

The Stoned Crow Press



INTERVIEW WITH WRITER AND DIRECTOR SEAN MANNION

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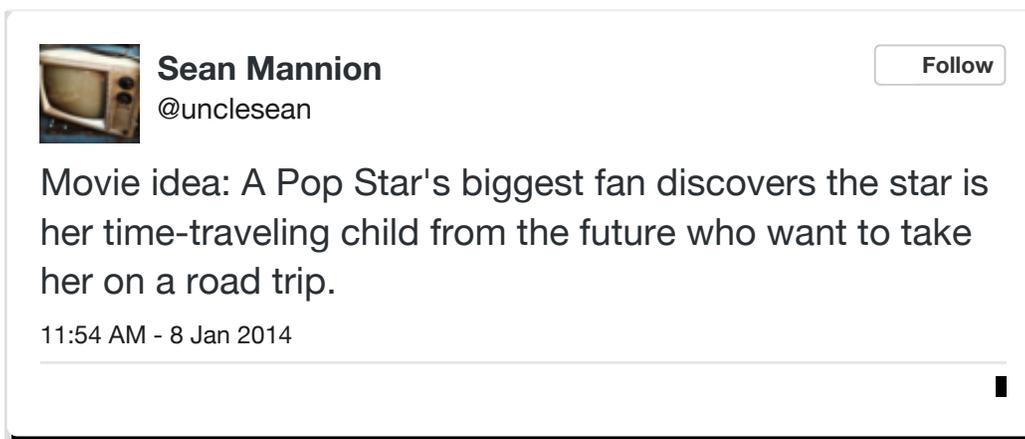
Sean Mannion was raised in Alaska but headed to New York City in the late aughts to pursue filmmaking. The now Brooklyn-based writer and director has many shorts to his name and is currently in production on his first feature, *Meme*, which he, for some strange reason, has allowed me to art direct. I met Sean for the first time on **another film** I was bizarrely art directing, on which Sean was the assistant director. You can often find him helping out however he can on other director's shoots.

Time Signature is Sean's most recent short film and you can watch it for free online [here](#) (and embedded below).

***Time Signature* takes an unusual approach to time travel—it reminded me a little bit of *Primer* in it's lack of interest in special effects and flash, in favor of characters and questions. Where did the idea for this film originally come from?**

I'm a big fan of time travel stories. As a kid, *Quantum Leap*, *Bill and Ted*, and the *Back to the Future* series were some of my favorite things to watch. Early last year, when I came up with the idea for *Time Signature*, I'd been re-watching episodes of *Quantum Leap*. I had also written an outline for a time travel web series a few months earlier. So, time travel stories were on my mind.

Time Signature started as **a tweet**. I occasionally post silly movie ideas to Twitter. I just try to assemble the oddest ideas I can express in 140 characters or less. It's never serious but this one just seemed to click:



What was your writing process like? How long did it take you to write it, did anybody else have major input? Were there any major influences either in terms of story or approach?

It started with the tweet. It got a more positive response than most of my “movie idea” tweets. So, I did a draft of the screenplay within about a week and I liked the direction it was going. I shared some of the drafts with my wife, but I didn’t really show the script to a whole lot of people during my process.

The main influences on the script were the television show and movies I mentioned and also two short stories by the science fiction writer, Alfred Bester: *The Men Who Murdered Mohammed* and *Of Time and Third Avenue*. *Of Time and Third Avenue*, in particular, influenced the approach I took to *Time Signature* in that *Time Signature* doesn’t focus on the time traveler but on the person that the story’s time traveler is interacting with in the present. *Of Time and Third Avenue* also offers no concrete look at the future or the mechanics of time travel, which I also avoided in *Time Signature*.

You’ve written and directed a bunch of shorts and now are shooting your first feature (which you also wrote and are directing). How do you feel about the writing process versus the directing process? Is there one you prefer or identify with more?

Writing for film is a little weird, especially when writing something I’m planning to produce and direct myself. I used to be a lot more involved with the writing. That’s what I went to school for. In the past few years, the writing has become less of a focus for me. I see screenwriting, for projects like this that I’m directing and producing, as more of a rough outline to follow through the production and post-production process. So much happens between the script and the final edit that sometimes it can feel like a little bit of a waste to get overly invested in the script.

I think that means I’m a bit more engaged in the directing process. I enjoy creating a vision of the story with my director of photography and working with my actors on developing the look and voice of the characters. A lot happens after the script is locked that takes it from words on a page to people on a screen and I really love making that happen.

You tend to collaborate with a lot of the same people over and over. *Time Signature* features Kitty from *Meme*, I know you’ve worked as an assistant director on Hye Yun’s excellent web series, *Hey Yun*. How did you first come to work with them? What do you look for in repeat collaborators?

It is really important to me to work with people who I enjoy spending time with. It makes the work go easier on long days and when things get stressful on set, as they often do. I just really like to fill my film set with my friends and people who I want to spend time with.

