



## Space Odyssey: Stanley Kubrick, Arthur C. Clarke, and the Making of a Masterpiece

*Michael Benson*

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**Space Odyssey: Stanley Kubrick, Arthur C. Clarke, and the Making of a Masterpiece** Michael Benson  
Celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the film's release, this is the definitive story of the making of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, acclaimed today as one of the greatest films ever made, including the inside account of how director Stanley Kubrick and writer Arthur C. Clarke created this cinematic masterpiece.

Regarded as a masterpiece today, *2001: A Space Odyssey* received mixed reviews on its 1968 release. Despite the success of *Dr. Strangelove*, director Stanley Kubrick wasn't yet recognized as a great filmmaker, and *2001* was radically innovative, with little dialogue and no strong central character. Although some leading critics slammed the film as incomprehensible and self-indulgent, the public lined up to see it. *2001*'s resounding commercial success launched the genre of big-budget science fiction spectacles. Such directors as George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, Ridley Scott, and James Cameron have acknowledged its profound influence.

Author Michael Benson explains how *2001* was made, telling the story primarily through the two people most responsible for the film, Kubrick and science fiction legend Arthur C. Clarke. Benson interviewed Clarke many times, and has also spoken at length with Kubrick's widow, Christiane; with visual effects supervisor Doug Trumbull; with Dan Richter, who played *2001*'s leading man-ape; and many others.

A colorful nonfiction narrative packed with memorable characters and remarkable incidents, *Space Odyssey* provides a 360-degree view of this extraordinary work, tracking the film from Kubrick and Clarke's first meeting in New York in 1964 through its UK production from 1965-1968, during which some of the most complex sets ever made were merged with visual effects so innovative that they scarcely seem dated today. A concluding chapter examines the film's legacy as it grew into its current justifiably exalted status.

## Space Odyssey: Stanley Kubrick, Arthur C. Clarke, and the Making of a Masterpiece Details

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## **of a Masterpiece Michael Benson**

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## **From Reader Review Space Odyssey: Stanley Kubrick, Arthur C. Clarke, and the Making of a Masterpiece for online ebook**

### **Andrew says**

Fantastic story of the making of 2001. But more than just a behind the scenes story, this book explores the cultural influence if the movie on art, science and philosophy. I saw 2001 in the movie theater and it blew me away. But there was so much I didn't know about Arthur C. Clarke and Kubrick and how the movie came to be that I was blown away again. Read it!

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### **R. says**

Compulsively readable and filled with both technical detail and human interest, the book conveys something of a paradox. So much of the film turns out to have been profoundly collaborative and at times surprisingly random, and yet the portrait of Kubrick at the helm shepherding this impossible thing through to completion is that of an indispensable individual. In Danny Boyle's film about Steve Jobs, Wozniak complains, "Someone else designed the box. So how come 10 times a day, I read 'Steve Jobs is a genius'? What do \*you\* do?" To which Jobs replies, "I play the orchestra." And that seems exactly right about Kubrick as well.

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### **Erik Olsen says**

Younger people have little idea how impactful the film 2001: A Space Odyssey was when it first came out. It inspired a whole generation of filmmakers, including major names like Steven Spielberg, George Lucas and James Cameron. The film is visually sumptuous, employing cutting edge special effects, many of which were pioneered by Stanley Kubrick and his team. This book is a wonderful romp through the making of the epic, revolutionary film. It provides so much wonderful detail about Kubrick's obsessiveness, his attention to factual detail and his often-times tyrannical style of directing. I loved every second of it, and went back right after finishing it to watch the film again. Doing so right after reading the book opened my eyes to many details I had missed the first (and second and third) time around watching it. I confess I even learned a lot more about the plot, which was very confusing to me at times. It's an excellent summer read.

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### **Ian Casey says**

On its 50th anniversary, is there anything remaining to be said about 2001: A Space Odyssey, being as it is one of the acknowledged greatest films ever? Well, apparently there's at least a little.

Michael Benson's book may not be quite the final word on the subject (and his conclusion suggests another particularly comprehensive book from fellow enthusiast and collaborator Dave Larson may be forthcoming), but it is a worthy synthesis of the many diverse existing sources, combined with his own original research and interviews with such important figures as Arthur C. Clarke and Christiane Kubrick.

It eschews excruciating detail in any single aspect but as overviews go, it could scarcely be beaten. This is not to say it lacks depth in its own peculiar way. In fact the lively, anecdote-laden and almost conversational style of prose, sensibly divided in roughly chronological order, in its totality provides a convincing mosaic picture of Kubrick the man and the director, the conceptual evolution of 2001, and of the respectful and fruitful yet tempestuous relationship between Kubrick and Clarke which perhaps only such an approach could have conveyed.

