

2001_ A SPACE ODYSSEY

Written by

Vlad Nikolaev

Based on, If Any

Address
Phone Number

TITLE CARD:

"PART I

AFRICA

3,000,000 YEARS AGO"

VIEWS OF AFRICAN DRYLANDS - DROUGHT

The remorseless drought had lasted now for ten million years, and would not end for another million. The reign of the terrible lizards had long since passed, but here on the continent which would one day be known as Africa, the battle for survival had reached a new climax of ferocity, and the victor was not yet in sight. In this dry and barren land, only the small or the swift or the fierce could flourish, or even hope to exist.

1 INT./EXT. CAVES - MOONWATCHER

1

The man-apes of the field had none of these attributes, and they were on the long, pathetic road to racial extinction. About twenty of them occupied a group of caves overlooking a small, parched valley, divided by a sluggish, brown stream.

The tribe had always been hungry, and now it was starving. As the first dim glow of dawn creeps into the cave, Moonwatcher discovers that his father has died during the night. He did not know the Old One was his father, for such a relationship was beyond his understanding. but as he stands looking down at the emaciated body he feels something, something akin to sadness. Then he carries his dead father out of the cave, and leaves him for the hyenas.

Among his kind, Moonwatcher is almost a giant. He is nearly five feet high, and though badly undernourished, weighs over a hundred pounds. His hairy, muscular body is quite man-like, and his head is already nearer man than ape. The forehead is low, and there are great ridges over the eye-sockets, yet he unmistakably holds in his genes the promise of humanity. As he looks out now upon the hostile world, there is already something in his gaze beyond the grasp of any ape. In those dark, deep-set eyes is a dawning awareness-the first intimations of an intelligence which would not fulfill itself for another two million years.

2 EXT. THE STREAM - THE OTHERS

2

As the dawn sky brightens, Moonwatcher and his tribe reach the shallow stream.

The Others are already there. They were there on the other side every day - that did not make it any less annoying.

There are eighteen of them, and it is impossible to distinguish them from the members of Moonwatcher's own tribe. As they see him coming, the Others begin to angrily dance and shriek on their side of the stream, and his own people reply in kind.

The confrontation lasts a few minutes - then the display dies out as quickly as it has begun, and everyone drinks his fill of the

muddy water. Honor has been satisfied - each group has staked its claim to its own territory.

3 EXT. AFRICAN PLAIN - HERBIVORES

3

Moonwatcher and his companions search for berries, fruit and leaves, and fight off pangs of hunger, while all around them, competing with them for the same fodder, is a potential source of more food than they could ever hope to eat. Yet all the thousands of tons of meat roaming over the parched savanna and through the brush is not only beyond their reach; the idea of eating it is beyond their imagination. They are slowly starving to death in the midst of plenty.

4 EXT. PARCHED COUNTRYSIDE - THE LION

4

The tribe slowly wanders across the bare, flat countryside foraging for roots and occasional berries.

Eight of them are irregularly strung out on the open plain, about fifty feet apart.

The ground is flat for miles around.

Suddenly, Moonwatcher becomes aware of a lion, stalking them about 300 yards away.

Defenseless and with nowhere to hide, they scatter in all directions, but the lion brings one to the ground.

5 EXT. DEAD TREE - FINDS HONEY

5

It had not been a good day, though as Moonwatcher had no real remembrance of the past he could not compare one day with another.

But on the way back to the caves he finds a hive of bees in the stump of a dead tree, and so enjoys the finest delicacy his people could ever know. Of course, he also collects a good many stings, but he scarcely notices them. He is now as near to contentment as he is ever likely to be; for though he is still hungry, he is not actually weak with hunger. That was the most that any hominid could hope for.

6 INT./EXT. CAVES - NIGHT TERRORS

6

Over the valley, a full moon rises, and a cold wind blows down from the distant mountains. It would be very cold tonight - but cold, like hunger, was not a matter for any real concern; it was merely part of the background of life.

This Little Sun, that only shone at night and gave no warmth, was dangerous; there would be enemies abroad. Moonwatcher crawls out of the cave, clambers on to a large boulder besides the entrance, and squats there where he can survey the valley. If any hunting beast approached, he would have time to get back to the relative safety of the cave.

