



Lee Toland Krieger
enters the big
leagues, gives it to us
straight and wants
to get paid to get
fucked. *By Katherine*
Alex Beaven

Getting Lee Toland Krieger on the line for an interview is proving to be difficult. The southern California director has been working 15-hour days up in Vancouver for the last 13 weeks. Krieger is stuck in pre-production for his newest film, *Age of Adaline*, the story of an accidentally ageless woman who becomes a recluse after watching so many loved ones grow old and die. “We start in 10 days, which is crazy. I’m kind of starting to lose my mind a little bit, but it’s exciting”, he confides when we finally connect. Lee Toland Krieger is best known for his last two films, the dark and dysfunctional *The Vicious Kind*, starring Adam Scott and Brittany Snow; and most recently, *Celeste and Jesse Forever*, a comedic drama starring SNL’s Andy Samberg and Rashida Jones, also one of the film’s writers.

However, this time, the 31-year old Krieger is shooting in the big leagues. *Age of Adaline* is set to be released in 2015 by Lionsgate and stars the young and beautiful Blake Lively, alongside veteran actors Harrison Ford and Ellen Burstyn. It will be Krieger’s first big studio film, and although he would love to get back to directing films he has written himself, he understands where projects like that lie within the landscape of today’s industry. “It’s hard to get a movie made these days. If you fall in love with a script and you can bring it to life, it’s hard to say no. The only thing you can’t do is just not create, not produce material,” he says. “[*Adaline*] was a script I read like five years ago and really loved. I always loved it, and I always kept track of what was going on with it. Even though it wasn’t the lean, mean movie I was looking for [after *Celeste and Jesse*], it was such a good opportunity to really do something that, A: I really loved, and B: something that had a larger scope and scale -- with the proper infrastructure and time.”

At this point of the conversation, he begins to school me on the numbers involved in filmmaking 101. “As a director there’s only so much you can show of your voice if you’re just rushing to get your master, and then doing two close-ups and then moving on... it’s more about how fast you can do it and not what your voice is.” I ask him if he has shot all of his movies in 22 days — or less. “What’s crazy is that unless you hit about 10 or 12 million dollars you are probably making a movie in under thirty days.” (So, yes.) He then tells me that he shot

his first ever feature-length film, *December Ends* (which he also wrote and made while still attending University of Southern California’s film school), was shot in eight days for under \$75,000. This seems a lot more impressive to me now than it would have ten minutes ago.

Even more impressive is that he has been receiving accolades from the beginning, starting with *December Ends*, which won Best Film and snagged Krieger the award for Best Picture at Method Fest back in 2006. His next project, *The Vicious Kind*, collected nominations and wins at multiple festivals including an Emerging Filmmaker Award for the young director, while 2012’s *Celeste and Jesse Forever* also received award nominations, as well as went to Sundance, and was bought by Sony Pictures. He must be doing something right, right?

“I don’t feel like I’ve made a movie that I’m proud of yet,” he says. Krieger is notoriously modest and self-critical. “I’d really like to make something that I am able to put a stamp on.” Although he directed and wrote 2009’s *The Vicious Kind*, Krieger feels he could have done better. “I was so green and inexperienced, and dealing with what you deal with when you make a movie in 22 days...” He trails off before adding, “Maybe I am naive to think that will change—because even when you have 150 million dollar movies, the scale of the shots, like a tank blowing up on the freeway, is so high, you are still [rushed].” He knows that every job has its challenges, and I get the sense that he’s mourning the shots in his memory that could have been or should have been rather than complaining. But is anyone truly happy with what they create? “I’m just hoping, on this film, that at least we will have enough time to be happy with everything before we have to move on.”

Thanks to a larger budget, he has 40 days to shoot *Adaline*. But in a business where money has the ultimate creative control, it is hard to put your stamp on something unless it is your investment. Enter: mo’ money, mo’ problems. “If you are not paying for a movie completely out of your own pocket personally, you should expect to have to battle for creative control, and you should expect to lose most of those battles”, he explains matter-of-factly. “Because there are so many cooks in the kitchen, the vision gets totally neutered and becomes this sort of voiceless movie-by-committee, unless

you’ve earned the right to control the movie - [like] Chris Nolan, David Fincher, Ridley Scott, James Cameron, Martin Scorsese -- but that is rare.” He explains that this is true for any film — independent or big studio-backed.

“That’s the another frustrating part of making independent movies right now -- the part that people don’t talk about. There’s sort of this fallacy out there. They think when you’re making an independent movie, you’ve got complete creative control and when you make a studio movie you are just ‘working for the man, man!’ And it’s total bullshit!” He’s getting a little more heated, like maybe he’s just had his own rude awakening or been called a sell-out. “When you are making a movie of any size, unless you the filmmaker are paying for the whole film, you are going to have a bean counter there trying to, or in many cases, successfully controlling the film.” And then, he adds, “If I’m going to get fucked, at least I want to get paid to get fucked. Because to get fucked for free, it feels really shitty.”

It’s unclear if he is referring to the fact he worked on low-budgeted *Celeste and Jesse* pro bono - which seems great save the fact that despite its success, when Krieger called the distributors to request a copy of the film for his parents, they responded with “Sure, they are \$11 a copy.” Additionally, he was so broke after spending two-and-a-half years’ worth of 80-hour weeks on the film that he couldn’t even afford to see it in theaters. “The movie was playing on like 560 screens in America and there was a point during its release that summer when I didn’t have enough money to actually go buy a ticket to see it.” It’s no wonder that moving onto *Adaline*, a movie with a larger budget, was enticing.

“What I wanted was a movie with more scope and scale, where I would not have to worry about paying basic life needs so I could focus on making the movie. It’s not about ‘Oh well, I should make a bunch of money!’ — I’m not saying ‘I want my Ferrari!’; I just want to be able to pay my rent. I want to be able to pay my electric bill... I couldn’t survive.’ If my only concern in life was making money, I would do something else. I wouldn’t make movies.” For fun, I asked Lee Toland Krieger what he would do if he was not making movies. “I never wanted to do anything else, which is maybe stupid - but it’s the truth.” Well, thank fucking goodness for that.