

# Stanley Kubrick, filmmaker, 1928 - 1999

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On Monday, March 8, 1999, as the morning news reported the death of perhaps the greatest film director of all time, anybody who ever knew what the word "film" meant felt a little knot in their stomach. Stanley Kubrick had died in his sleep the night before of a heart attack in his London home.

Seeing a Kubrick film was more than an evening out, it was an experience. Kubrick did not know how to make a bad film. He could have made *Home Alone* a deep, dark introspection into the human soul if he had been forced to shoot the script. Of course, he had better taste. Kubrick was responsible for such films as *Spartacus*,

**"Each month Stanley Kubrick isn't making films is a loss to everybody."**

-Sidney Lumet

the 1962 *Lolita*, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *The Shining*, and *Full Metal Jacket*.

Stanley Kubrick was born on a Thursday, July 26, 1928 in the Lying-In Hospital in Manhattan, New York. Kubrick's father, Dr. Jacques L. Kubrick, M.D., was part of the third generation of an Austrian family who had immigrated to the U.S. on the Lusitania in 1899. Kubrick's childhood was fairly normal, although his attendance was considered poor during his early school years in the Bronx, and his behavior was found to be unacceptable in certain areas by his school. In 1940, when Kubrick was 13, his father sent him to spend a year of school on the West Coast. It was his first trip to Hollywood.

During high school, Kubrick began to immerse himself deeply into photography. He took pictures as a hobby, and also took pictures of school clubs and activities for his school newspaper. As a high school senior, Kubrick began free-lancing for *Look* magazine. He continued to work for *Look* after he graduated and married his high school sweetheart, Toba Metz.

Kubrick's first film, *Day of the Fight*, was made in 1951. It was a 16-minute long documentary about the Walter Cartier-Bobby James boxing match. Kubrick spent \$3,900 on production and sold the final film to RKO pictures for \$4,000. He took the \$100 profit and immediately secured an advance of \$1,500 for his next film. Kubrick continued to make short films, such as *Flying Padre* (1951) and *The Seafarers* (1953). His first

feature-length film, *Fear and Desire* was released in 1953, followed by 1955's *Killer's Kiss*.

Stanley Kubrick teamed up with James B. Harris and created Harris-Kubrick pictures to make the 1956 *The Killing*, an adaptation of the novel *Clean Break* by Lionel White. The film's budget was originally \$330,000, which was pretty low for 1956 in Hollywood, but was huge for two young men who had just started making movies. After *The Killing* was released, an article in *Time* magazine stated: "At twenty-seven, writer-director Stanley Kubrick, in his third full-length picture, has shown more audacity with dialogue and camera than Hollywood has seen since the obstreperous Orson Welles went riding out of town on an exhibitor's poll." Kubrick had begun to not only gain popularity and esteem among the critics, but was approaching the superhuman status of a Hollywood film director.

Kubrick and Harris stuck together for the 1957 release, *Paths of Glory*, which starred Kirk Douglas. Later came *Spartacus* in 1960, also starring Douglas, which won four Academy Awards. As *Spartacus* was being released, Kubrick's third wife, Christiane Kubrick gave birth to Stanley Kubrick's third daughter, Vivian Vanessa Kubrick, who would later organize the sound score for *Full Metal Jacket* under the pseudonym Abigail Mead.

Kirk Douglas had this to say about Kubrick after working with him on the set of *Spartacus*: "You don't have to be a nice person to be extremely talented. You can be a shit and be talented and, conversely, you can be the nicest guy in the world and not have any talent. Stanley Kubrick is a talented shit."

Next came the film adaptation of Vladimir Nabokov's novel, *Lolita*, the story of an older man's obsession with a young girl. The film, starring Shelly Winters, James Mason and Peter Sellers was originally given an "X" rating by the British Board of Film Censors and a "C" rating by the Catholic Church, meaning that any Catholic going to see this film would

be committing a sin.

Apparently the world was full of sinners in 1962, because *Lolita* gained much media attention and did quite well at the box office. Just as *Lolita* was being released, Kubrick and Harris went to work on their next film.

