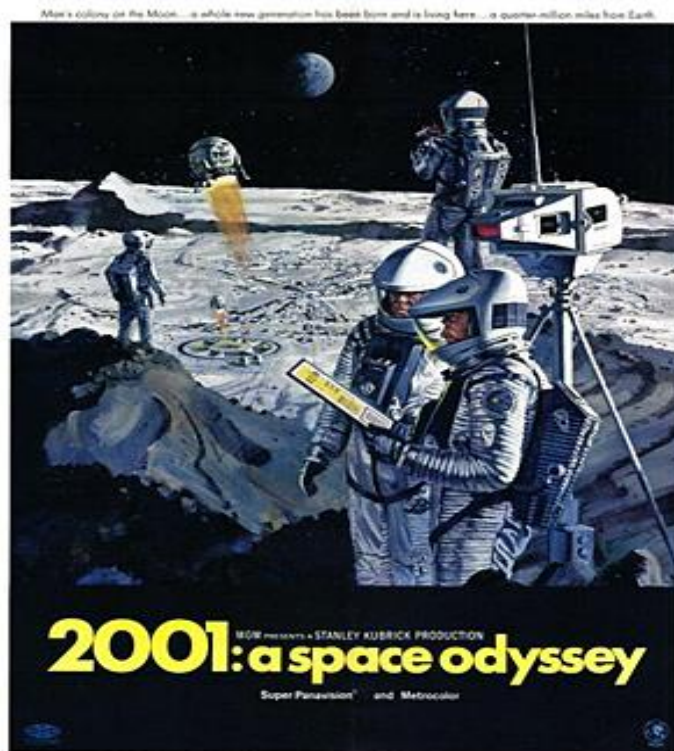


An epic drama of adventure and exploration



2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY—BEYOND THE INFINITE

Retrospective by Dr. John L. Flynn

Introduction

The year 2001 marked the beginning of a new millennium and the end of rumors about a doomsday computer bug. The year 2001 witnessed the inauguration of a United States President following questionable election returns from the state of Florida and the horrifying destruction of the twin World Trade Towers in New York City by Muslim terrorists. The year 2001 saw the introduction of the Segway, the mapping of the human genome, the decline of the world's economic markets, the rise of thinking machines far more complex and sophisticated than the human mind, and the ongoing construction of

the International Space Station while in orbit around the earth. The year 2001, as imagined by Stanley Kubrick and Arthur C. Clarke in 1968, turns out to have been quite different from our reality and now, in fact, looks rather quaint. For all of the predictions about a commercial orbiting space station, talking super-computers, a satellite network, and a fleet of space shuttles that have come true, the lunar colonies (of both Russia and the United States), the mission to Jupiter (and beyond), suspended animation, and first contact with an alien species remain as unfulfilled dreams. The biggest surprise was that Kubrick and Clarke failed to predict the personal computer or the Internet. But their film “2001: A Space Odyssey” was more than just a motion picture about what the next century would look like; it was a metaphor that examined the mystery of what makes us human—not in the small, every day lives of characters in a mainstream movie, but in the larger symbols of time and space. While the year 2001 has come and left its indelible mark on history, the film “2001: A Space Odyssey” remains as relevant as the dreams that it has inspired and the possibilities of man and his place in the cosmos.

A View from Serendipity

“2001: A Space Odyssey” (1968) was without a doubt the most influential science fiction film of its period, and remains, to this day, one of the greatest motion pictures of all time. In fact, members of the American Film listed the film as number 22 among the 100 Best American Films of all time, and science fiction fans, in a recent poll, have named “2001” as one of the ten best films of the Twentieth Century. Auteured by Stanley Kubrick, who created the equally brilliant “Dr. Strangelove, or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb” four years earlier, this M-G-M roadshow presentation in Cinerama, filmed in Super Panavision and Metrocolor, was clearly a quantum leap

beyond the fantastic visions and cinematic nightmares of Georges Melies, Fritz Lang, James Whale, and George Pal.

Regrettably, critical reaction to 2001 was mixed when the film was first released in 1968. Roger Ebert of The Chicago Sun-Times regarded it as a landmark film, praising its imaginative use of visual images with words like "transcendent" and "fascinating" in order to convey the total experience of the film to his readers. The Saturday Review characterized 2001 as a "milestone film," proclaiming its "unforgettable space journey" as "breathtaking." Time called the film "dazzling, wrenching, eerie . . . a mind bender." But their appreciation for Kubrick's ten-million dollar masterpiece was among the minority. When "2001: A Space Odyssey" premiered in Washington, D.C., on April 2, 1968, most East Coast film critics found the film slow-moving, dull, and completely bereft of a discernible plot. For some reason, their unfavorable reviews were particularly vitriolic, as if the majority of critics had somehow been personally offended or duped by Kubrick with his artistic rendering of the year 2001. Renata Adler in The New York Times said that "the movie is so completely absorbed in its own problems . . . that it is somewhere between hypnotic and immensely boring." Judith Crist, writing in New York, suggested that "2001" be "cut in half" in order to "preclude our wondering why exactly Kubrick has brought us to outer space." Pauline Kael, who had earlier praised "Planet of the Apes" in her New Yorker review, described "2001" as "a monumentally unimaginative movie," while her fellow critics called it "slow-moving," "ponderous" and "incomprehensible." Life Magazine simply labeled it as "brain-boggling." Even science fiction author Lester del Rey stated the film was a "disaster" and likely to "set major science fiction moviemaking back another ten years."

