

Blade Runner Blues

Chapter 3 – Reality's Decay

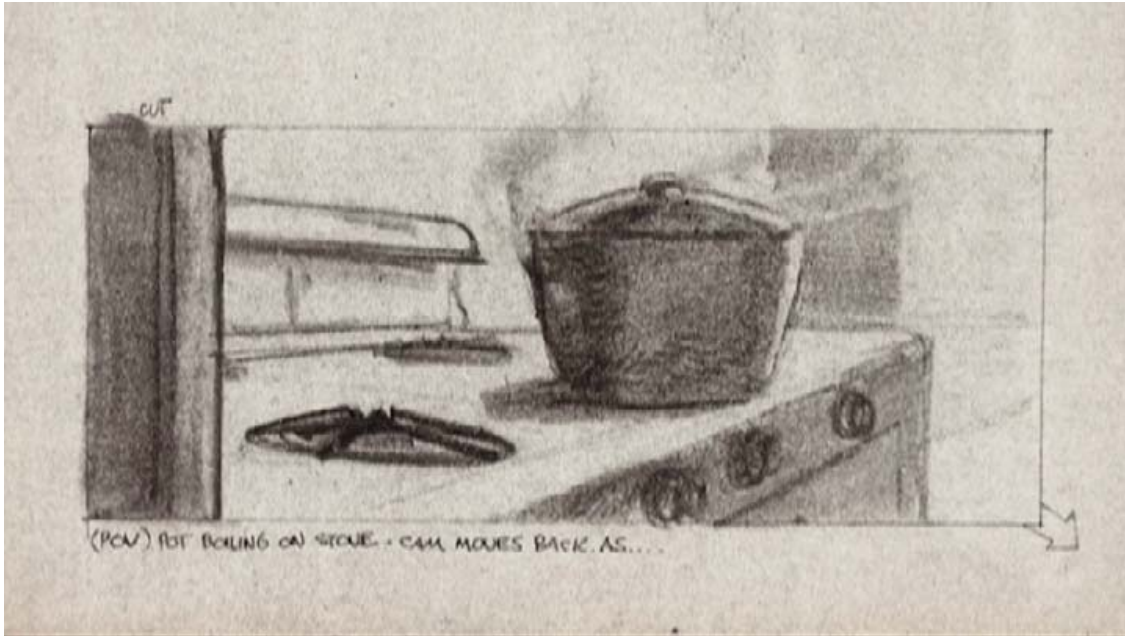
The engines of Deckard's Spinner were silenced now as he walked across a roughly plowed field, lost in thought. The reddish brown dirt was freshly turned and soft; his feet sank slightly in the aerated soil with each step he took. A thick fog hung in the crisp morning air; the damp, white curtain obscuring visibility to within a few feet, revealing only his immediate surroundings down low, near the ground. He heard the sound of mechanized farm equipment in the distance, lost somewhere in the misty ether of the pale shroud, but kept on a straight course up a gradual hill, heading toward the small farmhouse he couldn't see, but knew was there. A small scruffy dog appeared out of the fog, barking at him yet keeping his distance from the stranger at his home. Deckard kept walking. The animal was being protective, but posed no threat to him.

He stepped up to, and across, the warped floor of the porch, finding the white front door unlocked. He drew his weapon silently and pushed open the door, entering the house. He smelled something cooking as he moved through the front hall. Until he was out of sight, the dog's barking continued; then it ran off, back into the mist. The old wooden floorboards creaked beneath his feet as he eyed the piano in the parlor.



He carefully scanned each room as he passed, his hand gripping his outstretched gun, making sure no one was home. As he made his way down the narrow hall to the rear of the house past the bedrooms, he found himself in a large, bright kitchen. This room, like the others, had been left in an immaculate state; everything in its place. A large metal pot simmered on the stovetop, slight wisps of steam periodically escaping from beneath its lid.

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Rolling his head side to side, looking over the small table and chairs to the left, Deckard moved toward the stove, holstering his gun. There was a bowl and a large spoon resting on a small plate on the counter beside the pot. It was covered in a thin, brown sauce and had obviously already been used for stirring the contents of the pot. Grabbing a towel from the oven door handle, he carefully lifted the lid. A roll of steam curled up as he did, and the smell of blended meat, potatoes, carrots and other vegetables escaped the pot of bubbling soup. Immediately his mouth salivated. It had been a long time since he had eaten a decent home-cooked meal like this. He replaced the lid and walked over to the table, pulled out one of the chairs and sat down to wait. He unbuttoned the collar and first few buttons of his coat and got comfortable, settling in.