*Dr. Strangelove* starred Peter Sellers, Slim Pickens, and George C. Scott. A young James Earl Jones has a small role in it, as well. *Dr. Strangelove* was nominated for four Academy Awards, and it won the Writers Guild Award for best screen-

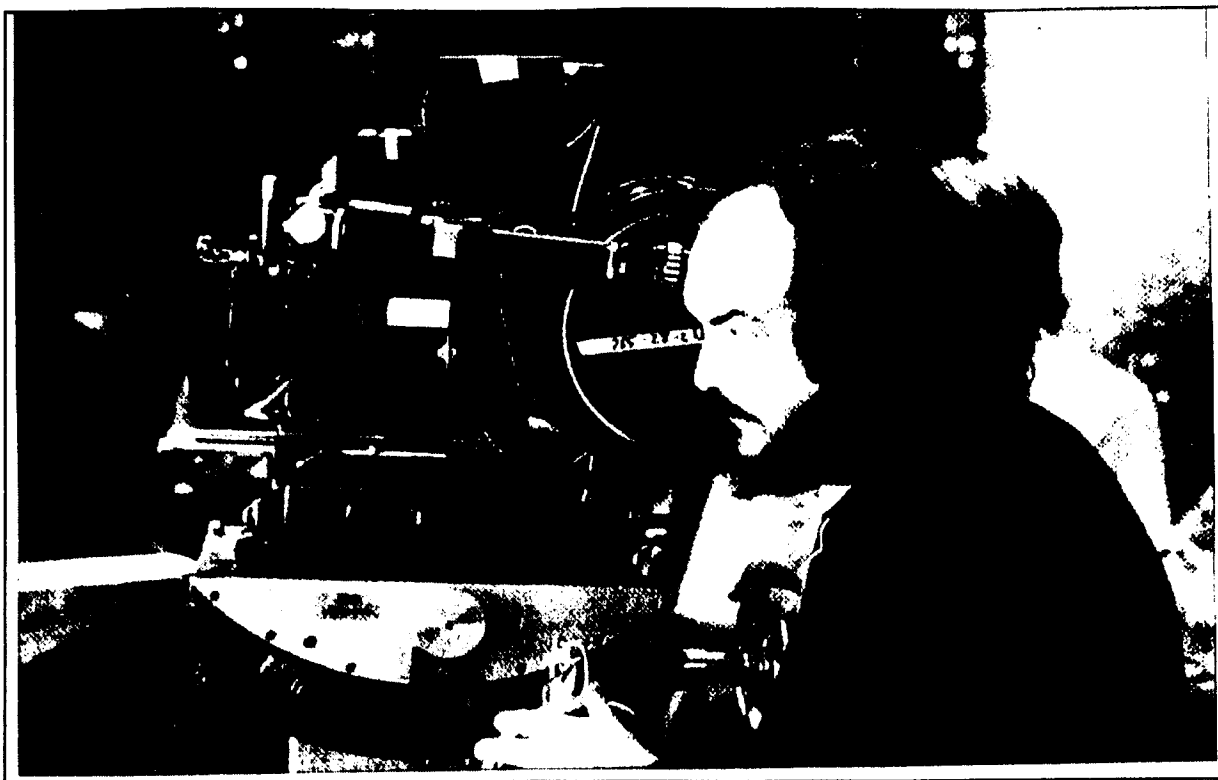
Every part of *2001* is famous. From the mysterious, black monolith to HAL's monotone voice to the chilling classical music score, everyone, whether they know it or not, has seen a reference to *2001* in some form of medium.

John Calley, Warner Brothers executive, sent a copy of Stephen King's *The Shining* in 1975. "That was the one and only thing sent to me which has ever interested me or which I ever liked." Shooting *The Shining* began in 1978. This was to be Stanley Kubrick's first movie to be shot with the Steadicam, a device that allowed the director to shoot such scenes as little Danny riding his big wheel and the chase through the maze at the end.

Seven years went by before Kubrick had an idea for another project. He considered making a film about war, but couldn't decide what novel to adapt. Finally he stumbled across a book called *The Short Timers*, by Gustav Hasford, a former Marine and military war correspon-

**"He'll be a fine director someday, if he falls flat on his face just once. It might teach him how to compromise."**

-Kirk Douglas



Stanley Kubrick lining up a shot on the set of *The Shining*.