Today, thirty years after its inauspicious debut, “2001: A Space Odyssey” is celebrated not only as a great motion picture but also as a metaphysical, philosophical, and even religious epiphany to man's place in the cosmos. The many questions the film raises about the relationship between man & machine, man & alien, and man & God harkens back to similar questions the early progenitors of the genre, including Mary Shelley, H.G. Wells, and Olaf Stapledon, first considered. Science fiction, at its best, has often raised these questions. In the classic models of literary science fiction, including Shelley's Frankenstein, Wells's The War of the Worlds, and Stapledon's Star Maker, technology gives way to the metaphysical, and reveals the boundless optimism of the soaring human spirit as it takes its place among the stars. Perhaps, the real genius of “2001: A Space Odyssey,” aside from its breathtaking visuals and existential narrative, was its sublime connection to these classic works as it charted mankind's inner odyssey of mind and consciousness, evolving man from ape to star-child to the strains of Johann Strauss's "Blue Danube" waltz.

Origins

The genesis of the film “2001: A Space Odyssey” began with Arthur C. Clarke's short story "The Sentinel," first published in 10 Story Fantasy in 1951 as "Sentinel of Eternity." The simple but somewhat haunting story tells of the discovery of an alien artifact on the moon. In the short, first-person narrative, Wilson, a lunar geologist, glimpses a metallic object high on the ridge of a great promontory overlooking Mare Crisium, or the Sea of Crisis. The year is 1996, rather than 2001, and Wilson is part of a large expeditionary force from a lunar base at Mare Serenitatis, exploring and surveying the great mountain ranges in the Southern hemisphere of the Moon. He and his assistant

Louis Garnett make an unauthorized climb up the 12,000-foot peak and discover an alien object--twelve-feet tall, shaped roughly like a pyramid, and made out of a glittering, crystalline substance. Wilson doesn't know whether it's a building, a shrine, a temple, or a device, but he quickly discovers that it is generating a force-field. Twenty years later, even after Earth's scientists have cracked its invisible shield and reached inside, the alien object still remains a complete mystery. Based upon the thickness of the meteoric dust around its lunar base, Wilson concludes that it was set on the moon before life had emerged from the seas on Earth. Its builders must have scattered millions of them throughout the galaxy as beacons to signal that one, glorious day when a race had struggled up from savagery to take its first steps to the stars. The lunar geologist compares the "sentinel" to a fire-alarm, and suggests that humans need only wait for those who built it to arrive. Wilson closes his narrative, saying, "I do not think we will have to wait for long."

"The Sentinel" represents Clarke's first exploration of the metaphysical, even mystical, universe that may exist beyond technology and hard-core science. From 1946, with the publication of his first short story "Loophole" in Astounding Science Fiction, to 1951, when his first novel Prelude to Space was published, Arthur Clarke had always written fiction in which human problems were solved rather mechanically by some scientific discovery. The once and future chairman of the British Interplanetary Society had even proposed in scientific journals the deployment and use of satellites for communication years before the launch of Sputnik. He was considered by many of his contemporaries, including Isaac Asimov and Robert Heinlein, to be a leading proponent of hard SF. With "The Sentinel," however, Clarke moved beyond the physical world

where the laws of science ruled like some great monolithic entity to a mystifying realm where science was little more than superstition in light of some vast alien intelligence. Not only were we not alone (in the universe) but mankind actually needed the transcendence of other beings to give his life meaning and redemption. Science fiction is realized as a religion. His image of mankind as orphaned children crying out for the ancient inscrutable wisdom of alien races would dominate his writing for the next forty years, continuing with Childhood's End and reaching apotheosis with 2001: A Space Odyssey and its three sequels.

