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An independent FOUND-FOOTAGE movie that proved to be a hit among sci-fi lovers, LUNOPOLIS rose from humble beginnings to WORLDWIDE appeal, and a DEDICATED FANBASE beyond typical genre films of its kind.

Love for POWERFUL STORYTELLING is universal, and attention to detail helped the film receive acclaim from critics & audiences at festivals around the globe. By CONNECTING every CONSPIRACY THEORY on the internet in a fictional tale told through a documentary lens, the film was heralded as a unique, thought-provoking exercise in world building LIKE NO OTHER.

Available on streaming giants NETFLIX, HULU & AMAZON PRIME for years, and still available today on TUBI, YOUTUBE & DVD, the film continues to build an extended audience of fascinated viewers.

Now, WRITER/DIRECTOR MATTHEW J. AVANT has returned with a new VISION, a CHILLING story, and a DEEPER dive down the rabbit hole.

The second chapter of the LUNOPOLIS universe is here.

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FILM INK MAGAZINE SEPTEMBER 2010

DIRECTORS CUT

SHOOT THE MOON

With the wildly inventive sci-fi conspiracy thriller *LUNOPOLIS*, debut filmmaker MATTHEW AVANT has crafted a work of conny, no-budget brilliance.
BY KATERINA SAKKAS

The moon is the centrepiece of all conspiracy," says Matthew Avant, writer-director of the new science fiction uber-conspiracy flick *Lunopolis*. Though they occurred before he was born, it was the Apollo moon landings that sparked Avant's long term fascination with conspiracy theories. "I read a lot about NASA and the moon programme, and the first conspiracy theory that I ever heard accused the entire moon landing of being a hoax," the director explains. Battered that there were those who could doubt the event's veracity, especially in the face of filmed evidence, Avant attempted to learn all that he possibly could about the hoax theories in an effort to understand them. This led to the greater realisation that there were conspiracy theories surrounding everything. Moon theories led to UFO theories, which led to time travel theories, which led to 2012 theories. Since he was now spending something of a lifetime researching the subject, I pursued the question that I always wanted to have answered: could there be a single, unifying bond – a 'missing link' – that connects all these conspiracies together? And if so, what would that be?" *Lunopolis* is Avant's answer to that question. His first fictional feature, the film follows, mockumentary-

but that was never really paid attention to." He also drew on elements of the Mormon, Catholic and Baptist religions, secret societies like the Freemasons, and his own experiences growing up in a religious family that moved around America. "Through all of these organisations, there is a certain consistency in the actions and attitudes of the followers, and as far as doctrines go, Scientology is by far the most mysterious, and therefore the most fascinating," he says. "There is a large shroud of mystery around the organisation that leaves you wondering what the big secret really is. I wanted to tap into that part of the human psyche that wants a simple explanation for everything, but is

As is not uncommon in independent filmmaking, Avant had a high level of involvement with his project, contributing to the sound, editing and art direction as well as writing, directing and acting in *Lunopolis*. Given financial constraints, it was a necessary but frustrating process. "When you take on multiple tasks, you know that whatever you aren't doing at any given time is being sacrificed for what you are doing, and in the edit you constantly find yourself having to fill those cracks," Avant says. It's a testament to *Lunopolis*' inventiveness that it makes its rather rough-around-the-edges style a virtue rather than a vice.

"I WANTED TO TAP INTO THAT PART OF THE HUMAN PSYCHE THAT WANTS A SIMPLE EXPLANATION FOR EVERYTHING, BUT IS SIMULTANEOUSLY TERRIFIED OF WHAT IT MAY BE."

style, the consequences arising when two paranormal investigators (played by Avant and Hal Maynor) discover a strange machine in an underwater warehouse. Little do they know that their find is of crucial importance not only to various shady entities, but possibly to the future of the world itself. The shadiest entity in *Lunopolis* is the mysterious Church Of Lunology, an organisation that bears more than a passing resemblance to Tom Cruise's religion of choice. Avant chose Scientology as the partial model for his fictional church due to the area that it occupies on the edge of mainstream consciousness. "I wanted the Church Of Lunology to seem familiar to the audience in a 'Haven't-I-heard-of-that?' sort of way," he explains. "It needed it to feel like something that was always there,

simultaneously terrified of what it may be."