If nothing else, the numerous bizarre anecdotal moments are entertaining in themselves and serve both to humanise the individuals and give the essence of the distinctive time period. There's the testy pre-production dinner with Carl Sagan. 'Moonwatcher' Dan Richter struggling with his legally-regulated drug addiction. Doug Trumbull claiming homosexuality to dodge the Vietnam draft.

The thunderous reaction to England's World Cup win disturbing a long-exposure special effects shot of a miniature. The reluctantly hired gun composer collapsing from exhaustion and being wheeled into the music studio on a gurney to present his music to a director who had no intention of using it. The tea boy Andrew Birkin who took an opportunity to shine and ended up on a ludicrous escapade stealing protected trees in Africa to transport to a shooting location.

You get the picture, and, thanks to Benson, you will also 'get' the picture of 2001 in a way that you never quite have before. I highly recommend it to anyone with an interest in film, in sci-fi, in special effects, in the late 1960s era, or any of a litany of loosely connected subjects.

p.s. The gorgeously shiny first-edition hardcover is a work of art in its own right. Do get your hands on a copy if you're able.

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### **Robin Bonne says**

I loved 2001: A Space Odyssey and enjoyed learning more about the creation of the film and book.

Thanks to NetGalley and the publisher for a free copy of this ebook.

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### **James says**

When's the last time you finished a book and said, *This is one of the best books I've ever read?* This is one of them: one of the best books about artistic creation ever written and I'm including *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in that list. In 450 pages, there's not a single extraneous sentence and I've never read anything that suggests Kubrick's method and character in as balanced and believable a fashion. He's always portrayed as the Obsessed Maniac or the Reclusive Genius or the Big Jerk--but here, he's an incredibly intelligent person struggling to articulate an idea. Benson is great on everything: Kubrick and Clarke's relationship, special effects, the story, the release, the impact--there's not a single aspect that Benson has overlooked. I learned so much from this--and I'm a *2001* know-it-all. If you love *2001*, buy this book and begin reading it immediately. I wish Congress could compel Benson to write another one on any other of Kubrick's films. I know I'm being hyperbolic, but the book is that good.

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## Leah says

### Caution: Geniuses at Work

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the release of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the masterpiece science fiction film that grew out of a collaboration between two creative geniuses, Arthur C Clarke and Stanley Kubrick. In this book, Michael Benson tells the story of that collaboration, and of the making of the film, its release and its impact at the time and since.

A couple of years ago, I had the amazing experience of reading Clarke's book and then immediately watching Kubrick's film, and discovering how wonderfully they enhance each other. Until then, I hadn't realised they arose out of a joint venture – I had assumed Clarke had written the book first and then Kubrick had decided to turn it into a film. Benson starts by telling the story of how Kubrick wanted to make the first "really good" science fiction movie and, as research, immersed himself in the SF literature of the day, including reading Clarke's *Childhood's End*. This led him to approach Clarke with a view to them working together. At that stage, the plan was to make a kind of future history of man's experiences in space. Throughout his book, Benson shows how this initial plan grew and altered stage by stage until it became the book and film that were ultimately released, and gives a fascinating picture of two creative giants working together, mostly in harmony, each inspiring the other so that the end results were greater than either could have achieved alone.

Benson is clearly a huge admirer of the film and of both men, but he's not so starry-eyed as to be uncritical when it's deserved. Clarke was struggling financially as the project began, while Kubrick was riding high on the back of the success of his previous film, *Dr Strangelove*. This meant Kubrick had disproportionate power in the making of the deal between them, and he wasn't hesitant in making sure the lion's share of all profits and credit would come his way. He also retained control over every aspect, including when Clarke would be allowed to release the book. Since the making of the film fell years behind schedule, this caused Clarke considerable financial woe. But Benson also shows that the two men managed to survive this kind of friction without it dimming their appreciation of each other's genius. Benson's book is a warm-hearted portrayal of both men and it seems to me he tries hard, and succeeds, in giving due credit to both.

The book is an excellently balanced mix of the technical geekery of film-making with the human creativity behind it. Not just Clarke and Kubrick, but all of the major members of the crew come to life, as Benson illustrates their personalities with well-timed and well-told anecdotes about life on the set. The quality of Benson's writing is first-rate, and I loved that he would break up the more technical side of the story by introducing "voices" for some of the people to whom he introduces us. For example, when a young lad looking for his first break in movie-making goes off to meet Kubrick, Benson tells the story in a kind of Holden Caulfield voice, while the filming of the scene of Kubrick's little daughter talking to her on-screen daddy is told charmingly, as if from her six-year-old perspective.

