

# THE STRANGE WORLD OF



## RICHARD KELLY

by Andy Gately

Director Richard Kelly's hotly-anticipated sophomore effort is finally here. Written during a state of depression when no one would distribute *Donnie Darko*, then rewritten after 9/11 and injected with social commentary, the two hour forty minute *Southland Tales* is what Kelly describes as a pop epic for our times. He recently sat down with Andy Gately to talk about his religious views, getting *The Killers* to work for cheap, and his favorite Pynchon book.

**DB:** Thanks so much for your time, I'm sure you must be pretty fatigued from getting bombarded with questions, especially on a film like this.

**RK:** It's what I do, man.

**DB:** I guess you've only screened it a couple times [at Cannes and at Fantastic Fest in Austin, TX] but are you surprised by audience reactions to it so far, are they more or less what you expected, what do you feel?

**RK:** I've been thrilled with last night's screening [in Austin], I sat through the whole movie and it's the first time ever, ever it's shown to our kind of core audience, and I was thrilled. People seemed to be engaged, and they were laughing in the right places. That was my biggest concern, I wanted to make sure that we were getting laughter where we were hoping to get laughter, and I felt really great about it. We know it's the kind of movie that's a rush of information, and it's an overload of information, and we know it's going to leave a lot of its audience sort of baffled, and like, 'whoa,' you know, with a rush at the end, that's sort of the way, you know, the rollercoaster ride is designed that way, so my hope is that it will continue to sit in audience's mind and then maybe, if they do get a chance to see it a second time, they can really understand the complexity of the puzzle that we've tried to design.

**DB:** You mentioned the humor. I once saw David Lynch present a film, and I wanted to ask him so badly if he was surprised when



people laughed at his work, or if he knew when a laugh was coming, because the humor, similar to your films is a little bit different. *Kiss Me Deadly* is referenced in the film; what other films and filmmakers, besides Lynch, influenced you in the making of *Southland Tales*, if any?

**RK:** Well, I think influences definitely were writers like Raymond Chandler, the noir of Los Angeles, I would say. Kurt Vonnegut, in a way, Terry Southern, Philip K. Dick, Thomas Pynchon. I'm a big fan of speculative fiction and using science fiction to delve into political satire, and the adventurousness of all those writers are obviously a big influence on me, I'd say.

**DB:** What's your favorite Pynchon book, just out of curiosity?

**RK:** Uh... *Rainbow*? *Rainbow 6*, is it?

**DB:** *Gravity's Rainbow*?

**RK:** *Gravity's Rainbow*, yea, (laughs) I'm having a mind lapse... [Rainbow 6 is by Tom Clancy -ed]

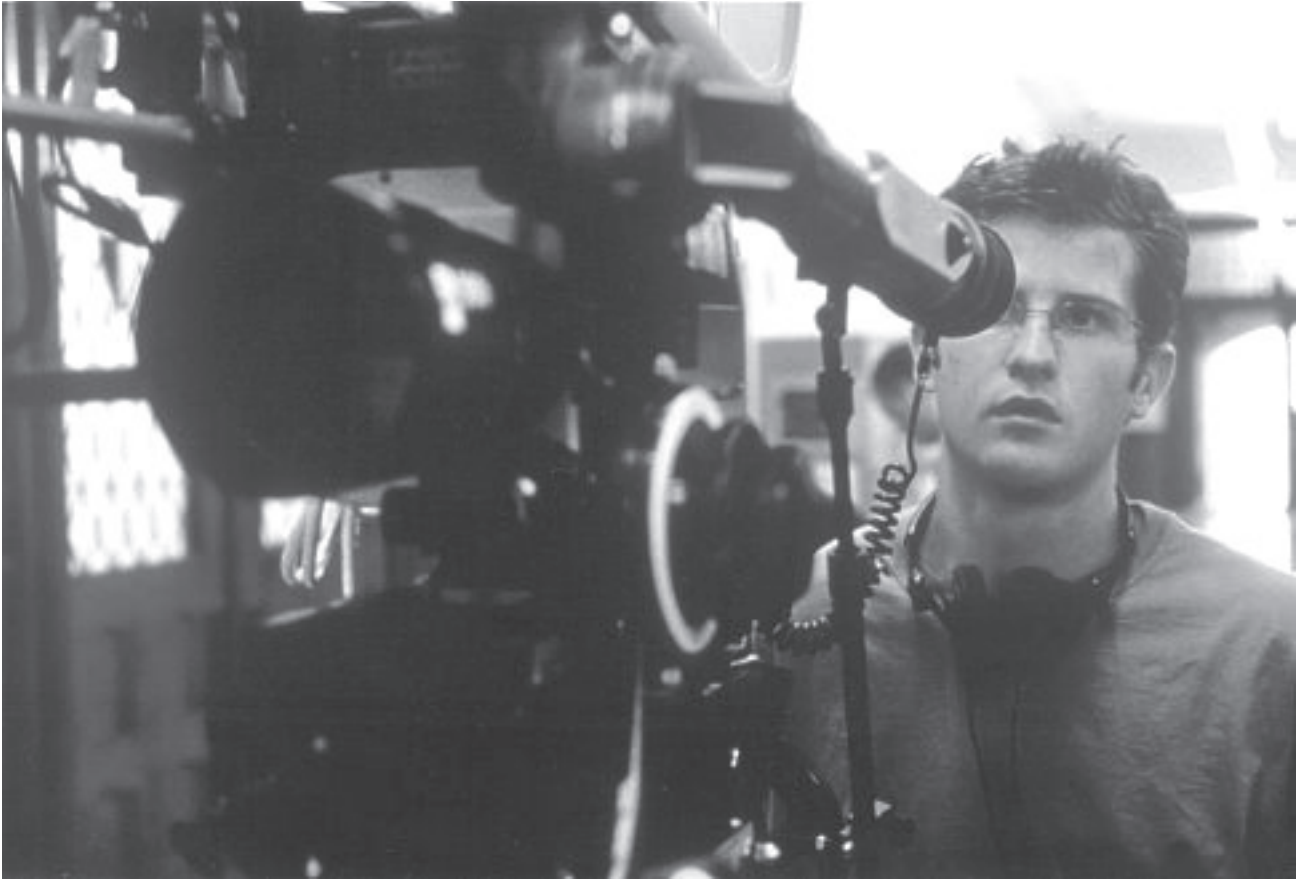
**DB:** That one's pretty epic, in keeping with your film.

