

‘Southland Tales’ Starts With Bang, Ends With Sensory-Overloading Whimper

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CHICAGO – Unlike the world, “Southland Tales” starts with a bang but ends with a whimper. Richard Kelly’s opus of a film is little more than sensory overload meant to look like a political statement on the state of privacy, the war, news, entertainment and celebrities.



Sarah Michelle Gellar in “Southland Tales”.

Photo credit: IMDb

The story is set in the near future after two Texas towns fall victim to nuclear attacks and throw the country into a new world war. The world is falling apart all around the citizens as the government sets up even more agencies to spy on the populace.

Kelly has stated that he was inspired by “Pulp Fiction” and “Dr. Strangelove” when he made this film. His choices and storylines prove it with its characters and arcs weave in and out of one other with reckless abandon.



Sarah Michelle Gellar and Dwayne Johnson in “Southland Tales”.

Photo credit: IMDb

The main character – if there is one – is Boxer Santaros (Dwayne Johnson). He’s an amnesia-stricken movie star who falls in with an ex-recovering porn star – Krysta Now – played by Sarah Michelle Geller.

The two get mixed up with twin brothers Roland and Ronald Taverner (both played by Seann William Scott). The ensemble cast is rounded out with Justin Timberlake, Miranda Richardson, Mandy Moore, John Larroquette, Jon Lovitz and Cheri Oteri.

At this point, I wish I could tell you more about the plot itself. In reality, it was just vignettes thrown together to make a film that tried to be a whole lot hipper and cooler than it actually turned out to be.



Mandy Moore in “Southland Tales”.

Photo credit: IMDb

While Kelly tried to do away with the traditional formula of telling a story, all that happened was storylines got lost and forced moviegoers to say to themselves: “Wait. What?”

However, the big surprise of the film was the performances by Dwayne Johnson and Scott. Both have shown they are now real players and have transcended the characters they portrayed at the start of their careers (The Rock and Stiffler, respectively).

Even though the narrative left something to be desired, the writing of “Southland Tales” was incredibly funny and dark.

The dialogue was sometimes so over the top and monumental that you have no other choice but to let out a little chuckle while hoping the people around you understood the joke as well.



Ling Bai in “Southland Tales”.

Photo credit: IMDb

The film did succeed in making a funny and poignant commentary on celebrities, news and commercialism. Even though it didn’t quite work the way it should have, it proved itself as a mirror reflecting our society to the nth degree.

Even though the movie did end with a whimper – and a confusing one at that – the stylized nature of the film can be appreciated at the price of a DVD rental.

“Southland Tales” opened on Nov. 16, 2007.

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