Clarke fades a little from the story once his book is more or less written, although the two men continued to consult and communicate throughout the project. But once the filming gets underway, Benson concentrates more on Kubrick and his crew. He shows the innovative techniques they developed as they went along to create not only the special effects but an entire overarching style. Kubrick is shown as demanding, a perfectionist, always pushing a little further than his crew believed they could go until they discovered that they could go further after all. Although he had his faults – a willingness to risk his actors' and crew's safety in pursuit of his art, for example – the impression comes through strongly that the people around him admired, respected and even loved him. Benson gives generous praise to each of the other creatives who

contributed to the movie, detailing each innovative technique and who was involved in achieving it. As he describes it, it felt to me like an orchestra full of individually brilliant musicians, with Kubrick as the genius conductor melding their talents into a wonderfully harmonious whole.

In the final section, Benson describes the release of the movie, initially panned by all the middle-aged men (and occasionally women) in suits in movie world, from studio chiefs to movie critics. He explains how Kubrick watched audience reaction minute by minute to see what worked and what didn't, eventually cutting nineteen minutes from the original running time. But he and others also noticed that young people in the audience seemed to "get" it in a way that the movie professionals didn't at first. Despite the critics, audience figures gave an indication that word of mouth was making the movie a success. Gradually, even the original critics mostly came round, and admitted that on second and third viewing they "got" it too. The film's success was crowned with a raft of Oscar nominations, though in an extremely competitive year that included *Oliver!* and *The Lion in Winter* amongst others, eventually it took only one, rather fittingly for Best Special Visual Effects.

I haven't even touched on a lot of what is included in this comprehensive book, such as how Kubrick decided on the music for the film, or how the man-apes were conceived and created. The quality of the writing and research together with Benson's great storytelling ability make this not only informative but a real pleasure to read – as much a masterpiece of its kind as the original film and book are of theirs. Highly recommended.

NB This book was provided for review by the publisher, Simon & Schuster.

[www.fictionfanblog.wordpress.com](http://www.fictionfanblog.wordpress.com)

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### **Neil Coulter says**

Sometimes when I hear about a new book, I impulsively go to the public library's website and put a hold on it; I worry that otherwise, I might forget all about it in the midst of my endless and ever-growing to-read list (which I probably would; though my impulsiveness really wreaks havoc on any sense of logic in my reading list). As a big fan of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, then, when I heard about Michael Benson's new book about the making of the film, I was excited to find that it was already in the library's collection, and a copy was soon on its way to me.

The book itself is beautiful. It's a hefty tome for being about just one film, and the dustjacket is a classic shot from the film, stunningly printed on metallic red paper, with embossed title and author text. Very nicely done!

What's inside the book is fascinating. Benson limits his scope to only the time of making *2001*. There are very few flashbacks to earlier Kubrick projects, and only a bit at the end about the ongoing critical and audience reception of *2001*. I actually would have preferred more tangents back and forth through the lives of Kubrick and Clarke, but I respect Benson's control in this narrow focus.

The largest sections of the book are about the development of the project, and the production. Other phases of the film pass by a little bit quicker, but everything is well-documented, supported by willing assistance from Kubrick's widow, Christiane, and many of his close collaborators on the film. This won't be the last book about Kubrick or *2001*, but it's a very thorough and enjoyable one.

As I read, in addition to being fascinated at the behind-the-scenes technical details, I was also, of course, intrigued by Kubrick himself. In some ways--his perfectionism, his self-doubt, his intense desire for something better than simply "average," his constant hunger for mastery of knowledge--I feel a resonance and kinship with him. As a fellow bibliophile, I also felt his pain when he packed up "books precious to the director, including ones he'd had since childhood" for shipment to the UK for *2001*'s filming--and then, "Within a month or so, it became clear that all of Kubrick's most precious books had been lost in transit" (104-105).

In other ways, though, I found Kubrick difficult and frustrating. That's partly because of how Benson regards him throughout the book, too. Benson seems too often willing to overlook Kubrick's faults. Kubrick was, of course, a genius, but he was also occasionally cruel to his closest friends. "As Kubrick had predicted," Benson writes, "everything came out all right in the end" (435). I'm not satisfied with that ends-justifies-the-means flippancy. Sure, the film ended up being a masterpiece, and many of the people associated with Kubrick (and sometimes treated awfully by him) ended up doing very well because of their association with him. But surely we can still objectively say that Kubrick was sometimes completely wrong, and genius or not, it's inexcusable. (I'm not saying anything is *unforgiveable*, of course; but we're not led to believe that Kubrick apologized to those he'd hurt. Instead, it's often those people who took the initiative to go back to Kubrick and patch up broken friendships.)

