



'Blade Runner: Black Lotus' Revisits the Iconic City of Neon Lights

The fifth project, but first series, in the epic 'Blade Runner' franchise tackles the grimy, gritty futuristic world of bioengineering with a female protagonist, Elle, who awakens in Los Angeles with no clue to her identity, now airing on Adult Swim's Toonami and streaming on Crunchyroll.

By [Victoria Davis](#) | Monday, November 15, 2021 at 1:35pm

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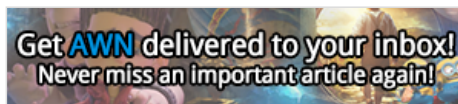


'Blade Runner: Black Lotus,' now airing on Adult Swim's Toonami block and streaming on Crunchyroll.

Blade Runner: Black Lotus is the fifth project in a long line of *Blade Runner* stories. The franchise, which began with Ridley Scott's award-winning 1982 neo-noir science fiction film starring Harrison Ford, has sported two feature films and three animated short films all tackling the grimy and gritty futuristic world of bioengineering and humanity's value in a constantly advancing world. Scott's original film is now considered a cult classic and has inspired a series of other cyberpunk films, including *Ghost in the Shell*, *The Fifth Element*, *The Matrix*, *Gattaca* and *Dark City*.

Blade Runner: Black Lotus, directed by *Appleseed's* Shinji Aramaki and *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex's* Kenji Kamiyama, premiered this past Saturday, November 13 at midnight on Adult Swim's Toonami programming block and in English subtitles on Crunchyroll. The 13 30-minute episodes are animated by *Ultramar's* Sola Digital Arts.

It's not only the first *Blade Runner* series, but also the first *Blade Runner* arc to star a female protagonist. But the heart of the story, the core of this *Blade Runner* universe, follows the same winning formula as those that have come before it.



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The story takes place in the year 2032 and follows a young girl named Elle, voiced by *Game of Thrones* Jessica Henwick, who wakes up in Los Angeles with no memory of who, or what, she is. Elle's only clue to her identity is the black lotus tattoo on her shoulder. The CG-series follows Elle trying to piece together who she is, the history of "replicants," or bioengineered robots meant to look and act like humans, and why so many people are out to get her.



"In a way, it does question a lot of the same things that the cyberpunk genre will usually ask," says Aramaki, who has also co-directed with Kamiyama on *Ultraman* and *Ghost in the Shell SAC_2045*. "What is human?" and the question of existence and whatnot. But this property does exist in a different plane. For me, it wasn't as much of a challenge trying to do something different. The challenge was doing justice to the properties of the franchise."

"What's the everlasting appeal?" adds Henwick. "It's the tone. It looks cool. It sounds cool. The writing is meaningful and deep. And it's talking about real things. 'What does it mean to be alive?' is such a huge question in the genre. And that transcends time."

Blade Runner: Black Lotus is not out to prove itself as a newly inventive peg in the creative world of cyberpunk, thought it tackles many of the same themes as its 80's film parent, diving into the value of human love, the meaning of human life, giant technology corporations' molestation of power, prejudice and so on. Instead, *Black Lotus* is taking the best of *Blade Runner*, and revisiting the world in a way that bridges the gap between Japanese and American cyberpunk.

"Obviously, *Blade Runner* itself was a revolutionary movie," says Kamiyama. "It has the neon signs, the dark alleys, and rain-soaked streets. *Ghost in the Shell*, indeed, was inspired by the genre that was really spun out of *Blade Runner*."

He continues, "It wasn't a squeaky clean sci-fi that we were used to back then. It really was a huge shock, especially to lots of anime creators. And also, there were a lot of Japanese language signs, which was actually quite interesting from a Japanese perspective. They weren't necessarily correct Japanese, but it was very endearing."

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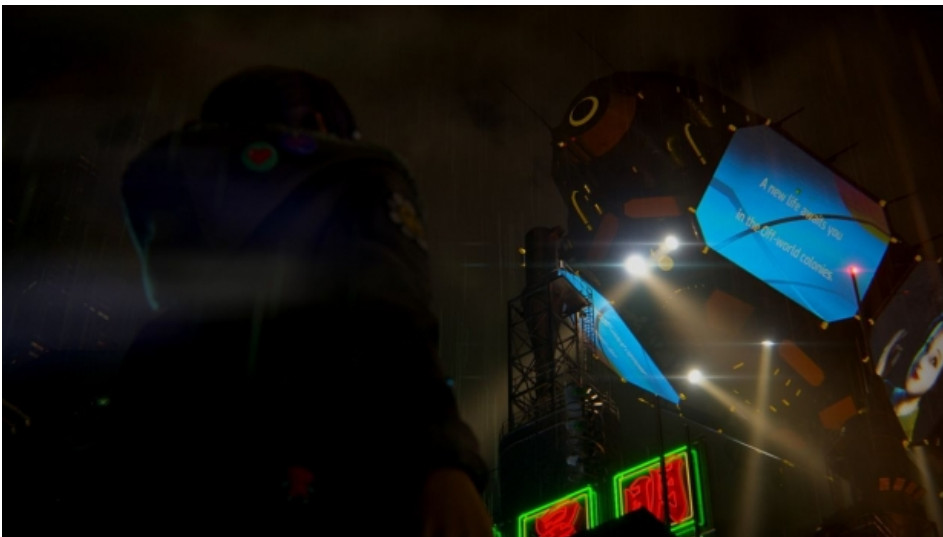


For Kamiyama, this city of endearing neon lights was one of the most important characters to consider when developing the world of *Blade Runner: Black Lotus*. In fact, executive producer Joseph Chou agrees that deciding what a CG anime version of *Blade Runner* would look like was the first question he and the team had to ask themselves.