Avant always wanted to be a storyteller. Graduating from a gig as a teenager producing cheap ads for the radio station that his parents ran in Lafayette, Louisiana, he moved into full-time television production work. After a decade in the business, Avant decided to leave and establish his own film production company. The director credits Frank Darabont's *The Shawshank Redemption* with setting him on the filmmaking path. Impressing him with its considerable scope on a relatively small budget, the much loved movie alerted Avant to how important every element of the filmmaking process is in creating a powerful whole. He particularly admires filmmakers like Quentin Tarantino and Christopher Nolan, who direct their own scripts.

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MAVERICK MOVIE AWARDS

"SHOOT THE MOON"

**Katarina Sakkas, Film Ink Magazine
September 2010**

With the wildly inventive sci-fi conspiracy thriller Lunopolis, debut filmmaker MATTHEW AVANT has crafted a work of canny, no-budget brilliance.

"The moon is the centerpiece of all conspiracy," says Matthew Avant, writer-director of the new science fiction uber-conspiracy flick Lunopolis. Though they occurred before he was born, it was the Apollo moon landings that sparked Avant's long-term fascination with conspiracy theories. "I read a lot about NASA and the moon program, and the first conspiracy theory that I ever heard accused the entire moon landing of being a hoax," the director explains.

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Already at work on a new project (*"as original as Lunopolis"*), Avant looks forward to exploring many different styles of storytelling in film. *"I want to write stories that keep you thinking,"* he says. *"It's been fun with Lunopolis because once you introduce people to that new playground of thought, you can watch where they go with it on their own. Maybe that will go on to inspire new ideas, and that would be a tremendous honor."*

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COVER STORY:

CONVOLUTION

Filmmaker Matthew Avant on his multiple award-winning conspiracy thriller 'Lunopolis,' and how his dream of shooting movies got off the ground

BY CODY DAIGLE

FROM THE BEGINNING, THE INTERVIEW PROCESS STRUCK MATTHEW AVANT AS A LITTLE BIT WEIRD.

"Do you want me to lie?" he asks as the photos in close to get a shot. "Look at me," the photographer, snapping a few shots, Avant does, and after a (with the camera person) Avant lets out a little chuckle as slightly shakes his head that says, "How weird is this?"

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"MOON VISION"

Cody Daigle, *The Times of Acadiana*

July 1, 2010 | Vol. 32 No. 13

Filmmaker Matthew Avant on his multiple award-winning conspiracy thriller *Lunopolis* and how his dream of shooting movies got off the ground.

From the beginning, the interview process strikes Matthew Avant as a little bit weird. *"Do you want me to look at you, or...?"* he asks, as the photographer leans in close to get a shot. *"Look at me,"* the photographer replies, snapping a few shots. Avant does, and after a few moments (with the camera perilously close), he lets out a little chuckle and ever so slightly shakes his head in a gesture that says, *"How weird is this?"*

"This is my first interview like this," Avant says later. You'd never know it from the way he handles himself during the almost hour and a half we spend talking. He's a laid-back guy with an almost disarming openness, as though he's weathered the artificial familiarity of interviews like this a thousand times before. And he's got a storyteller's flair for detail—his answers are thick with narrative flourish and delightful asides, as though he's hell-bent on not leaving anything out. But he's never less than completely engaging, passionate about his work, and amused by the fact that someone was interested in asking about it.