It's sad, reading through this book, to see how vital and vibrant Kubrick and Clarke's working friendship was in the early stages of *2001*'s development, but then to watch Clarke gradually disappear into the background as Kubrick ensures his own sole ownership and claim to the film. Again, at the end it's Clarke who modifies his perspective to graciously accommodate Kubrick. I would have preferred to see Kubrick returning such gestures with genuine concern.

*Space Odyssey* includes a very few photos, but I would have loved to see many more. However, the book is a wonderful read for *2001* fans and film buffs. It's amazing to be granted such a window into the creative process of a masterpiece. Like any book about the film should, this one made me want to watch *2001* again immediately.

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## Ms.pegasus says

It may surprise many readers that *2001: A Space Odyssey* initially had a poor critical reception. During the premier, many attendees left at the intermission. Pauline Kael, Stanley Kauffmann and Andrew Sarris, eminent critics of the time, panned it. Author Michael Benson observes: "...*how 2001 was received largely depended on which side of this late-sixties generational divide the audience fell.*" (p.424) That conclusion is substantiated by Roger Ebert's glowing review written on April 12, 1968 (Ebert was 26 years old at the time). Ebert recognized that the pacing, ambiguity of narrative and minimal dialogue were all conscious choices by Kubrick in the service of a powerful and original artistic vision.

Kubrick was exceptionally secretive during production. This was not only due to the many technical innovations his team was pioneering. He weathered extreme pressure from studio executives chafing over the extensive production delays and cost overruns. Kubrick seemed to understand that his project, which was a constantly shifting work-in-progress from day one of shooting to the final edit was too innovative to brook interference. His instincts were validated by the result, although it required a final frenzied round of edits to get there.

Benson's book chronicles the making of the film from inception to release. It is extensively researched and accompanied by both a index and a list of major associates who helped Kubrick transform his vision into reality. Kubrick recruited both accomplished professionals and promising novices to his team. Kubrick's acumen was supplemented by serendipity. Mike Wilson was a close associate of Arthur C. Clarke. Partying in London, he was privy to bits of the project through Clarke. He mentioned to the beat poet John Esam that Kubrick was toying with the idea of consulting a mime. Esam suggested Dan Richter. Richter transformed the men-in-ape-suits ensemble into convincing australopithecines by studying the motions and expressions of primates at the zoo. Richter played the sentient ape Moonwatcher in the "Dawn" scene and choreographed the life-like gestures of the dancers who donned the extremely uncomfortable costumes and endured seemingly endless takes under the glare of hot lights.

The book opens with Kubrick and Clarke's collaboration and details their initial contract and financial arrangement. The original idea was deceptively simple. Clarke would pen a novel and Kubrick's film would be based on the novel. The novel would not be published until the film was completed. Alternative story lines were being considered and rejected well into production. One point on which they agreed was changing the space capsule's destination from Jupiter to Saturn. The science seemed right. Unfortunately, after months of work by the visual effects team, a convincing Saturn simply wasn't possible and Kubrick was forced to retreat to the original destination of Jupiter.

The achievement of particular special effects forms a major part of the book. Those sections will appeal to industry insiders and photography buffs. These technical innovations are explained with painstaking detail. Unfortunately, they were still beyond my comprehension. The parts of the narrative I enjoyed the most followed the process of transforming ideas expressed verbally into the language of film.

The amount of film that ended up on the cutting room floor was astonishing. In the "Dawn" scene Kubrick envisioned family groups of australopithecines including suckling babies. Baby chimps were obtained on loan and trained. Make-up was applied to their faces and they had to be trained not to lick the make-up off. Costumes were engineered with breasts filled with milk that the chimps could suckle. Suddenly, Kubrick had a new inspiration on the day of the shoot. He wanted to film the performers jumping around, which caused the milk to separate and then squirt out of the nipples. Filming stopped. The costumes had to be cleaned and reloaded with milk. The nursing chimps were finally filmed and then the whole scene was deemed extraneous and cut. (p.308) The amount of trial and error that went into making this film was yet another surprise to me.

This book is so dense with material that it is best viewed as a reference work. Read through it. Then, watch the movie again, preferably with someone who knows about film. This is probably the closest you will ever get to a "behind the scenes" look at how a movie gets made.