Of all the creatures who had ever lived on Earth, Moonwatcher's race was the first to raise their eyes with interest to the Moon, and though he could not remember it, when he was young, Moonwatcher would reach out and try to touch its ghostly face. Now he knew he would have to find a tree that was high enough.

He stirs when shrieks and screams echo up the slope from one of the lower caves, and he does not need to hear the occasional growl of the lion to know what is happening. Down there in the darkness, old One-Eye and his family are dying, and the thought that he might help in some way never crosses Moonwatcher's mind.

The harsh logic of survival rules out such fancies. Every cave is silent, lest it attract disaster.

And in the caves, in tortured spells of fitful dozing and fearful waiting, were gathered the nightmares of generations yet to come.

7 EXT. THE STREAM - INVASION

7

The Others are growing desperate; the forage on their side of the valley is almost exhausted. Perhaps they realize that Moonwatcher's tribe has lost three of its numbers during the night, for they choose this mourning to break the truce. When they meet at the river in the still, misty dawn, there is a deeper and more menacing note in their challenge. The noisy but usually harmless confrontation lasts only a few seconds before the invasion begins.

In an uncertainly-moving horde, the Others cross the river, shirking threats and hunched for the attack. They are led by a big-toothed hominid of Moonwatcher's own size and age.

Startled and frightened, the tribe retreats before the first advance, throwing nothing more substantial than imprecations at the invaders. Moonwatcher moves with them, his mind a mist of rage and confusion. To be driven from their own territory is a great badness, but to lose the river is death. He does not know what to do; it is a situation beyond his experience.

Then he becomes dimly aware that the Others are slowing down, and advancing with obvious reluctance. The further they move from their own side, the more uncertain and unhappy they become. Only Big-Tooth still retains any of his original drive, and he is rapidly being separated from his followers.

As he sees this, Moonwatcher's own morale immediately revives. He slows down his retreat, and begins to make reassuring noises to his companions. Novel sensations fill his dim mind - the first faint precursors of bravery and leadership.

Before he realizes it, he is face to face with Big-Tooth, and the two tribes come to a halt many paces away.

The disorganized and unscientific conflict could have ended quickly if either had used his fist as a club, but this innovation still lay hundreds of thousands of years in the future.

Instead, the slowly weakening fighters claw and scratch and try to bite each other.

Rolling over and over, they come to a patch of stony ground, and when they reach it Moonwatcher is on top. By chance, he chooses this moment to grab the hair on Big-Tooth's scalp, and bang his head on the ground. The resulting CRACK is so satisfactory, and produces such an immediate weakening in Big-Tooth's resistance, that he quickly repeats it.

Even when Big-Tooth ceases to move for some time, Moonwatcher keeps up the exhilarating game.

With shrieks of panic, the Others retreat back, across the stream.

The defenders cautiously pursue them as far as the water's edge.

8 EXT. CAVE - NEW SOUND

8

Dozing fitfully and weakened by his struggle, Moonwatcher is startled by a sound.

He sits up in the fetid darkness of the cave, straining his senses out into the night, and fear creeps slowly into his soul. Never in his life - already twice as long as most members of his species could expect - has he heard a sound like this. The great cats approached in silence, and the only thing that betrayed them was a rare slide of earth, or the occasional cracking of a twig. Yet this is a continuing crunching noise that grows steadily louder.

It seemed that some enormous beast was moving through the night, making no attempt at concealment, and ignoring all obstacles.

And then there came a sound which Moonwatcher could not possibly have identified, for it had never been heard before in the history of this planet.

9 EXT. CAVE - NEW ROCK

9

Moonwatcher comes face to face with the New Rock when he leads the tribe down to the river in the first light of morning. He had almost forgotten the terror of the night, because nothing had happened after that initial noise, so he does not even associate this strange thing with danger or with fear. There is nothing in the least alarming about it.

It is a cube about fifteen feet on a side, and it is made of some completely transparent material; indeed, it is not easy to see except when the light of the sun glints on its edges. There are no natural objects to which Moonwatcher can compare this apparition. Though he is wisely cautious of most new things, he does not hesitate to walk up to it. As nothing happens, he puts out his hand, and feels a warm, hard surface.

After several minutes of intense thought, he arrives at a brilliant explanation. It is a rock, of course, and it must have grown during the night. There are many plants that do this - white, pulpy things shaped like pebbles, that seem to shoot up in the hours of darkness. It is true that they are small and round, whereas this is large and square; but greater and later philosophers than Moonwatcher would be prepared to overlook equally striking exceptions to their laws.