The sweeping vision of Childhood's End (1953) extended Clarke's thesis onto a much broader canvas. In a twist on H.G.Wells's War of the Worlds, Earth is "invaded" and ruled by a thoroughly beneficent race known as the Overlords. Within days of mankind sending its first spaceships to the moon, huge alien mothercrafts appear over every major city on Earth as well as over American and Soviet launch sites. Karellen, the alien supervisor of Earth, orders an immediate cessation to war and the formation of a single world government. At first, the appearance of the Overlords has a profound psychological, religious, and cultural impact on mankind. Later, once Rikki Stormgren, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, has conferred with Karellen, life on Earth returns to normal. Only a small portion (less than 7%) of the Earth's population resists the rule of the Overlords. One of those who questions the aliens' motives, Jan Rodericks, stows away on a supply ship, bound for an eighty-year round-trip to their home world. During the eighty years, a utopia is eventually achieved, but what mankind doesn't know is that it is being prepared for a major evolutionary step. Small groups of children, including Jeff and Jennifer Anne Greggson, are removed to a continent of their own, and

are trained by the Overmind for Total Breakthrough. Gradually, all other life on Earth disappears.

When Jan Rodericks returns from his epic journey, he is the last man on Earth. He confronts Karellen with the knowledge he has gleaned from his trip. The Overlords have been tinkering in the affairs of mankind since the beginning of time. Throughout history, certain minds had understood their role in human affairs, but still characterized the Overlords in art and literature as devils because of their satanic-like appearance. Karellen shows him the progress of the Earth children, every one of whom are standing motionless in a pattern which covers an entire continent. Though motionless, their minds are quite active as they mentally stretch out and connect to the very core of the planet. Karellen and his people can only watch and wonder and dream of the day, which will never come, when they can scale such heights. The Overlords are apparently only menial laborers who work for a greater intelligence they call the Overmind. Rodericks is offered a choice to join the Overlords, but he decides to remain behind as they hoped he would. In the concluding paragraphs, he witnesses the apotheosis as Earth children surrender their physical bodies to evolve to the next level of being. Meanwhile, Karellen watches from his starship, mourning his own race for they will never know what it's like to evolve beyond themselves into something more.

Clarke's apocalyptic vision in Childhood's End, which was influenced by Stapledon's Last and First Men and Star Maker, effectively describes the end of man as we know him, and the evolution of mankind to a higher plane of existence. By implication, man is unable to effect such a self-transformation, and must rely upon the transformation wrought by the alien Overlords to help him climb to the next level.

Ironically, the Overlords are beings of pure reason rather than spirit, and are unable to move beyond the physical world themselves. In the novel, science is perceived as little more than a tool; Rodericks employs scientific calculations in order to make his epic journey, but in the end science cannot transform him; the Greggsons create the colony of New Athens as a place where science and the arts can flourish, but their children leave these childish pursuits behind as they are transformed into beings of pure energy; even the Overlords rely on science to help them traverse the stars, but they are unable to reach the metaphysical world beyond. By relegating science to a secondary status, Clarke seems to be saying that mankind actually needs the transcendence of an Overmind, or a God, for life to be meaningful, and that thesis is a deeply spiritual and religious one.

The novel 2001: A Space Odyssey, which evolved from Clarke's 1951 short story and the screenplay he co-authored with director Stanley Kubrick, and its three sequels also dealt with similar themes as Childhood's End. In the book (as in the finished film), an alien intelligence intervenes at several key junctures in man's evolution, and helps mankind evolve from ape-man to stargod. Nine years after the mission to Jupiter went terribly wrong, Heywood Floyd and a team of Soviet astronauts must put aside their many differences in order to attempt contact with the unseen alien race in 2010: Odyssey Two (1982). Instead they come face to face with the "transcended" Dave Bowman who warns them to attempt no further contact, and to leave the Jovian moon Europa alone. The alien intelligence has decided to help Europa's primitive, ice-bound life-forms evolve into a sentient species by transforming the gas giant Jupiter into a new, life-giving sun. In 2061: Odyssey Three (1987), Floyd must once again confront Dave Bowman, a newly reborn and independent HAL, and the limitless power of the alien race in order to rescue

his son and the other members of a probe to Halley's Comet. The alien intelligence has decided that mankind will play a role in the evolution of the galaxy--whether it wants to or not, and gives Heywood Floyd little choice in the matter. In 3001: The Final Odyssey (1997), one thousand years after the failed Jupiter mission, Frank Poole is resurrected from the dead into a world quite different from the one he left behind, and asked to play a key role in bridging the gap between the alien race and mankind.