#### NOTES:

Here is Roger Ebert's review: <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/20...>

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#### Darcy says

I first saw 2001: A Space Odyssey when I was a youngster back in 1969. It was an incredible experience that had me rushing out to purchase the novel the next day. Since then I have lost track how many times I have seen the movie, how many articles about it I have read, or how many times I have seen programs talking

about it. Throw in Arthur C Clarke's book about the making of the movie and I felt pretty confident I knew pretty much all there was to know... Wrong! Michael Benson's book revealed that I had only scratched the surface. Detailing the process, the people, the problems and the passion that took to make this movie he succeeds in crafting a narrative that is compelling and engrossing.

The focus is on Stanley Kubrick and Clarke, but all of the other players get page time. We are led from the initial idea of, "a really good science fiction movie," through the arduous journey to get it on the screen, and ultimately to its reception and final acknowledgement as a classic. 2001 is a movie that still stands up today and after reading this marvelous book my appreciation for it has grown. If you have an interest in how the sausage is made and want to be entertained at the same time, this is the book for you.

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### **False says**

I had to rate this book "really liked" based solely on the amount of research the author put into this subject. At times, it felt like drudgery reading it, much like Keir Dullea endlessly going around Space Station 5's jogging track (which Kubrick later cut.) Nonetheless, it is amazing that between Arthur Clark and Stanley Kubrick, and some very kind, liberal executives at MGM, this movie got made. I kept waiting for the financial hatchet to come down and cannot imagine such an undertaking today when it's all about the bottom dollar, not art. You have to be a creative obsessive to make a work like this. For understanding that drive, most certainly read the book.

In the end, I am most fascinated by Arthur Clarke and his own passions, hiding away in then Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) with his boyfriends and projects. The final words of the book sum up his character quite nicely:

"Arthur C. Clarke died in Colombo on March 19, 2008, of respiratory complications leading to heart failure. He left explicit instructions that no religious rituals of any kind should be performed at his funeral, but a few hours after his death, a gamma ray burst of unprecedented scale reached Earth from a distant galaxy. More than two millions times brighter than the most luminous supernova ever recorded, its energy had taken seven and a half billion years to arrive at the solar system--about half the age of the observable universe. Having traveled through space and time since long before our planet formed, for about thirty seconds this vast cosmic explosion became the most distant object ever seen from Earth with the naked eye. It was the kind of salute even a lifelong atheist might have appreciated." Eat "that," Kubrick.

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### **Alexandre Melo says**

Que 2001 é um marco do cinema nem é preciso comentar, se esse filme não lhe parece nada demais então certamente há algo de muito errado em ti e sugiro que revise urgentemente sua condição humana.

No mais, o livro de Benson destrincha todo o processo de concepção, feitura e legado de 2001 de forma magistral, sem perder a mão e, longe de querer explicar o filme, lança uma luz esclarecedora sobre como era trabalhar com Kubrick, seu processo criativo, idiossincrasias, manias, defeitos, inquestionável genialidade e como, até hoje, o filme é uma referência e consegue não soar datado e totalmente profético.

Vale demais a leitura!

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### **Joseph F Cowan says**

#### **Amazing book.**

Having met Arthur C Clarke in the late 60's, not long after seeing 2001 for the umpteenth time, I looked forward to reading this book. What happened amazed me. The author presents events, discussing things the way they might have been, and then discussing the final scene or dialog. As each revelation unfolds I found myself recalling each scene vividly, intensely. It was like the film was playing as I read. The parsity of illustration was no bother, I remembered the film and my attendant awe. Great detail not previously annotated in other books. A wonderful history of a pivotal point in cinema.

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### **jaydro says**

I was hoping for the definitive book on the making of "2001," and while this was good and interesting, it was not that book. It reads more like a collection of memoir highlights from others involved, and while the research seems to have been exhaustive, various bits of information I had read in other books (which are listed as sources here) are left out, which makes one wonder if they were incorrect or just victims of editing. It is highly readable, though there were times when I felt disoriented by jumping months forward and backwards in an otherwise straight chronological telling of the story. There were also small things which were glossed over so much that you wonder if the author understood them or if it was done to make things easier for the reader (I'm thinking in particular of the background information on Cinerama, but there were a few other instances). I'm always troubled by this sort of thing because I then wonder where this may crop up in areas where I am not very knowledgeable.

So to summarize: I had really high expectations for this book, and they were not met; however, it is one of the best books on the subject I have ever read.

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### **Stephen Hughes says**

The best book on filmmaking and filmmakers I've ever read, and I've read quite a few.

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