

Crazy Boat Pictures
presents

THE HUNT FOR PLANET B

A film by Nathaniel Kahn

USA | 93 min. | 2021

WORLD PREMIERE – 2021 SXSW FILM FESTIVAL

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LOGLINE

Capturing the human drama behind NASA's high-stakes Webb Space Telescope, *The Hunt for Planet B* follows a pioneering group of scientists—many of them women—on their quest to find another Earth among the stars.

SYNOPSIS

The Hunt for Planet B captures the human drama behind NASA's high-stakes Webb Telescope, due to launch in October 2021—the most ambitious space observatory ever built. The film interweaves the creation of this massive machine with the story of a pioneering group of female scientists on a quest to find life beyond our solar system. What begins as a real-time scientific adventure turns into a deep meditation on our place in the universe. On the brink of seeing farther out than ever before, we find ourselves looking back at our own imperiled planet with new eyes.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

When I was a kid, I was captivated by seeing the moon through a neighbor's telescope. The wonder I felt that night has never left me. So when the opportunity arose to document the building of NASA's massive Webb Space Telescope, I jumped at it. The Webb Telescope (which NASA is undertaking in partnership with the European Space Agency and the Canadian Space Agency) is the most complex space telescope ever built. Representing the collective endeavor of thousands of people from 14 countries, it will be 100 times more powerful than the Hubble, and promises to reveal secrets about the universe that will transform our sense of ourselves and our place in the cosmos.

As thrilling as it was to film the technology coming together, it was the people involved in the project that interested me most. I became especially intrigued by a dynamic group of female astronomers who are planning to use the telescope to investigate recently discovered planets around nearby stars for potential signs of life. The field of exoplanets—planets beyond our solar system—had long been thought the realm of science fiction. In the last decade, though, we have discovered that virtually every star in the sky has at least one planet around it, and many, like the Trappist-1 system that we explore in the film, have multiple planets around them. Statistics seem to favor the existence of life out there, and yet for now, we actually only know of life in *one place* in the vastness of space: our Earth.

This pivotal moment, in which we stand on the threshold of discovering whether or not we are alone in the universe, was the original focus of the film. But as my team and I probed this story deeper, a dramatic irony asserted itself: just as we find ourselves capable of answering a question that has haunted us for thousands of years, we are realizing that we may not survive the emergence of technology. Wildfires are raging, icebergs are melting, sea levels are rising, and unless we confront the reality of climate change, our species is unlikely to survive long term—let alone find the global stability and unity required to explore the other worlds we may discover.

The characters in this film were well aware of this irony, and I found them eager to explore it with me. In this way, the film developed a surprising dramatic arc. Our search for answers in the heavens was somehow allowing us to see our Earth anew—realizing its uniqueness in a way that transcends our tumultuous point in time. A great telescope, forged out of human curiosity, is about to launch into deep space. It will carry with it the hope that by looking outward, we can find a new and startling way to see ourselves.

– *Nathaniel Kahn*

FILMMAKERS

Nathaniel Kahn – Director, Producer

Nathaniel Kahn is an award-winning filmmaker. His 2018 film *The Price of Everything* premiered at Sundance, was broadcast on HBO, and was nominated for an Emmy. Kahn's *My Architect*, about his father, architect Louis Kahn, won the Directors Guild of America Award for outstanding direction of a documentary and was nominated for an Academy Award, two Independent Spirit Awards and an Emmy. *My Architect* is in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art. Kahn's film *Two Hands*, about the late concert pianist Leon Fleisher, was also nominated for an Academy Award and an Emmy.

Bonnie Hlinomaz – Producer

Bonnie Hlinomaz has worked on acclaimed features and documentaries with such notable directors as Martin Scorsese, Penny Marshall, Sidney Lumet, Robert De Niro, Jonathan Demme, Antoine Fuqua and Arne Glimcher. She was a producer on the documentaries *Picasso and Braque Go to the Movies*, which premiered at TIFF, and was featured at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and *White Gold*, narrated by Hillary Clinton, which premiered at DOC NYC and MoMA. *White Gold* has also been shown at the United Nations and embassies across the world.

Sabine Krayenbühl – Editor

Sabine Krayenbühl is an award-winning editor with over twenty theatrical documentaries and narrative features to her credit. Her work includes the Oscar and Independent Spirit Award nominated *My Architect* for which she received an ACE Eddie Award nomination. Other credits include *The Price of Everything*, *Mad Hot Ballroom*, *The Bridge*, *Picasso and Braque Go to the Movies*, produced by Martin Scorsese, and *Kiss the Water*, co-produced by BBC Films. Most recently, she finished her directorial debut *Letters from Baghdad*, which was released theatrically in the US and UK to great success. She is an alumni of NYU's Tisch School of the Arts and a long-term member of New York Women in Film and Television.

Robert Richman – Cinematographer

Robert Richman is an Emmy-nominated and Sundance award-winning cinematographer whose documentaries include *An Inconvenient Truth*, *Metallica: Some Kind of Monster*, *Paradise Lost*, and *The September Issue*, as well as several of Nathaniel Kahn's films including *The Price of Everything* and *My Architect*. Richman directed his first feature film, the award-winning *Ahead of Time: The Extraordinary Journey of Ruth Gruber*, which premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2009.