Weird as it may be, the interview process - and all that comes with it - is something Avant should probably get used to. This weekend, Avant's first full-length feature film, *Lunopolis*, will get four screenings at the Roswell UFO Festival, an annual event dedicated to UFO culture and conspiracy theories held in Roswell, NM. UFO enthusiasts know the significance of Roswell: The small desert town was the site of an alleged UFO crash and recovery of extraterrestrial debris - including alien bodies - in the summer of 1947. Since the 1970s, Roswell has become the nexus of American UFO culture and a spawning point for conspiracy theories about the government's knowledge of life beyond our planet.

The festival, which combines film screenings, events, workshops, and even a more serious academic component about emerging technologies, is more than 30 years old and has drawn a loyal fan base of sci-fi fans and conspiracy theorists from around the globe. *"It's one of the bigger festivals of its kind. It's kind of the mothership of conspiracy festivals,"* Avant said. This is a big step for a film that's already made a few stops on the festival circuit. *Lunopolis* has already been seen at the Boston Sci-Fi Festival, the Buffalo Niagara Film Festival, and the Nashville Film Festival. Avant's screenplay won the 2009 Best Screenplay Award at the Maverick Movie Awards.

"The film is about two documentary filmmakers from Louisiana who accidentally uncover-" Avant starts before catching himself. *"I'm reciting what I know I've written for the press releases,"* he adds with a laugh. *"They accidentally uncover a huge secret."* The secret they uncover is as grand a conspiracy theory as any other - an elaborate rethinking of history that blends time travel, religion, space exploration, and our abiding cultural obsession with the moon into a clever, mind-bending narrative.

The film's central conceit - that a race of people on the moon have a more direct and lasting effect on our world than we could ever imagine - not only delivers the twisty thrills that good sci-fi plots demand, but it also provides explanations for current mysteries, such as UFO sightings. *"I've always liked the idea of saying, 'what if there was just this one big missing link, this one giant explanation that linked everything together?'"* Avant said. *"It was a lot of fun to do, fun to imagine. Playing in that world—it's like creating a big sandbox to play in, creating the rules and seeing what happens."*

The film also takes an unorthodox approach to delivering its high-concept story, eschewing elaborate effects and opting for a stripped-down, documentary-style approach. It was a choice born of both artistic integrity and financial necessity. *"I don't have the resources to compete with a big Hollywood movie. I can't compete that way. So the best way I can tell this story is to tell it like a documentary,"* Avant said. *"It's very gritty, very guerrilla. We're on the run, keeping the cameras rolling, capturing this thing as it happens."* The world of *Lunopolis* may seem unconventional to some, but for Avant, it's been a thread in his life since youth.

"I'm not necessarily a huge sci-fi person," Avant said. *"But I've always been fascinated by the moon for some reason. In fact, my mom found some old papers I'd written when I was in grade school. And one of them was about Jules Verne, and the other was about space travel. And I thought, 'Man, this has really been with me a lot!'"* The film also gave Avant the opportunity to tinker in another world he finds compelling: the world of conspiracy theory. And conspiracy theories surrounding UF's, alien life and the moon - all theories which are explored or touched on in *Lunopolis* - have long histories.

"Conspiracy overall is just fun," Avant said. *"I don't necessarily believe it, but I think it's really rich source material. Even people who don't have an opinion about most things probably have an opinion one way or the other about whether the moon landing actually happened. Everyone will weigh in somehow."*

Avant's relationship with film began early in his life, as well, with a film encounter marked by fantasy. *"The very first movie I ever remember seeing that really motivated me, that made me say, 'I want to tell stories; I want to make movies' was Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory."* Avant remembers first encountering the film while being babysat at a friend's house. *"It was on a tape that was clearly taped from television—there was this California Raisins holiday special right before the movie—and once it started, I was totally sucked in."*

The film encounter gave him a fledgling vocabulary for something he'd been doing for years. As a child, Avant remembers writing stories and fleshing them out with hand-drawn panels animating the action. That led to an early interest in drawing comics, which evolved into his first stabs at screenplay writing. Once bitten by the filmmaking bug, Avant launched himself into learning the craft, taking jobs that would teach him the technical side of the business. He worked in a recording studio for a year and a half learning sound engineering. He got his first chance to get behind the camera as a producer for a local hunting and fishing show. A tip from a friend led him to a local television station, where he spent three years learning shooting and editing. Another four years at another TV station allowed him to inch closer to the kind of filmmaking he aspired to as a child.