They bought the rights to a novel called *Red Alert* by a former Royal Air Force navigator and British intelligence agent named Peter George. The rights were bought for \$3,500 and Kubrick began to work with George on a screenplay for a serious drama about the threat of nuclear war.

However, one night, as Harris and

play of 1964. Also, it gave Stanley Kubrick recognition as an international writer/director/producer.

For his next film, Kubrick wanted to make a science fiction feature. He was extremely interested in the writings of Arthur C. Clarke and decided to write him a letter, expressing the director's desire to make "a really

have to look hard to find a reason not to do."

Once again, Kubrick feared an "X" rating. In order to please the censors, he speeded up the orgy scene with Alex and two women. Even so, the censors awarded it an "X." Copycat crimes of "ultra-violence" began springing up in England. Kubrick reacted by pulling the film out of the theaters, thus making it illegal to be shown in Britain, where it remains so today.

Kubrick's next film was *Barry Lyndon*, based on the novel *The Luck of Barry Lyndon* by William Makepeace Thackeray. The film received less attention than his other films, but is worth mentioning because of the unique lighting techniques Kubrick used in it. Because the novel was based in 18th century Ireland, Kubrick felt that the only way to make a film about a period before electricity was to use candlelight. And so, lighting equipment made of wax and wicks was constructed. The lenses required for filming in such light were the fastest of their time, used only by NASA. John Alcott, the cinematographer for *Barry Lyndon*, won an Oscar in 1975 for his work on the film. Production designer Ken Adam, who also won an Academy Award for *Barry Lyndon*, had this to say of Kubrick: "He's the nearest thing to genius I've ever worked with, with all of the problems of a genius. He's like a human computer."

**"He's a kind of dyspeptic filmmaker, a Type A filmmaker, worrying and wanting to edit right up to the end. He's very painstaking, obviously. You know what? I think he wants to hurt people with this movie. I think he really wants to make a movie that will hurt people."** -Stephen King

Kubrick were working on the script, they began to joke around with the script. "We started to get silly," Harris remarked, "kidding around. 'What would happen in the War Room if everybody's hungry and they want the guy from the deli to come in and a waiter in an apron around him takes the sandwich order?' We started to giggle about it and say, 'Do you think this could be a comedy or a satire? Do you think this is funny?'" The seed for *Dr. Strangelove* or: *How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* was planted.

good sci-fi movie." Clarke agreed to work on the film with Kubrick, and met him in New York. Kubrick and Clarke toiled over the script for months until they had both decided that it was perfect. "We've extended the range of science fiction," an ecstatic Kubrick told Clarke.

The budget for the film was Kubrick's biggest ever, \$6 million. Kubrick decided that he would shoot the film in London and announced to the press that his next film, *2001: A Space Odyssey* would be produced in England.

dent who had served in Vietnam. Pre-production on *Full Metal Jacket* had begun.

Kubrick wanted absolute realism in his actors. He cast Lee Ermey, a former drill instructor, as the infamous Sergeant Hartman. Much of Hartman's insulting of the new recruits was contributed by Ermey himself.

Kubrick never let Ermey rehearse with the actors who played the recruits. He wanted their reactions to be genuine; he wanted them to show fear. *Full Metal Jacket* was completely shot on British land, with elaborate sets constructed to represent Da Nang and the Vietnamese jungle.

After *Full Metal Jacket* was released, people wondered when Stanley Kubrick's next film would come out. Five years went by, and then ten. And then rumors of a film called *Eyes Wide Shut* starring Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman began to surface. The sexual-obsession thriller began production in 1996 and, after 19 months of top secret shooting, is supposedly done.

People are wondering what kind of shape the film was left in by its creator. Warner spokeswoman Barbara Brogliatti assures us that the film had reached its final cut. Whether it is released on its scheduled date of July 16 remains to be seen. Regardless, if it was released twenty years from now only half finished, it would still be a timeless, priceless piece of art.

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