Paul Leonard-Morgan – Composer

Paul Leonard-Morgan is a BAFTA award-winning, Emmy and Ivor Novello nominated composer and producer. His film scores include *Tomorrow Man*, *Dredd*, *Limitless*, *The Number Station*, *Amateurs in Space*, and *Legendary*. He recently worked on a string of projects with Academy Award-winning director Errol Morris including *B Side*, *Wormwood*, *American Dharma* and *My Psychedelic Love Story*. Other scoring work include the high-grossing films *Despicable Me 2* and *Walking with Dinosaurs 3D*, and the acclaimed series *Tales from the Loop*, co-composed with Philip Glass.

APPEARING IN THE FILM (partial list)

Natalie Batalha

Natalie Batalha was a science lead on NASA's Kepler mission, which revealed a staggering diversity of planets beyond the solar system. A professor of astrophysics at UC Santa Cruz, Batalha uses the world's most powerful ground-based telescopes to identify planets suitable for atmospheric studies with the Webb Space Telescope. She is building an Astrobiology program at UCSC and was named by *Time* magazine as one of the world's 100 most influential people in 2017.

Natasha Batalha

Natasha Batalha is a scientist at NASA Ames who studies the atmospheres of worlds beyond the solar system. She has a dual PhD from Penn State in Astrobiology & Astrophysics and has garnered awards such as the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Minority Scholarship & the UC Presidential Fellowship. Her models help decipher the atmospheres of planets, including their climate and chemical makeup. They are publicly available as she strives to create a field that is accessible and inclusive.

Nick Lane

Nick Lane is a biochemist and professor of evolutionary biochemistry at University College London. He is the author of four acclaimed books, which have sold more than 150,000 copies worldwide, been translated into 25 languages and have won numerous awards. Lane's research is on how energy flow has shaped evolution over 4 billion years and on the origin of life. He is the winner of numerous awards including the 2015 Biochemical Society Award and the 2016 Royal Society Michael Faraday Prize, the UK's premier award for excellence in communicating science.

Amy Lo

Amy Lo is the Deputy Director for Vehicle Engineering on the James Webb Space Telescope for Northrop Grumman. Prior to her current role, Lo served as the Alignments Thread Lead on Webb responsible for all mechanical alignments. Her expertise includes mathematical simulations, space mission architecture development, mission & payload analysis and system engineering. She has a Bachelors in Physics from Brown University, and a Ph. D. in Astrophysics from UCLA.

Matt Mountain

Matt Mountain is the current President of the Association of Universities for Research in Astronomy (AURA). He is a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the International Society for Optical Engineering and the Royal Astronomical Society and a member of the American Astronomical Society. Mountain is the Director Emeritus of the Space Telescope Science Institute, which operates Hubble and will operate JWST.

Sara Seager

Sara Seager is an astrophysicist and a professor of physics and planetary science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Her research, which earned her a MacArthur "genius" grant, has introduced many foundational ideas to the field of exoplanets, and she led NASA's Probe-class study team for the Starshade project. She is now at the forefront of the search for the first Earth-like exoplanets and signs of life on them.

Jill Tarter

Jill Tarter is known worldwide for her work in the search for extraterrestrial intelligence (SETI). She is the Emeritus Chair for SETI Research at the SETI Institute and helped construct and operate the Allen Telescope Array. Tarter was awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award from Women in Aerospace and two Public Service Medals from NASA. She is a Fellow of the AAAS and the California Academy of Sciences. In 2012, *Time* magazine named her one of the 25 most influential people in space.

Maggie Turnbull

Maggie Turnbull is an astrobiologist with expertise in identifying planetary systems that may be capable of supporting life. She developed the Catalog of Habitable Stellar Systems with Jill Tarter at SETI. She currently leads teams to develop NASA missions to discover planets beyond our solar system. Turnbull continues to serve both science and the public through advocacy on Capitol Hill and as an elected official in her local community. She was a candidate for Governor of Wisconsin in 2018.

CREDITS

Director: Nathaniel Kahn

Producers: Bonnie Hlinomaz, Nathaniel Kahn

Editor: Sabine Krayenbühl

Cinematographer: Robert Richman

Composer: Paul Leonard-Morgan

Executive Producers: Sandra Evers-Manly, Carleen Beste, Matt Mountain,
Lawrence B. Benenson, Gerry Ohrstrom, Alberto Conti

Co-producers: Lisa Remington, Marya Flanagan

NASA Director of Photography: Michael McClare

2nd Unit Director of Photography: Mark Gambol

Visual Effects: Michael Wharton

Sound Designer: Robert Hein

Re-Recording Mixers: Tony Volante, Robert Hein

Sound Recordist: Edward O'Connor

Colorist: Roman Hankewycz

Title Designer: Randy Balsmeyer

Archival Producer: Judy Aley

Post Production Services: Harbor