With his masterpiece, 2001: A Space Odyssey, and its three sequels, Clarke magnified his beliefs about the metaphysical, even mystical, nature of the universe, and introduced audiences to his most unique extraterrestrial, the monolith and the unseen alien intelligence behind it. Over the years, many fans of the movie have turned to Clarke's novel for answers, but the novel was never thought to be the final authority on the film. 2001: A Space Odyssey was, in fact, based upon an earlier version of the screenplay that he and Stanley Kubrick co-wrote. But Kubrick made so many changes to the film after the novel was completed that there are passages within the novel that do not take place in the movie at all. Similarly, there are elements of the film that are not found in the book. For instance, the spaceship Discovery travels to Saturn and its moon Japetus in the book, while nearly everyone who's seen the film remembers the mission was to Jupiter. In the novel, HAL-9000 flushes all of the oxygen into space, by opening the airlock doors, in an attempt to kill Bowman who is still aboard the Discovery. In the film, Dave Bowman is lured into outer space, then HAL refuses to open the pod bay doors to let him back into the ship. Bowman's subsequent journey beyond the infinite is explained by Clarke in very concrete, rational terms, while the film takes a more symbolic approach. The novel (and its three sequels) represents some of Arthur Clarke's

best work as a science fiction author, but the best way to discover the subtleties, symbols, and concepts of the movie are found in the screen story itself and how the screen story evolved from his collaboration with Stanley Kubrick.

How the Solar System Was Won

On April 22, 1964, Arthur C. Clarke met Stanley Kubrick for the first time at a restaurant in Manhattan. Clarke, a native of Great Britain who was then living in Sri Lanka, had heard all of the stories about how difficult Kubrick was. Kubrick was the highly acclaimed producer-director of “Paths of Glory” (1957), “Spartacus” (1960), “Lolita” (1962), and “Dr. Strangelove” (1964), but his reputation as a self-absorbed perfectionist who expected perfection from everyone around him had unfairly labeled him as a difficult man. Clarke agreed to take the meeting with the “enfant terrible” because he had so much admired Clarke’s “The Sentinel.” Of course, when he finally met Kubrick at Trader Vic’s in New York City, Clarke was immediately put to rest by Stanley’s exuberant optimism and superior intelligence. The two discussed the possibility of collaborating on an original novel first from which the screenplay would derive. Clarke thought it was an unusual approach, but then their collaboration was also most unusual—never before had an acclaimed producer-director agreed to collaborate on a science fiction novel with an established and well-renowned author. Arthur Clarke quickly agreed, and within a few weeks the two men were at work on “How the Solar System Was Won.”

The title “How the Solar System Was Won” was never taken seriously by either Clarke or Kubrick, but it was just the right hook they needed to interest potential financial investors and studio bosses. M-G-M’s very popular hit “How the West Was Won”

(1962) was still playing to sold-out crowds nearly two years after its initial release, and it was more than the gimmick of Cinerama that kept audiences in their seats. Clarke and Kubrick wanted to do for the science fiction film what “How the West Was Won” had done for the Western, and structured their epic story as a series of interconnected vignettes in much the same way that screenwriters James R. Webb and John Gay had structured their epic Western. In fact, on May 28, 1964, Kubrick purchased the rights to five other stories Clarke had written (in addition to “The Sentinel”), and structured the novel, which would eventually become the screen play, as a series of six adventures or vignettes. Clarke’s stories included “Before Eden,” “Breaking Strain,” “Out of the Cradle,” “Into the Comet,” “Endlessly Orbiting,” “Who’s There?” and, of course, “The Sentinel.” From those stories would come eventually the five-part structure—from the “Dawn of Man” to “Beyond the Infinite”—that comprises the film “2001: A Space Odyssey” that we know today. But it would take almost four years and many long and arduous writing sessions to become a reality.

Throughout much of 1964, Arthur Clarke and Stanley Kubrick continued brainstorming their ideas for “How the Solar System Was Won,” and Clarke wrote multiple drafts of the novel and screenplay in his room at New York’s Hotel Chelsea, while Kubrick dictated his notes into a tape recorder. The two often worked eight-hour days, six days a week in order to write, revise, and re-write major sections of the work. For instance, in early drafts of the novel (and later screenplay), the HAL-9000 computer was actually feminine in gender, named Athena after the goddess of knowledge who had emerged fully formed from the forehead of Zeus. They would eventually drop that notion in favor of a masculine identity for the super computer, who was first christened

Socrates, then later changed simply to Hal. While fans of the film have, for many years, assigned cosmic significance to the fact that the letters in the name HAL are just letters once removed from the logo IBM, Clarke and Kubrick have stated that this is purely coincidental. Arthur Clarke later explained that HAL's name is an acronym formed by combining the first letters of two learning systems, **h**euristic and **a**lgorithmic. Ironically, a "female" computer would become a mainstay on the television series "Star Trek," which was in production at the same time on the Paramount lot and would debut two years earlier in 1966.

