the familiar Voight-Kampff machine from *Blade Runner*.

Walt has never seen a VK machine but is increasingly disturbed by the strange battery of psychological questions from the Tyrell executive. After the test the executive declares it "positive" and tells a horrified Walt that he is not a human after all, but a Replicant. He is property of the Tyrell Corporation, a piece of defective hardware that must be recalled. Walt's head is still spinning in disbelief as a Tyrell security team arrives to take him into custody. Walt fights back and as security officers try to restrain him his genetically-encoded combat training asserts itself. Walt goes on autopilot, using skills he never knew he had to fight his way out of the hospital and lead an armed Tyrell security team on a thrilling chase through the streets of the Off-world colony before jumping an Earthbound shuttle and using its escape pod to crash-land somewhere in mainland China.

Walt staggers from the smashed escape pod, dazed but uninjured. Trying to make sense of everything that has happened. He is convinced the VK test must be a false positive. He *knows* he is human; he remembers growing up in his childhood home just outside of Shanghai. Even if he was a Replicant, he should already be dead - their four-year lifespans have all expired by now. And he is an expectant father! Along with their limited lifespans, the one thing everyone knows about Replicants is that they are “born” sterile and cannot possibly reproduce.

Knowing that Tyrell will still be on his tail, Walt sets about proving to them what he already knows - he is human, their test must be wrong. He heads toward Shanghai, to his childhood home, where his family still lives and can vouch for his true human identity.

OPTIONAL: The Earth of 2029 may not look like the one we saw in *Blade Runner*. The idea is that society has solved its growing problems of overpopulation and pollution by incentivizing the populous lower classes to emigrate Off-world (and in some cases forcibly relocating them). So while the Off-world colonies seen in the movie’s first act would be reminiscent of the original movie - dark, densely-populated, grimy - when we get to Earth in Act Two we’d be surprised to see that it is comparatively bright and clean and spacious, as we have transplanted so many of our problems Off-world, allowing Earth to essentially become the private reserve of the wealthy elite. In a society increasingly defined by class division, the 99% and the 1% now literally live worlds apart.

Meanwhile, in a Tyrell Corporation boardroom scene we learn that many Replicants do still exist. A rare genetic aberration led to many living beyond their four-year lifespans. They now live among us, both Off-world and on Earth, hiding in plain sight. The Tyrell board has known about this for some time, but to reveal it would cause widespread panic and - more importantly to them - be a costly and embarrassing public relations nightmare. So instead of involving the police, they have been using their own private security

contractors (optional: these “mercs” could include retired Blade Runner cops, experts in hunting Replicants but now ironically retired and obsolete themselves in this post-Replicant era) to quietly locate and eradicate these “defective” rogue Replicants.

Shanghai is currently in the midst of a wave of terrorist bombings, and Tyrell uses its powerful connections to have Walt implicated as a suspect, sparking a citywide manhunt. Walt is relentlessly pursued by Tyrell’s security agents all the way to his childhood home in suburban Shanghai - which looks just as he remembered it. But when his mother opens the door, she does not recognize him. And Walt’s world crumbles around him as he comes to realize that his childhood, his memories, were not his own, but transplanted from a human “templant” - the man who actually lived Walt’s life.

Although faced with overwhelming evidence that he must, after all, be a Replicant, Walt still clings to the fervent belief that there must be some mistake, based on the fact that he has an unborn child. That, he now believes, is the proof he needs to demonstrate to Tyrell that they’re mistaken. But before he can figure out how to get back to his family the house is surrounded by Tyrell security forces who have tracked him here.

Walt is outnumbered and outgunned and about to be taken into custody when a group of heavily-armed civilians intervenes and, in an intense firefight, rescues Walt and rushes him to safety. With him, they disappear into central Shanghai (an east-west melting pot much like the Los Angeles of the original film and the last densely-populated city on Earth) where Walt is introduced to the Replicant Underground, a secret enclave where all the “defective” Replicants immune to the four-year lifespan - hundreds of them in total - have gathered under the guidance of an enigmatic leader. This is revealed to be ELDON TYRELL, JR., the son of the Tyrell Corporation CEO murdered by Roy Batty ten years earlier. Eldon Jr. succeeded his late father as CEO and continued his vision of creating beings “more human than human” until Replicants were outlawed and the Tyrell

Corporation's board of directors voted to have him removed after he refused to sanction the "retirement" of the Replicants known to still be out there.

Eldon Jr. shares the same vision as his father; he sees all Replicants as his children, and refuses to abandon them even though society has. An MLK-like visionary, he sees a future in which Replicants are accepted in society once again. But they must fight for their place in the world. All they want is the right to exist, but society is not yet ready so they must bide their time. Meanwhile, a small militant splinter group (the "Roy Batty" faction) is more impatient and believes Replicants must take their rights by force - they, we discover, are the ones behind the terrorist bombings in and around Shanghai.

Walt still refuses to believe he is "one of them", a Replicant. Until he is introduced to something not even the Tyrell Corporation knows about - the Replicant children that now live among the adults in the underground. As well as living beyond the four-year lifespan, these rare Replicants have also defeated the genetic marker that renders them sterile. They can - and do - reproduce. Far from being the last of their kind, a whole new generation of Replicants is now being introduced (we may refer to these children as NEXUS-7s).

There appears to be hope for the future of Replicants after all - until their secret settlement is crashed by Tyrell Corp's security agents, who we learn never lost Walt's trail and followed him all the way back here. In a powerfully emotional sequence the Tyrell agents mercilessly "retire" every last Replicant - children and all - neatly putting an end to their PR problem in one fell swoop.

Walt manages to escape, finally accepting that he is a Replicant and driven now by the knowledge - shared by the Tyrell Corp - that his unborn child is a human/Replicant hybrid - perhaps the first of its kind and certain to be considered as much a threat to the Tyrell Corporation as any other Replicant, if not more.

In the closing scenes of the movie *Blade Runner* - still a wanted fugitive - manages to smuggle himself back to the Off-world colonies and to his home, where he spirits his pregnant wife away to safety just before Tyrell security busts down their door. The movie ends with the birth of Walt's daughter, the first of her kind and perhaps a new hope for the Replicant species. We may even see that telltale red glimmer in her irises...

THE END