"It wasn't always the most creative kind of work," Avant said. *"But the whole time, I knew deep down that this was what I was born to do."* A lucky break came in the form of a documentary project focused on Louisiana veterans. It was an opportunity for Avant to make his first feature-length documentary and to put his skill set to the test. Once finished, the documentary never got off the ground, but it gave Avant the needed push to take the next step.

"I knew going in it was a temporary gig until the film was done," Avant said. *"So when we got to that point, I figured I could either go back and work in a production company somewhere, or I could just do it myself."* Avant chose the latter, forming Media Savant LLC and putting his film aspirations, finally, in his own hands. *"I knew I wanted to tell stories. I knew I wanted to do it in a visual medium. I started this process and fell in love with this form along the way,"* Avant said. *"And it just feels like who I am now."*

It would be easy for Avant to ride the success of Lunopolis to an inflated sense of self - others have made that trip on less acclaim - but to his credit, Avant seems resolute to stay grounded and humble. While chatting about his experience at the Nashville Film Festival, one of the larger festivals to screen Lunopolis, Avant is quick to put that experience in perspective.

"They interviewed me on the Gibson Guitar Bus. And I was like 'Man, what am I over here?'" He said with a laugh. *"And we said when we got there, 'Okay if we see a celebrity here, then we'll know this is legit.'" Mario Van Peebles was the first guy we say. And I was like 'All right, there's one!'"*

And Avant is even hesitant to affix an artistic label to himself. *"I don't really call myself... I mean, I have never called myself a 'filmmaker,'" he said. "Because I don't feel like one. I just want to do the work and do the work well. And that's all."* His humility is both striking and completely genuine. For Avant, filmmaking isn't a flashy entrance to the world of red carpets and festivals and awards. For Avant, filmmaking is a necessary function, an imperative—the *"thing I was born to do."*

And it seems to stem from his core belief in the primacy of storytelling. "Now, people have a tendency to want to rush out and start producing stuff right away because it's easier now than ever to get your hands on the right equipment to make it happen," he said. "Chances are, they might not have taken the time to develop the story so much. That's where maybe I can do something special." And as Avant sees it, a good story may be the independent filmmaker's only ace in the sleeve in an increasingly cluttered and effects-driven industry.

"A good story is maybe the only way we can compete," Avant said. *"No, you can't get the big actors or the special effects of Iron Man. But I think that gives independent filmmakers the leg up. If you can come up with really good stories, you're doing something different, unique. And audiences are hungry for it."* As we wrap up the interview, Avant shares his excitement about the impending Roswell trip and the opportunity to share Lunopolis with an audience he's sure will dive into the film's world eagerly and appreciatively. *"I'm excited about this one in particular because this is the perfect audience for the film,"* Avant said. *"We really wanted to do this one, and it's such a great thing that we're getting to do it."*

It's clear that the ride Avant has taken audiences on in *Lunopolis* pales in comparison to the ride the film has taken him on - one that is still in its early stages but looks poised to become a lifelong endeavor. Whether that ride will include the heights of Hollywood is, for Avant, irrelevant. *"I'm not thinking I'm going to get some huge kind of Paranormal Activity distribution deal or anything,"* Avant said. *"But all told, the thing I want more than anything is for somehow, whatever I do with it, for it to open a door to do another one. Because I have all these ideas that are floating around. Will I ever get the opportunity to do them? I don't know."*

Until the fate of those other ideas is discovered, there's *Lunopolis*—a film with its eyes fixed on the stars. Much like the man who made it.