The minutes slipped by into hours, and although the sun appeared as a brief glare behind the dense clouds just after noon, the milky fog failed to burn away. The afternoon light was beginning to fade when the farmer, who had been out plowing all day, returned home, entering through the back door, in a little room off the kitchen, opposite where Deckard sat. He could only see the farmer's shadow moving against the wall as he removed muddy boots. They hit the ground with a thud, and the farmer walked into the kitchen, heading straight for the pot, not noticing his visitor seated at the table. He was a large fellow in bib overalls, dirtied with reddish-brown earth and the stains of sweat under his arms.

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He grabbed the sides of his protective goggles, pulling them off his eyes and up onto his forehead as he noticed the towel which now lay out of place beside the stirring spoon. With it, he picked the lid up off the pot, smelling the delicious aroma as he slowly stirred and turned over the contents of the thickening soup. "You want some soup?" he asked, as he filled his bowl, only briefly turning his head to glance at Deckard before returning his eyes to the pot. Deckard said nothing, but sat up straighter in the chair. "Who are you with, anyway?" asked the farmer turning toward him and taking a mouthful of soup from the bowl in his hand.

"I'm Deckard, Blade Runner" came Deck's cold response as he unceremoniously drew the gun from beneath his raincoat and discharged it several times squarely into the farmer's chest. The soup bowl went flying, as the farmer was thrown back into the counter and slumped to the floor in front of the cabinets beneath. Deckard holstered his gun and stood up, walking to the stove. He opened one cabinet, then another until he found an empty bowl. He glanced at the body as he served himself. The pulsing flow of crimson blood from the farmer's chest coursed heavily for near a minute or so, and then tapered off, finally stopping altogether. Deckard finished off his bowl of soup, licking the soup from his fingers as the farmer's life drained away with his blood. The Blade Runner cocked his head to the side, watching for any signs of life. The twitching spasms in the limbs stopped, and he figured brain death had finally occurred.

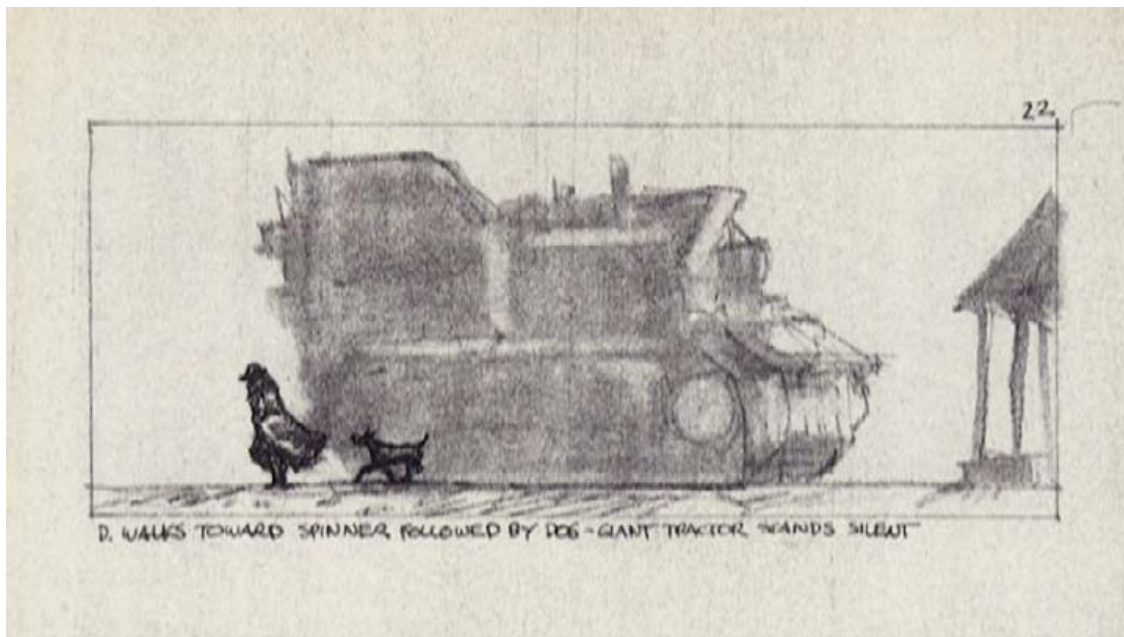
When all motion stopped, he placed his empty soup bowl beside the sink and turned off the stove. Wiping the corners of his mouth with his hand, he approached the slumped form on the floor and squatted before it. With his left hand, Deck grabbed a handful of the farmer's hair, holding his head firmly against the cabinet door behind. With his right, he went to the side of the neck, feeling for a pulse. Confident there was none, he grabbed the farmer's jaw, pulling it down hard with a fast jerk. There was a loud ratcheting sound as he did. Then he reached inside the mouth, hooked his fingers behind the ridge of teeth in the lower jaw and pulled up hard. The jaw bone and teeth released into his grasp and came away freely as he let go of the hair.