"It's one thing to think about it when you're doing 2D animation, but when you're in CG, that's a different question," says Chou, who also produced the anime short *Blade Runner: Black Out 2022*. "When we were trying to do this project, *Black Lotus*, it wasn't really about what we were trying to do with it. It was really about what might be expected of us. We're coming into a pretty big glimpse of this world, and we have to make sure, when someone enters in, that it had to be recognizable for someone to say, 'Hey, that's *Blade Runner*.' But how we get there with this format was the big question."

Chou says that, in CG, there's a spectrum of going full cartoon or leaning more toward photoreal. But neither was an option for *Black Lotus*. "We had to have the look that's evocative and unique for us but, at the same time, has to be familiar," explains Chou. "That was a pretty difficult thing to do. There was a lot of look development that went on with this one, especially with it being a series."

The team eventually found their groove, using the fluid feel of CG animation to accent the smoggy streets, provide dark shadows and texture detail on the concrete buildings and skyscrapers, and utilize the full glare power of those famous neon lights - with a bit of spelling corrections, of course.



"Something we had to also constantly think about was 'Will this be accepted by the *Blade Runner* fans? Can it be something that's considered *Blade Runner*-esque that fits in the canon?" says Aramaki. "It's something that we really struggled with, the whole balance of it."

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Correction: The short aired as part of Adult Swim's 2020 April Fools Day, not 2019. That aside, January 9th can't come soon enough!
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It might have been a challenge but, according to Henwick - who is also a big fan of the original *Blade Runner* - the creative team found that balance and produced a product that was breathtaking.

"There were several times where we were recording [in the booth] and they just play you a five-minute clip and you have to try and follow and place in sounds of breathing and whatnot," says Henwick. "Often I would just stop making noises... I was just so transfixed. The look of the world is beautiful. And the cinematography is amazing. I was blown away when I saw it."

Altered Carbon's Will Yun Lee, who voices the character Joseph in *Black Lotus*, said that the series' animation actually made him feel like he was back on the set of Laeta Kalogridis' Netflix series.

"*Altered Carbon* felt like it started from the basis of *Blade Runner*," recalls Lee. "I remember walking onto a set piece, and I was like, 'Wow. I feel like I'm in *Blade Runner*. This feels like Harrison Ford should be popping out at some point during the scene.' The steam coming from the ground, the neon lights, the mix of cultures, [*Blade Runner*] bled through so many pieces of *Altered Carbon*."

He adds, "Once I saw what [*Black Lotus*] looked like and the world we were living in, it did feel like I was transported back to *Altered Carbon*, which in essence is being transported back to *Blade Runner*. And having been able to touch a set like that, that is so influenced by *Blade Runner*, and then coming into a booth where you're seeing this cinematic experience, it felt like I was just on a movie set. And that's the approach that I was going to take, just treat it like I was on a film."



Stephen Root, who voices for the character Earl Grant, is also a "lifelong sci-fi fan" and says being a part of this franchise has been "geek-fun."

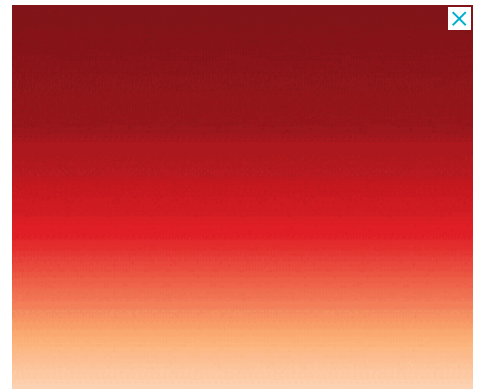
"Being able to see this incredible animation, you just become entranced with it," says Root. "It's like 'Oh, boy! I get to be in this world!'"

All three *Black Lotus* actors agree that *Blade Runner* "changed the game" and "opened our eyes to cyberpunk." And in such a character-driven story, Kamiyama hopes that fans grow as attached to the character of 2032 Los Angeles as they do Elle, Joseph, and others.

"The city itself, the environment, the look, is a major character in *Blade Runner*, and we had to do it right," he concludes.



Victoria Davis is a full-time, freelance journalist and part-time Otaku with an affinity for all things anime. She's reported on numerous stories from activist news to entertainment. Find more about her work at victoriadavisdepiction.com.



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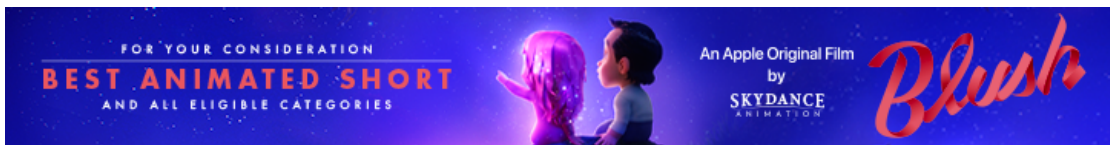
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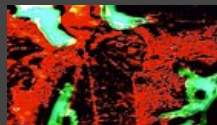
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