

Hello Louis,

Thank you very much in advance for taking the time to answer my “Blade Runner” questions. Sooooo...

1.) Why did you choose this particular license for a video game?

*Blade Runner was my favorite film and we thought we had a good idea for a game that would respect the film. We found the license was available very late with only a couple weeks to make our pitch. I had several meetings with our team and we came up with a concept and some early visuals we thought really leaned into the license. We later found out that the Blade Runner Partnership had pretty much decided to go with another publisher and we won them over in the eleventh hour and were thrilled!*

2.) Sometimes working with licenses can be restricting because a lot of things need to be approved and the existing lore excludes some creative choices. What was your experience working with the Blade Runner license?

*We did not have trouble with approvals and we partnered closely with The Blade Runner Partnership so any restrictions were self imposed out of respect for the film and its fans. We feel our game design extends the feeling of the film into an interactive experience because it requires the player to be a detective in a tense world where things could violently explode at any time. Our love for the film informed all our decisions.*

3.) Another “issue” with licenses is that they can be expensive and drain the dev budget. How much did the license cost (if you can tell) and was budgeting for it a concern? I can imagine that choosing a side-story could have the benefit of not needing to re-cast some roles which would otherwise require prohibitively expensive talent (or - in case of Harrison Ford - talent that wanted nothing to do with the property anymore at all)

*The development budget was not impacted since our unusual licensing deal shared the \$3M development costs, marketing costs and revenue. The cost seems small now but was quite large at that time for the genre.*

*We wanted to use all the actors from the film as voice actors. We did not approach Harrison Ford primarily due to our game design choice of a parallel storyline that allows the player to fill in all the things that happened off the screen in the film and more. The film closely follows Harrison Ford’s character and he never meets our main character in the film so it would have seemed odd to have him say nothing “important”. Harrison Ford was also on record of being concerned games would take away jobs from actors. I think we could have won him over on that since we employed a model, physical actor and voice actor for every character.*

4.) Why did you choose to tell a sidestory instead of following the film’s plot?

*Replaying the film story would diminish the core theme of mystery around what is human and non-human. Blade Runner is a detective story in the Film Noir tradition where the*

*protagonist is in search of himself. Telling a parallel story allows the player to decide for themselves if their character is human or non-human replicant. We also randomize most of the enemy characters as either replicants or sympathizers which further requires the player to dig into what it means to be human to decide if the enemy they are hunting can be killed.*

- 5.) “Blade Runner” uses a very unusual graphics mix of pre-rendered backgrounds and voxel-based characters. Why did you choose this particular graphics setup?

*When we began Blade Runner in 1995 the ability to render a world respectful of the film’s timeless visual quality was very limited so we had to get creative. Rendering all the scenes as looping animations allowed us to make the most of our talented group of 3D artists. We pixel rendered the characters so that they would more closely resemble the compressed environments. We discarded polygon rendered characters at the time because 3D capable hardware was a small subset of the gamer audience and the necessary low polygon characters would have looked oddly origami in the scenes. Our invented voxel technology allowed our characters to be pixelated 3D objects that even took on lighting. We also composited additional animated objects with depth and lighting information to break up the animated loops. Late in development we found some tricks for volume effects like mist and even found a way to have the camera follow the character from one scene to the next with pre-rendered camera movement. We felt the end result was very convincing.*

- 6.) The pre-rendered movies were quite spectacular for the year 1997 (and quite honestly don’t look too shabby from today’s perspective) - what was Westwood’s secret to great render technique?

*Our very talented artists followed a similar approach used in making the film. We hired Syd Mead, the concept artist for the film and one of the film production designers. Our 3D artists followed the steps used by the film production designer to realize Syd’s concepts by using “found objects” to create layers of visual noise which gave our sets a similar visual feel.*

- 7.) “Blade Runner” wasn’t just graphically unusual, but also regarding its content. Why did you choose to create a detective story with a non-linear story progression instead of a “typical” point-n-click adventure?