By the end of the year, Clarke and Kubrick had produced enough of a manuscript to interest the studio executives at M-G-M, but their sale to a major studio was not a foregone conclusion. During the late fifties and early sixties, many of the movie studios were forced to take enormous gambles with their productions, including spending lots of money on experimental formats like Cinerama and Todd-AO 70 in order to compete against the popularity of television. Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer had already gambled and won with hits like "Ben-Hur" (1959), "How the West Was Won," and "Dr. Zhivago" (1965), but for every success, there were dozens of costly failures like "Cleopatra" (1963) and "Fall of the Roman Empire" (1964). And at the time science fiction films were considered "kiddie faire." M-G-M's last major gamble on a big-budget science fiction film had been "Forbidden Planet," ten years earlier. Nonetheless, Kubrick relied on the success of his previous film "Dr. Strangelove" to pressure Robert O'Brien, the chief studio executive, to grant him unprecedented control (including final cut) over the costly venture, and O'Brien finally agreed. In February of 1965, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer announced that it would finance Stanley Kubrick's "Journey Beyond the Stars," with a

budget of \$6 million and a production schedule of two years. (The film would actually cost \$10.5 million and would take three years to make.) Two months later, in April of 1965, Kubrick renamed the film “2001: A Space Odyssey,” and began production on his epic science fiction film.

Stanley Kubrick shot the film on ten huge sound stages at Shepperton Studios in Boreham Wood, England, including all of the “exterior” shots for the “Dawn of Man” sequence, with a 106-man production unit. With some plot details still not completely resolved, Kubrick began actual shooting on December 29, 1965, on Shepperton’s Stage H, at the time the second largest soundstage in Europe, with Dr. Floyd’s visit to the TMA-1 excavation site. Originally, Kubrick and Clarke had envisioned the monolith as a black tetrahedron, just as it appears in “The Sentinel,” but the alien object just didn’t look right on camera, so Con Pederson and other members of special effects team had to come up with something else. They eventually settled on the shape of the monolith, and built five altogether from black lucite, including the twelve-foot-long model that appears in the first scene filmed from the movie.

On the recommendation of Arthur C. Clarke, Kubrick hired two scientific and technical consultants, Frederick Ordway and Harry Lange. Ordway was a Harvard-educated research scientist, and Lange was a consultant to the aerospace industry and NASA. Both helped in developing the advanced concepts for space vehicles that were used in the film, and both assisted as technical advisors on various sequences in the production of the film. Ordway also convinced dozens of corporations, including IBM, Honeywell, Boeing, General Dynamics, Grumman, Bell Telephone, and General Electric, to participate in the production by loaning hardware prototypes and documentation in

exchange for “product placements” in the completed film; in fact, this was one of the first instances of product placement that have actually become so commonplace in our motion pictures today. Many of the companies believed that the film would serve as a big-screen advertisement and endorsement for their forward-thinking technology. Unfortunately, not all of the companies benefited from this unique arrangement. When IBM discovered that the plot involved a computer that went berserk and murdered astronauts, business executives demanded that Kubrick remove any sign of their company from his sets. Pan American World Airways, which lent its name and logos to various spacecraft (including an early version of the space shuttle), ceased operations in 1991, a mere ten years before the real year 2001. The future, it seems, turned out to be quite different from the reality Kubrick and his team were creating at Boreham Wood.

The perfectionist Stanley Kubrick insisted that every detail of the production, even down to the most insignificant elements, was technologically and scientifically accurate. Production designers Tony Masters, Harry Lange, and Ernest Archer researched everything, from the space food that Dr. Floyd consumes on the Aries space shuttle and the function of the zero-g toilet to the rotation of the space station and the propulsion systems of Discovery. They washed and dried sand so that it would have the same color and texture of the lunar terrain. Special effects wizards Douglas Trumbull and Wally Veevers invented new ways to film a scene to suggest weightlessness, and when more space scenes were required, Kubrick hired the Vickers-Armstrong Engineering Group to build a thirty-eight-foot-diameter, ten-foot-wide rotating “ferris wheel” to simulate weightlessness in the interior of the Discovery’s command module. Stanley Kubrick’s desire for perfection paid off with the one and only Academy Award

the film would win for its special effects, and more importantly the undying admiration of audiences and critics who still, in this day of computer-generated images, find the cine-magic of “2001: A Space Odyssey” more convincing than many later science fiction movies.

In December of 1967, Stanley Kubrick hired composer Alex North to write the music for the film. Kubrick had already cobbled together a rough cut of “2001: A Space Odyssey,” relying on several temporary tracks of music to give the movie a sense of pace and rhythm. Of those temporary tracks, Kubrick had selected Richard Strauss’s “Thus Spake Zarathustra” for the opening sequence and Johann Strauss’s “Blue Danube” waltz for the sequence that finds Dr. Floyd traveling to the space station and, ultimately, the moon base at Clavius. Other tracks included Khachaturian’s “Gayne Ballet Suite” and Gyorgy Ligeti’s “Requiem,” “Lux Aeterna,” and “Atmospheres.” Kubrick said that he might retain some of the temporary tracks for the final cut; in particular, he liked how the Richard Strauss theme, taken from a quote from Nietzsche about ape, man, and superman, complemented the theme of his movie. North disagreed with Kubrick, offered to provide him with an alternative theme, and began working on the score in January 1968. In all, Alex North composed and recorded nearly an hour of original music, but Kubrick was not impressed with his compositions, and dismissed him a month later, choosing instead the temporary tracks he had originally selected.