I first met Kitty Ostapowicz when I was casting for my first attempt at shooting my feature film, *Meme*, in 2013. *Meme* didn’t happen at that time but Kitty was really interested in working on more projects and I felt the need to shoot more, so we made several shorts together, including the *lone*

Shorts, and that lead us to making *Time Signature* together.

I first met [Hye Yun Park](#) after seeing the first season of her web series online and falling in love with it. The series was produced by [Nancy Schwartzman](#) who produced a short documentary and related campaign called *The Line*, which I was very impressed with. I'd met Nancy several years earlier and kept up with her through social media. When she tweeted about Hye Yun's series, I decided to check it out. After I started sharing it, Hye Yun and I communicated online and then met up for coffee. We stayed in touch and not long after that I decided to cast her as Maya in *Time Signature*. She subsequently hired me to be the Assistant Director for the second season of [her series](#).

For *Time Signature* I also worked with Tara Cioletti again. She starred in the previous short film I crowdfunded, *Abel and Cain*. Tara was the first actress I met through what has become my standard casting process. I'd had a couple of bad experiences with the typical auditioning process, so I've since adopted a more informal process. I select actors who submit for my casting notices and meet them for coffee rather than have them come in and read lines. She's proved to be a wonderful actress to work with on both projects we've worked on together.

You chose a nontraditional, but increasingly common, method of distribution for *Time Signature* – you just have it up for free for anyone to watch. What led you to choose that mode of distribution and how's it turning out for you?

I spent some time considering the traditional approach of the festival route for *Time Signature* but I just don't feel like that is the best option for the way I am approaching my career. The cost of submitting to festivals builds up quickly and it's a gamble. It's a gamble to get the film in front of what may only be a handful of people who are probably only at the festival to see the features. I want to get my work in front of a wider audience and I want to get it in front of an audience that actually wants to see it. This is not to say that I'm not submitting the film to festivals. I am. It's just not my primary focus. So far, the approach is going well. It's a slow process getting the film in front of people, but it's been steady and we've gotten a lot really positive feedback from people who've seen the film.

Which are your top five (or so) screenplays/screenwriters? Who are your five favorite directors? Favorite films? Let's just make all that one question, why not.

Screenwriters

Honestly, I was having a hard time coming up with five, particularly as screenwriters aren't often talked about.

1. Walter Hill – He has a very streamlined approach to writing that I enjoy and fits with my

production process. It's really interesting to read his screenplay for *Alien*. The scene descriptions are very brief and only the most important actions are described. Most of the screenplay is just the dialogue.

2. Lawrence Kasdan – He wrote *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *The Empire Strikes Back*. I think his work on those films is part of what make them the stand out films in their series' and for their directors.
3. David Mamet – Less for his work and more for his book *On Directing*, which emphasizes focusing on action and clarity and has been a big influence on my writing for film.
4. Charlie Kaufman – I don't love all of his movies but I like his overall approach to storytelling and the magical realism, in particular.
5. Diablo Cody – I think *Jennifer's Body* is a wonderfully clever twist on horror tropes and has some scenes that feel very honest in a way I wasn't expecting. *Young Adult* is also a really wonderful story.

Directors

1. David Cronenberg – *Videodrome* is probably the biggest influence on my work.
2. David Lynch – Another big influence on my approach to storytelling. At different times I'm into different films of his.
3. Alejandro Jodorowsky – Wonderfully bizarre and visually striking movies.
4. Richard Donner – My favorite "for hire" director. He's done every kind of film and done it well. Among his work are some of my favorite films including *The Omen*, *Superman*, the *Lethal Weapon* films, and *Scrooged*.
5. Rob Zombie – What I enjoy about Zombie is that his films have a consistent voice but they're never really the same. He seems to approach everything a little bit sideways and doesn't seem to want to repeat himself. It's also really fun to listen to his commentary tracks on his films. He seems to genuinely love the process of filmmaking and still appreciates the magic of it.

Films

1. *Lisztomania* – The greatest biopic ever. A surreal musical about the pianist Franz Liszt. It is insane and wonderful. I don't want to say any more about it, because I think it should just be experienced

without warning.

2. *Heavy Metal* - Maybe not the best movie but it's a really fun sci-fi fantasy film.
3. *Videodrome* - The biggest influence on my work.
4. *Josie and the Pussycats* - The film's villains are trying to brainwash everyone with subliminal advertising. The film features an onslaught of hilarious product placement in the most unusual places. It's genius. Also, it's damn funny.
7. *Star Trek V: The Final Frontier* - "What does God need with a starship?"

What's next for you and *Time Signature*?

I'm currently shooting my first feature, *Meme*. We're shooting it on no-budget, when people and equipment are available. So, it's been taking a long time to shoot, but we're very close to finishing shooting. We're also shooting some films-within-the film for *Meme*, so we'll be working on those as well. Then, there's going to be a lot of post-production for that. Then, we'll see how long I let myself take a break before I give myself another project.

For now, I'm pushing *Time Signature* online and looking at festivals for it.

Watch *Time Signature*:



Time Signature

from [Sean Mannion](#)

10:17 |



HD