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The lifeless head dropped back against the bloody overalls, and he stood, studying the stainless steel "jawbone". With his thumb, he wiped away a slice of potato, revealing a serial number stamped along its edge, ending in the numbers -002. He shook his head, "Nexx 2". From within his pocket, he produced a clear plastic bag into which he dropped the jaw. He sealed the bag and slipped it into the pocket of his raincoat.

Leaving the dead replicant on the floor, he walked out the front door, wiping blood from his hands on the kitchen towel. He tossed the stained towel on the porch and stepped back into the fog-covered dirt heading for his Spinner. The little dog once again appeared, barking at him as he walked away. To his right, he noticed the vague outline of the machinery he had heard earlier.



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The dog stopped following him, but continued barking as Deckard disappeared into the mists.

The Spinner door folded forward, and he stepped inside, closing it over behind him. As the engines started up, the dog appeared a few feet away, still barking. Small pieces of the turned earth were blasted away from his vehicle, and the dog's fur was blown as the Spinner lifted up and ascended into the fog.

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Deckard sat on the sofa in his apartment, with blankets wrapped around his shoulders as he closed the case file. He vividly remembered the farmer's face, and that first assignment in the Blade Runner unit. He was sure Bryant would eventually discover that he had this paperwork, along with all the rest of his case files he had dumped out on the coffee table. He shivered and pulled the blanket closer, reaching for his drink. He swallowed deeply, returning the glass to the table. It was easy in those days, he thought to himself. The Nexx 2 and 3 Replicants were still partially cyborgs, embedded in living tissue. Now, the new generation Nexxus fives and sixes were made from cloned organs and body structures; genetically synthesized and completely living.

Slamming the case file on top of the pile, he reached for another drink. He was glad he made the choice to leave. Iran was gone, and a clean, fresh start would do him good. He stood and moved to his bed, climbing on and collapsing into the rumpled pillows and covers, the blanket from the sofa still around his shoulders. He needed to kick this, whatever it was, and then maybe head over to his house and see what she had left behind, if anything. That would keep at least until morning he thought, and closed his eyes, descending into the warm embrace of sleep.

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Pris flushed the toilet as Mary helped her to her feet. She leaned over the small metal sink and raised a cupped handful of the running water up, rinsing the bitter taste of vomit from her mouth; Mary's hands on her shoulders, steadying her shaking body. Roy had made his way to the rear of the ship as they were emerging into the cooler air of the hold. "Thank you, Mary" he said, "I'll see to her now."

She nodded and allowed Roy to take Pris from her. She moved away from the pair, glancing back sympathetically before disappearing through the hatch to head back to the others.

Pris' eyes were closed, and she leaned against Roy's shoulder as he kissed the top of her head, "Do you think we did the right thing seeing that doctor?" she said, running a hand over her flat belly, "Or were we stupid?"

He smiled, and kissed her head again, "Pris, Pris. No. We were not stupid. With the new knowledge of our incept dates and longevity, it was a need. Going to Earth to confront Tyrell is a possible and likely extension for our lives, but for a bloodline, a legacy, a part of us that Tyrell didn't create, well . . .this is our best hope for that" he said, rubbing her belly. "Even with an extension, we all die. *It's no use reminding yourself daily that you are mortal: it will be brought home to you soon enough*"

Pris, wishing she was as smart as he, looked into his face, studying him as he quoted. "Who said that?" she asked.

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He looked down at her, as his superior mind raced through his implanted memories. "Albert Camus, an Algerian born, French author and philosopher from the last century."

Mary re-entered the room, "I just felt I should check on her. After all, it was me that got you two into this. Am I interrupting anything?"

Pris looked to Roy, then over to her, "No."

"I thought maybe I'd sit with you until we get to Earth."

Roy squeezed Pris a bit and released her, "I'll be in the cockpit with Leon. The trip will most likely take us a week or so." He turned his attention to Mary as Andy walked through the door with the box of snack bars, "Let me know if anything changes."

Mary nodded and Andy moved closer to Pris, "Would you like a bar now?"

Mary wrapped her arms around Pris and turned to Andy, "She's still feeling sick, Hodge, and will be for some time, I expect. Leave her alone for now. She'll ask for one if she wants it."

"I prefer my stage name Andy. Please don't call me Hodge anymore; it reminds me of people and places I'd rather forget" and he turned and walked away.

The two female replicants walked over to a cushioned bench in the passenger area where Pris lay down; her head in Mary's lap. Mary sat beside her, one hand on Pris' shoulder, the other stroking her hair gently.