Arthur C. Clarke experienced similar problems with Kubrick. After many long and arduous writing sessions with the producer-director, Clarke was abandoned to keep working on his own while Kubrick left to begin preproduction in England. Clarke completed his first draft of the novel in April of 1966, and sought Kubrick’s approval so

that they could publish the novel prior to the release of the film (as they had always agreed from the beginning). But Stanley Kubrick kept making changes to the screenplay, which in turn meant that Clarke had to keep making modifications to the novel. This went back and forth for more than a year, and upset Clarke greatly, especially in light of the fact that Delacorte Printing had advertised the book for sale and had already set the book in type. Kubrick as the perfectionist that he was just simply couldn't settle on the version of the story that he liked best, and held up publication of Clarke's novel until July of 1968, three months after the release of the film. Ironically, the screen story was not all that different from Kubrick had approved two years earlier.

The Screen Story

Spanning thousands of years in human development and evolution, the film begins in prehistoric times when early man-apes first learn to use primitive tools (from an alien intelligence in the form of a ten-foot tall, geometrically perfect, black monolith). Initially, the first tool is employed by Moon-Watcher (Daniel Richter) to secure food for his small family unit; later, when the ape discovers that the tool can also be used as a weapon, Moon-Watcher and members of his tribe seize a small watering hole from a rival group of man-apes. The subsequent leap to the year 2001, in the form of a brilliant jump cut that transforms the tool into a space-based weapon, suggests that man himself is still primitive but using far more sophisticated tools as weapons. Orbiting satellites, with thousands of nuclear warheads, now circle the planet, forming a strange ring of death, and man, only marginally evolved beyond the man-ape, still competes with his fellow man for earth's limited resources.

When another monolith is disinterred on the moon, 200 miles from the human settlement Clavius, Heywood Floyd (William Sylvester) is called from Earth to investigate TMA-1 (Tyco Magnetic Anomaly-1) in the crater Tyco. He quickly realizes that this strange monolith is no natural formation, but rather an ancient sentinel, deliberately buried by an alien intelligence millions of years before as a kind of calling card. Floyd's closer inspection of the monolith seemingly triggers a series of electronic shrieks, aimed at the planet Jupiter; in reality, the monolith has been designed, like a burglar alarm, to alert its alien creators of mankind's first feeble steps to the stars. After three million years of dark silence, buried in the lunar surface, the sentinel greets its first dawn with an ancient, preprogrammed response. The strange signals prompt Floyd and his fellow American scientists to launch an epic journey of discovery and exploration to the Jovian system (and beyond).

A team of astronauts, including David Bowman and Frank Poole (Keir Dullea and Gary Lockwood), and a super-computer named HAL-9000 (the voice of Douglas Rain) travel aboard Discovery One on a two-year journey to the planet Jupiter. News of the lunar discovery have been censored; details of the mission classified, and three of the crew members have been melodramatically placed aboard already in a state of hibernation. HAL's suspicions about the true nature of the mission cause him to become anxious, fearful, and neurotic. When he misdiagnoses the failure of the AE-35 radio-antennae unit, Bowman and Poole agree to disconnect him, but he is one step ahead of them. To protect himself (and save the mission), he must destroy the human members of the crew. HAL, which embodies all of mankind's fears and anxieties, cold-bloodedly murders Whitehead, Hunter, and Kaminski, the three astronauts in hibernation; kills

Poole (while he is outside the ship), and strands Bowman in the cold darkness of space. Dave Bowman ingeniously outwits the murderous super-computer and disconnects him from the main operating systems of the ship.

When the Discovery finally reaches the Jovian system, Bowman leaves the ship in a space pod, essentially led by the mysterious force that the monolith represents, and travels through the star-gate. Bowman's odyssey takes him beyond the infinite, racing down a seemingly endless tunnel of light. On the final leg of the astronaut's journey, played out against the banal backdrop of a Louis XVI suite, man's next evolutionary step is brought about by the same unseen forces first encountered by the primitive man-apes. They transform Bowman into the fetus of a superbeing, no longer requiring tools or technology to survive in the bleakness of space. He is then returned to earth as a "transcended man" and called upon to deal with the nuclear weapons in orbit. The implication is that man must discard his science and complex tools in order to reach the next stage in his evolution.

