



## INTERVIEW WITH JAMES CUNNINGHAM WRITER/DIRECTOR OF 'ATLAS'

**How long have you been making films?** *"I've been involved in filmmaking since the 1990s. My journey began working at a video store (remember them?), a role that immersed me in the world of cinema. The desire to tell stories and explore human emotions led me to study filmmaking, and working on local film and television productions only deepened my passion for telling stories, both on screen and on the stage."*

**Why did you want to do this project?** *"ATLAS is born out of a need to challenge and redefine the conventional concepts of masculinity. I wanted to use my platform as an independent artistic filmmaker to explore how societal expectations shape male body image and identity. This project, blending personal experiences along with my own artistic vision, really aims to inspire viewers to reconsider their perceptions of strength and vulnerability."*

**How much budget did you have to produce the film? Was ATLAS self-funded?** *"While we prefer not to disclose the exact figures, I can share that ATLAS was produced with an modest independent budget, focusing on remunerating the film's outstanding cast for their brave, bold performances."*

**How long did it take from initial idea to being able to release?** *"From conception to release, ATLAS took about two years. This timeframe included developing the concept, writing and workshopping a script, casting (which was so important to this particular film, as it is to all my projects), a laborious yet patient international remote production, post-production and ultimate release, all while ensuring the film's message remained impactfully clear."*

**Are you happy with the result?** *"Absolutely. ATLAS not only met but exceeded my expectations. It's a testament to the power of collaborative storytelling and the dedication of everyone involved, especially my outstanding cast who believed in the vision."*



(Ethan Vaughan as Atlas in short film ATLAS - Presidential Productions)

**What phase is this project in right now?** *"It's early 2024 and ATLAS is currently in the midst of its festival circuit. We're receiving positive feedback and are excited to see how it continues to resonate with audiences around the world and judges alike."*

**How has your experience been with the festivals so far? In what ways do you feel film festivals can evolve or improve, particularly in relation to projects like yours?**

*"The festival experience has been inspiring, especially seeing diverse audience reactions to ATLAS. However, I believe film festivals and audiences would benefit greatly from being more inclusive of independent cinema. By opening doors wider for indie filmmakers, festivals can showcase a richer tapestry of stories and perspectives, which not only enriches the festival experience but also the entire cinematic landscape."*

**Sometimes, filmmakers use many references, favourite directors, favourite movies, etc. Were you inspired by any director or film? If so, tell us your references...**

*"My approach to ATLAS was influenced by a blend of contemporary cinema. In creating ATLAS, especially with its visual and thematic elements, I was influenced by the works of filmmakers like Argentine-filmmaker Gaspar Noé, Danish-filmmaker Lars von Trier, and American-filmmaker Joe Swanberg. Their fearless approach to cinema, often blending raw reality with artistic expression, resonated perfectly with the vision for ATLAS and became pivotal in shaping the way ATLAS addresses masculinity and vulnerability."*



(Geoffrey Oliver as Atlas in short film ATLAS - Presidential Productions)

**How does your approach to filmmaking, especially in ATLAS, contribute to the ongoing conversation about masculinity in cinema?** *"With ATLAS, my approach was to delve deeply into the nuances of masculinity, challenging traditional perceptions. I believe cinema has the power to initiate dialogues and question long-standing norms. By portraying the complexities and vulnerabilities of male athletes, ATLAS aims to redefine what it means to be masculine in today's society, moving away from stereotypical portrayals towards more authentic and multifaceted representations."*

**Nudity in cinema can sometimes be a contentious topic. How do you navigate this in your work, particularly in a film like ATLAS which features nudity but also aims to redefine masculinity?** *"The nudity in ATLAS is not just a visual element; it's a narrative tool and a performance instrument. It's used to strip away societal layers, revealing the raw, unfiltered essence of the character. Specifically male nudity aligns with the film's core message about vulnerability and strength. Handling such a sensitive topic requires a balance of artistic integrity and respect for the performer. It's about ensuring that the portrayal is purposeful, meaningful, and contributes to the film's deeper message."*

**What's your favourite movie?** *I'll give you my top three: Jurassic Park (1993), Casino (1995), and Clue (1985). Honourable mentions to 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968) and Showgirls (1995). For any cinephile, it's hard to pick.*



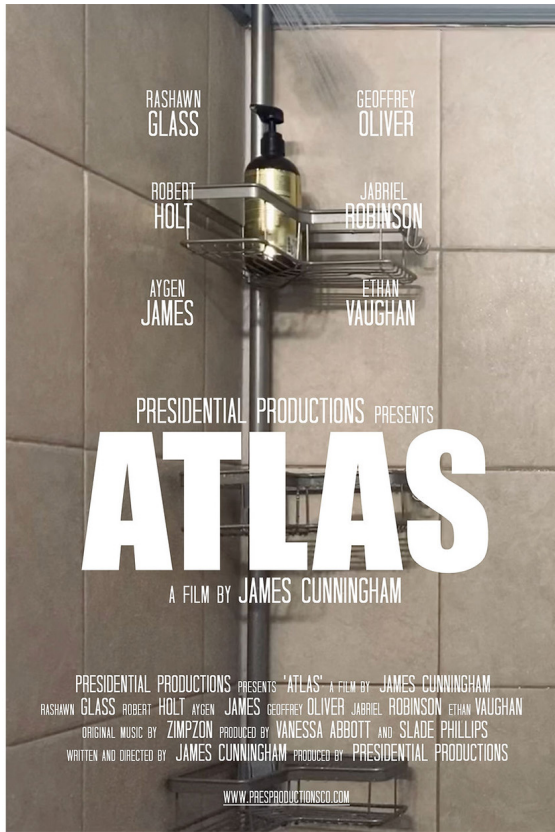
(Gabriel Robinson as Atlas in short film ATLAS - Presidential Productions)


**Do you see yourself making movies in five years?** *"Definitely. I see myself continuing to explore and challenge societal themes through cinema, perhaps one day expanding into feature-length projects."*


**Do you have any other project in mind?** *"There are a few ideas in the pipeline, all of which continue to explore dark themes and challenge conventional narratives, much like ATLAS. I'm currently in post-production on a new project titled 'Savage Sands', a sun-drenched, blood-soaked thriller following a man stranded alone on a tropical desert island; the film explores his battle against the forces of nature while confronting his own dark human instincts."*

**What do you ask for the future, cinematographically speaking?** *"I hope to see the film industry continue to embrace diverse stories and innovative storytelling techniques, pushing the boundaries of what cinema can achieve. And world peace."*

**Your best experience in a movie theatre?** *"Watching the audience's reaction to the first film I ever worked on, GETTIN' SQUARE. There's nothing quite like seeing your work come to life on the big screen and connecting with an audience."*







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Directed by  
James Cunningham

Six Athletes; One Conversation...

ATLAS is a thought-provoking original short film that explores the complexities of the concept of masculinity through the experiences of six male athletes, ATLAS is an international collaborative film project from award-winning Australian filmmaker James Cunningham, brought to life by American actors Rashawn Glass, Robert Holt, Aygen James, Geoffrey Oliver, Jabriel Robinson and Ethan Vaughan.

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