**RK:** Yeah.

**DB:** Did you have a religious upbringing, and, if so, did that figure into the writing of the film, given all the Christian iconography in it?

**RK:** I grew up very, very open-minded. Kind of, we went to church a little bit growing up, my dad wasn't really religious, my mom and I would go to church a little bit, and as we got older we just sort of lost interest in it, not really that religious at all. But I think, like anyone who grows up in the South, you're exposed to a lot of





religious people, and a lot of people who do go to church every day. I guess I was exposed to a Methodist sort of Christianity through a lot of family friends and people.

**DB:** Is this in Abilene?

**RK:** No, I'm from Richmond, Virginia, but I also have, my aunt and uncle are from Abilene, and I have a lot of family there. My mom is originally from Texas, so I have a lot of relatives there. We shot the opening of the film in my aunt's house in Abilene, so I think obviously I was exposed to religion the way a lot of Americans are growing up, but I'm not a particularly religious person. I'd say I'm agnostic, but I'd say I like to study all religions in a way.

**DB:** How were the accompanying *Southland Tales* graphic novels conceived, and how do they relate to the narrative of the film?

**RK:** It's a prequel, it's called the *Prequel Saga*, but the movie's meant to be accessible to someone who hasn't read the books.

**DB:** You mentioned you had very little money to pay the artists on the soundtrack like The Killers and Moby because *Southland Tales* is an independent film, yet it looks so big and epic. How did you achieve that huge, big budget look with such limited funds?

**RK:** (laughs) We did it in thirty days, and it was, I still don't know how we did it. It was really, really challenging. A ton of preproduction, we prepped the movie for so long, our locations were very, very expensive, and a lot of it, over six hundred digital effects shots, and everyone did it for scale, like no money. Everyone did it for bare bones price, and our visual effects artists like barely broke even do-

ing it, they just really loved the movie and were excited to be a part of something that is really provocative. They were really excited to be a part of it, and they gave a lot, and made a lot of sacrifices to make things happen, so we were able to get a lot of bang for our buck, really.

**DB:** Tell me about the next project you're working on.

**RK:** We are on preproduction on a film called *The Box*, and I'm going to start shooting right around Thanksgiving, and it stars Cameron Diaz.

**DB:** I understand the website for the film is one of the most elaborate ever conceived, what's the story there?

**RK:** We were hoping to make it bigger and much more elaborate, but we just don't have the money. (laughs) The website is [www.southlandtales.com](http://www.southlandtales.com), and there's [www.krysta-now.com](http://www.krysta-now.com), and <http://www.freer-products.com/>, and a lot of the different universes of the film. It's not as big as I'd hoped to make it; I got the books finished, I got the movie finished, the website was sort of third of the list of priorities (laughs), but it has the potential to be much bigger and much cooler, we just don't have the money right now, to do that.

**DB:** Well good luck with that.

**RK:** Yeah, we'll see, maybe one day. I feel like this movie is going to be around for a while.

Andy Gately is a freelance writer, filmmaker, and founder of the Austin Underground Film Fest. 