The Film's Release

"2001: A Space Odyssey" was finally released in April of 1968, accompanied by much fanfare and publicity. And yet, up until a few weeks before the release, Stanley Kubrick was still tinkering with the final cut of the film, unsure himself of the final product. At first, he thought about adding a narrative (he had written with Clarke) that would have helped to explain things: "The remorseless drought had lasted now for ten million years, and would not end for another million... In this dry and barren land, only the small or the swift or the fierce could flourish, or even hope to exist. The man-apes...were on the long, pathetic road to racial extinction..." But he eventually rejected

that idea, even though Ordway tried to convince him otherwise. Then he considered adding a series of ten-minute, black and white interviews that he had filmed of experts talking about the existence of extraterrestrial life to the beginning of the film, but he rejected that idea as well. Kubrick finally cut a number of scenes, including one in which Floyd purchased a bush baby for his daughter and another one that detailed the life of lunar colonists. All in all, he considered removing as much as nineteen minutes of footage, but settled instead for only a few minutes.

The press screenings on April 1 and 2 turned out to be disastrous, and he and his editor Ray Lovejoy prepared another cut for the official premiere in New York City on April 3, 1968. Despite an aggressive advertising campaign on behalf of Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer, promoting the film with taglines that included “the most technically complex movie ever made!” and “You’ve never seen anything like it,” film fell flat with most audience members. At the Los Angeles premiere on April 4, Rock Hudson reportedly burst out of the Pantages Theater, demanding, “Will someone tell me what the hell that was about all?” On April 5, Kubrick and Lovejoy trimmed several additional scenes, including footage from the “Dawn of Man” sequence and shots of Poole exercising in the command module of the Discovery, and turned in yet another cut on April 9. Stanley Kubrick claimed that he had always wanted to trim about nineteen minutes from the final running time, and was now satisfied with the final cut.

That final cut of “2001: A Space Odyssey” ran in theaters for more than a year, gaining cult status among the disenfranchised youth of America and the world. Members of the counterculture thought that Kubrick was speaking directly to them about their hopes and fears for the future, and legions of young hippies who had been protesting the

war in Vietnam and the totalitarian actions of local police officials “turned on, tuned in, and dropped out” with marijuana, LSD, and other drugs to the “psychedelic” Star Gate sequence at the movie’s end. M-G-M’s Cinerama spectacular, which was promoted like a prestige picture on the same level with “Ben-Hur” and “Dr. Zhivago,” had become the most expensive counterculture movie of all time. The “epic drama of adventure and exploration” became a must-see cult film for people under twenty-five who, in a day well before videocassettes and dvds, went to see the film over and over again. Eventually, other audiences, consisting mainly of intellectuals and science fiction readers, found the movie, and made it their own. They understand the film’s non-traditional plot structure, and embraced the way in which the images, sound, and music told a story with dialogue or resolution. Years before the advent of MTV, they understood that, as Marshall McLuan observed, “the medium was the message.”

Symbols and Metaphors

For over thirty years, Kubrick's masterpiece has been interpreted in many different ways from many different perspectives, but in all the myriad ways, the film defies interpretation. “2001: A Space Odyssey” represents the ultimate Rorschach test, replete with psychedelic colors, impossible patterns, and stunning visuals--all of which challenge conventional cinematic explication. However, certain images do tend to emerge from all inkblot designs that are clearer and more transparent than others, and that is decidedly true with “2001.” Reaction to its Rorschach-like images is usually divided along basic intelligence lines. Some viewers clearly make the association between symbol and theme; others simply do not. Perhaps the reason why the film's harshest critics failed to grasp its transcendent nature and, in turn, labeled it "incomprehensible"

was that they did not have the intellectual and emotional make-up to appreciate the sublime. By looking closely at some of the film's most profound images, certain common truths become readily clear and transparent.

The Monolith - The monolith appears in four of the five key segments of the film. At first, the ten-foot tall, geometrically perfect (with a ratio of 1 to 4 to 9), black monolith appears as a teaching device which helps man-apes survive extinction four million years ago. Then, like some cosmic herald, TMA-1 announces to the universe that a new race of intelligent beings (mankind) have left their cradle and taken to the stars. Next, a two-thousand-foot tall monolith, orbiting the planet Jupiter, opens the star gate and sends Dave Bowman to a new birthplace. And finally, the monolith aids in the transformation of man and returns him as a star-child to Earth. The monolith is clearly a highly sophisticated tool, capable of many functions beyond the knowledge of Earth science; it was created by an alien intelligence, which prefers to remain unseen, and its builders undoubtedly scattered millions of them throughout the galaxy as sentinels to watch over (and later help) the development of younger, primitive races. The monolith is distinctly missing from the film's middle segment. In that segment, mankind has replaced the monolith with its own highly sophisticated yet flawed HAL-9000. Only after HAL's destruction does the monolith reappear. The implication is that no matter how objective and well-intentioned man's attempts to use science to create artificial life may be—a theme first suggested by Mary Shelley in her novel Frankenstein—he still tends to produce a monster.