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She had left in hurry, he figured, as he looked around the room. Pieces of unwanted clothing lay strewn across the rumpled, unmade bed; mostly pieces he had bought for her himself. There were dirty tires marks leading up to, and away from, the spot where the mood organ had been wheeled away. She had most certainly packed it first. Various toiletries had been left where dropped as she had hastily cleared out her portion of the bathroom. After all, she was in a hurry to get onboard an off-world shuttle and be on her way to her new love. He picked up an unused luggage tag from beside the sink . . . Off-World Transports. He turned it over, noting the date from a week ago, and the flight number, 2187.

Deckard shook his head, running his fingers through his hair from front to back.

On the counter, near the sink was a photo of him and Iran when they had moved in. He lifted it up to see that it was the one of them standing on the walk out front and looking happy.

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Try as he might, he could not remember who had snapped the picture that day. As he put the picture back down he thought how funny it was that life was this twisting, undulating ride. Sometimes people got on, sometimes people got off, but the ride had no end, and you had no control over the coming or going.

Subconsciously he noticed the wallpaper they had picked out together and put up after moving in. It now curled away from the ceiling in several places defiantly. It had been so fresh and vibrant once; now all color seemed to have drained from it. Turning to the window, he inserted a hand between the two hanging sheer curtains and parted them to one side, looking out into the back yard. There was no sheep there. He looked down to the sill and removed his hand from between the sheers, then turned and walked out into the hall.

The office had been rummaged through and emptied of anything useful or having value. A large pile of unpaid bills and receipts littered the floor, left behind for him. These walls . . . his house, his home seemed to twist and feel uncertain underfoot now, in a surreal, dream-like way. It was the right location but nothing was as it should have been. A nauseating cacophony of memories and emotions fermented inside him now. The muscles in his left shoulder began to spasm slightly as he headed down the hall to the stairs.

The faintest hint of Iran's perfume still hung in the air. It had been a gift, shortly after they moved in, a scent she adored and had to have. He shook his head as he plodded down the steps . . . she never once wore it for him. He noted the scrape marks dug along the walls, and ran his hand over them. As preoccupied as she was with her awaiting off-world lover, she must have impatiently evacuated, dragging her suitcases along haphazardly. Evacuation certainly felt like the right description, to be certain. The house resembled a war zone, with their world . . . or rather what was left of his world, in shambles.

As mentally anticipated, the fourth step from the bottom reassuringly cracked loudly under his foot, just as it always had. Finally, a hint of unchanged, familiar normalcy surfaced for a moment.

Passing the small island counter, he grabbed a half-empty bottle of Johnnie Walker. The stripped kitchen was dark and silent, save the whirring of the refrigerator. With his free hand, he grasped its' handle, tugging it open, hoping to find something to eat. He slammed the door shut quickly, jerking his head away, squeezing his eyes shut and turning away sharply, nearly hitting his head on an open cabinet door.

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She either must have left a plate of fish uncovered in there, or some small animal had curled up in there and died. Either way, there was nothing to eat. He stepped away, shaking his head and moving in to the den.

The house, indeed, the very walls seemed to exude a drained darkness as he examined the cleared out den. Some of the furniture had gone to his apartment, but it looked as if she had either given the rest away or sold it. There were deep impressions in the carpet where the feet and skids of the chairs and sofa had been. As he moved deeper into the room, the dim shape of his synthetic sheep came into view.

It lay motionless in the corner, its stiff, dry tongue hanging out on the dirty carpet. Deckard knelt over it, running his hand through the shaggy wool, feeling for the control panel. He carefully opened the small door, revealing several meters and knobs surrounding a charging port.

Both meter needles indicated a status well below the empty mark. All the training and learned patterns he had worked so hard to teach it were lost now, all memories purged and lost forever. All she had to do was keep it charged, he thought, just keep it charged. An unseen chisel coldly slammed into him, claiming yet another small piece of who he was, as he felt his heart empty a bit more. He pushed himself to a standing position, still clinging to the squared bottle of amber alcohol.

There was no longer anything for him here now. Nodding his head silently, he glanced around slowly, then walked through the front foyer, out onto the porch and down into the rain, heading toward his car, leaving the front door open wide. If he was going to sell exotic, synthetic animals off-world, he would need to learn more about them, and he knew a good place to start. A prior case had produced several contacts down on Animoid Row. All the best synthetic animals could be found there.

He pulled the door down on his sedan and started the engine. It idled quietly as raindrops and tiny streams of water trickled down the outside of the glass. Staring out through the watery mosaic at the house, he paused just ever so slightly before accelerating away into the drizzling gloom.

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