

## ***Sleep Dealer* Injects Sci-Fi into Immigration Debate**

*Wired* magazine. By Jason Silverman.

Tech will not set you free. At least that's the message of *Sleep Dealer* director Alex Rivera's impressive, eye-opening debut. Set in a futuristic world of have-nots, where 21st-century gadgetry sucks resources from the world's poor and channels them to its wealthy, the film premiered to enthusiastic response at the Sundance Film Festival.

"Science fiction always tells outsider stories, with people coming into conflict with the system," Rivera said. "But I wanted to create a science-fiction point of view that we've never seen before. We never see films about the future of Mumbai or Mexico City. Just yanking the point of view out of London, or New York, or Los Angeles and dropping it somewhere else is a powerful gesture."

In Rivera's film, Mexican villagers are forced to buy water for their crops from an armed, English-speaking robot. Most of the village's healthy men have bolted for Tijuana to look for work in cyberfactories. And the multinational imprint is seen almost everywhere.

"We are being sold a false bill of goods, that the more connected we become the more equal we will be," Rivera said during an interview from Sundance's headquarters in Park City. "Statistically speaking, that's not what's happening. The more connected we become, the more we are divided."

*Sleep Dealer* is set in the very near future. Central themes include outsourcing, corporate ownership of water, remote warfare, confessional internet diaries and military contractors who are accountable to no one. "I wanted to use this film to ask the question, 'Where are we going?'," said Rivera.

Rivera said the inspiration for the film came from a *Wired* magazine article about the emerging "global village." It was published around the same time that the U.S. government began building walls along the country's border with Mexico. That ironic juxtaposition started Rivera thinking: What if technology could extract the life force from the Mexican population and send it north?

"The problem is that the worker comes with a body," Rivera said. "That body needs health care, and gives birth to children that need to go to school. So keep the body outside of the United States. Suck its energy and leave the cadaver or the problematic shell out of the picture."