HAL-9000 - HAL's nervous breakdown forms the basis of the central conflict between man and his ill-conceived technology (which threatens to destroy him) in the

film's middle segment, and overshadows the other two segments as well. In "2001: A Space Odyssey," there are not one but two Frankenstein stories at work. Clarke seems to suggest that these unseen, alien intelligences (made corporeal in monolithic form) are also mad doctors tinkering with the natural order. By singling man out from the other animals and bestowing upon him the knowledge of tools, they create a monster. Their actions are like some extraterrestrial Prometheus. For in return, man perverts that knowledge into dangerous weapons which ultimately threaten his very existence (both on Earth and on board the Discovery One spaceship). When he eventually triumphs over his technology (in his brilliant struggle with HAL), man is welcomed into their cosmic brotherhood, like some lost child (or creation).

The Star-Gate - In the next to the last segment of the film, Dave Bowman leaves the wreck of Discovery One in orbit around Jupiter, and travels in a space pod through the star-gate. His final transmission to Earth records the exclamation: "My God! It's full of stars!" While Clarke's novel offers a detailed, somewhat concrete explanation of "hyperspace" and methods of faster-than-light travel, the film takes a more lyrical, even psychedelic approach to illustrate Bowman's journey beyond the infinite. Dazzling images of color and light race by at impossible speeds as the space pod hurtles down a seemingly endless corridor to the other side of the universe. Bowman's mind can't begin to comprehend the vast distances of time and space, and he gradually becomes unglued. As his odyssey nears its conclusion, he begins to recognize familiar landscapes, mountain ranges, and canyons, but they are painted in a cacophony of mind-blowing colors which are far beyond his experience or visual perception. Finally, his spacecraft comes to a halt. The star-gate is obviously an entry point into a highly-complex, extraterrestrial

commuter system which allows nearly instantaneous travel from one part of the universe to another.

Louis XVI Suite - Near the end of the film, Dave Bowman concludes his cosmic trip beyond the infinite in what looks like a hotel suite lushly decorated in the period of Louis XVI (thus reminiscent of the era of Mary Shelley and her creation Frankenstein). The suite is little more than a facade, however; the surroundings may be familiar to him and his psyche, but he is clearly a specimen of mankind in some great cosmic zoo. As Bowman steps from his space pod, he hears strange gibberish echoing from somewhere, but the source is unknown to him. The echoing voices and sounds in the suite suggest that Bowman is passing his life in some sort of laboratory, and the strange voices are the voices of the aliens themselves as they study his every move with intense scrutiny. These alien intelligences have observed man for millions of years. Their controlled experiment is about to move to the next level . . .

Star-Child – “2001: A Space Odyssey” climaxes with the birth of the star-child. The unseen alien intelligence transforms Dave Bowman into the fetus of a superbeing, which is mankind's final destiny and the grand result of the alien's four million-year-old plan. The star-child is as far removed from 21st century man as mankind is removed from its primitive man-ape ancestors. However, what was once Dave Bowman is still a baby, and must learn to temper his untested powers. He no longer needs to rely on the crude tools of the man-apes or the highly sophisticated yet flawed HAL-9000 of man. In fact, when he is returned to earth as the star-child, he feels compelled to deal with the nuclear weapons in orbit. The implication is that man will evolve to a point beyond physical form and the need to rely on technology to survive in the bleakness of space. He

will no longer be encumbered by crude tools or weapons; he will no longer rely on science or the laws of physics, but will instead take his place as a luminous being that is part of Eternity.

Final Thoughts

Like "The Sentinel" and Childhood's End, the novel and the film of "2001: A Space Odyssey" postulates a future in which mankind, with the help of unseen alien intelligences, not only journeys to the stars but becomes part of a much greater, metaphysical whole. According to Clarke, science and technology are merely tools, and should not be elevated or deified. The real triumph of creation--whether it is revealed in primitive man-ape, contemporary man, or star-child--is the soaring human spirit as it connects with the transcendent universe, and "2001" celebrates that triumph as it rescues mankind from extinction and takes him to the stars and beyond the infinite.

When "2001" was first released in 1968, science fiction films were represented by a few clever efforts, like Fox's "Planet of the Apes" or AIP'S "Wild in the Streets." But mostly they were low budget quickies like "The Green Slime," "Mission Mars," and "Night of the Living Dead." Few audience members had ever been exposed to a truly literate work of science fiction, and most found the film difficult, according to Kubrick, to confront "the grandeur of space and the myriad mysteries of cosmic intelligence anathema." Today, audiences have come to regard "2001: A Space Odyssey" as a masterpiece of cinematic science fiction, not only for its technical achievements in special effects and its breakthrough in narrative filmmaking but also for its hopeful, highly metaphysical, and possibly prophetic vision of man.

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