*I felt it was critical to get as close to the film’s emotional experience as possible. In Blade Runner we wanted the player to feel tension, even terror, as they actively investigate the world to determine if the enemies are human or replicant while constantly worrying that they will be attacked. The non-linear story is an outcome of the choice to add randomness in the human or replicant enemies so that every player had to investigate even if the player had read a guide or played before. Blade Runner is much more non-linear than most games in that we simulate a world of actors passing information to each other and trigger small story sequences based on the knowledge the individual characters have at that time. This creates a nearly unique sequence of stitched together story segments that deviate rapidly even when playing from a known state like a saved game.*

- 8.) The game has a good deal of “pixel hunting” (the shell casings in the first crime scene being some dark specks on the floor for example). Nowadays this is regarded as frustrating and “bad gamedesign”. What was your perspective back then?

*It was intentionally frustrating then too. That's an important part of recreating the detective's frustration while searching for the smallest clues. Just like the film, we reward that attention to detail with the ESPER sequences that zoom in and rotate to reveal clues. Like many design elements pixel hunting can be a poor design choice or a deliberate choice to create a specific emotion.*

- 9.) “Blade Runner” offers many, many different endings! Why are you insane? :)

*LOL :) The goal was a satisfying ending for all the possible states of player perception of their own humanity and if they were playing the hero or the villain. The Blade Runner game is a five act play that lets the story deviate at the beginning of each act then draws all the story threads into single act climaxes which attempt to create escalating feelings of success or frustration. Act 1 is deliberately easy and mildly rewarding, act 2 a bit more frustrating, act 3 very rewarding, act 4 very frustrating and finally act 5 finishes with what we hope to be an extremely rewarding ending and teasing epilog. In act five we decided to let the wildly divergent possibilities climax without drawing them back together. I believe there were seven broad ending scenarios and over 40 possible variants based on the random selection of human or replicant enemies and if you had killed or retired them. Each of the ending scenarios had an epilog that intended to cast doubt on the decisions of the player so they left the game feeling successful but a little uneasy about their choices.*

- 10.) After spending years being not available in any digital store “Blade Runner” popped out of nowhere on gog.com at the end of 2019, shortly after being playable via ScummVM. What was the reason for its sudden reappearance?

*The teams at GOG and ScummVM have been working on getting Blade Runner working for quite some time. Hats off to them because we had a lot of unique approaches to everything from compression to memory management. We pushed those old PCs right to the edge! I'm certain it was no easy task to get Blade Runner working again.*

- 11.) On Disc 1 of the game there was a folder named “pix”, containing a couple of [slightly weird pictures](#) - do you happen to remember what these were about?

*I don't remember taking them but I do remember many late nights. Our team leaders at Westwood, especially Mike Legg, loved to put “Easter Eggs” in our games. I wish I remembered more about these in particular.*

- 12.) Why was the game never ported to a contemporary gaming console?

*Adventure games in general were not typically ported to consoles at that time. I'm not quite sure the contemporary consoles at that time could even have handled the pixel pushing needed to get close to the PC execution.*

13.) How well did “Blade Runner” sell?

*Very well for the time and the genre. We sold over a million copies. For context the second best selling adventure game that year sold about 300k in the same time frame.*

14.) Do you have a development anecdote or two to share?

*I remember the first time we got the camera to move from one scene to the other. Mike and I sat there and watched it over and over again as the player character and non player characters were moving through the scene. It was magical. It was like looking into the future when real time rendering could look as good as pre-rendered sequences. I really wish we got that working sooner so we could have added more transition shots.*

15.) Have you played the game recently again? If so: What do you think of it from today’s perspective? Were you happy how it turned out, and how it performed?

*I have only taken a quick look at it, I just have not had the time, but I’m really impressed and deeply thankful for the work done to make our game playable again. Oddly I think our game holds up very similarly to the way the film holds up after all these years. I think it is because we made development and technology decisions that created an experience authentic to the film.*

Once again: Thank you very much - and all the very best from Hamburg, Germany!

Cheers,  
Paul