This really superb piece of abstract thinking leads Moonwatcher to a deduction which he immediately puts to the test. The white, round pebble-plants are very tasty (though there were a few that made one violently sick); perhaps this square one...?

A few licks and attempted nibbles quickly disillusion him. There is no nourishment here; so like a sensible hominid, he continues on his way to the river and forgets all about the Cube.

10 EXT. CUBE - FIRST LESSON

10

They are still a hundred yards from the New Rock when the sound begins.

It is quite soft, and it stops them in their tracks, so that they stand paralyzed on the trail with their jaws hanging. A simple, maddeningly repetitious rhythm pulses out of the crystal cube and hypnotizes all who come within its spell. For the first time - and the last, for two million year - the sound of drumming is heard in Africa.

The throbbing grows louder, more insistent. Presently the hominids begin to move forward like sleep-walkers, towards the source of that magnetic sound. Sometimes they take little dancing steps, as their blood responds to the rhythms that their descendants will not create for ages yet.

Totally entranced, they gather around the Cube, forgetting the hardships of the day, the perils of the approaching dusk, and the hunger in their bellies.

Now, spinning wheels of light begin to merge, and the spokes fuse into luminous bars that slowly recede into the distance, rotating on their axes as they do; and the hominids watch, wide-eyed, mesmerized captives of the Crystal Cube.

Then by some magic - though it was no more magical than all that had gone on before - a perfectly normal scene appears. It is as if a cubical block had been carved out of the day and shifted into the night. Inside that block is a group of four hominids, who might have been members of Moonwatcher's own tribe, eating chunks of meat. The carcass of a wart-hog lies near them.

This little family of male and female and two children is gorged and replete, with sleek and glossy pelts - and this was a condition of life that Moonwatcher had never imagined. From time to time they stir lazily, as they loll at ease near the entrance of their cave, apparently at peace with the world. The spectacle of domestic bliss merges into a totally different scene.

The family is no longer reposing peacefully outside its cave; it is foraging, searching for food like any normal hominids.

A small wart-hog ambles past the group of browsing humanoids without giving them more than a glance, for they had never been the slightest danger to its species.

But that happy state of affairs is about to end. The big male suddenly bends down, picks up a heavy stone lying at his feet -

and hurls it upon the unfortunate pig. The stone descends upon its skull, making exactly the same noise that Moonwatcher had produced in his now almost forgotten encounter with Big-Tooth. And the result, too, is much the same - the warthog gives one amazed, indignant squeal, and collapses in a motionless heap.

Then the whole sequence begins again, but this time it unfolds itself with incredible slowness. Every detail of the movement can be followed; the stone arches leisurely through the air, the pig crumples up and sinks to the ground. There the scene freezes for long moments, the slayer standing motionless above the slain, the first of all weapons in his hand.

The scene suddenly fades out. The cube is no more than a glimmering outline in the darkness; the hominids stir, as if awakening from a dream, realize where they are, and scuttle back to their caves.

They have no conscious memory of what they had seen; but that night, as he sits brooding at the entrance of his lair, his ears attuned to the noises of the world around him, Moonwatcher feels the first faint twinges of a new and potent emotion - the urge to kill. He had taken his first step towards humanity.

11 EXT. CAVE AND PLAINS - UTOPIA

11

Babies were born and sometimes lived; feeble, toothless thirty-year-olds died; the lion took its toll in the night; the Others threatened daily across the river - and the tribe prospered. In the course of a single year, Moonwatcher and his companions had changed almost beyond recognition.

They had become as plump as the family in the Cave, who no longer haunted their dreams. They had learned their lessons well; now they could handle all the stone tools and weapons that the Cube had revealed to them.

They were no longer half-numbed with starvation, and they had time both for leisure and for the first rudiments of thought. Their new way of life was casually accepted, and they did not associate it in any way with the crystal cube still standing outside their cave.

But no Utopia is perfect, and this one had two blemishes. The first was the marauding lion, whose passion for hominids seemed to have grown even stronger now that they were better nourished. The second was the tribe across the river; for somehow the Others had survived, and had stubbornly refused to die of starvation.

12 EXT. CAVES - KILLING THE LION

12

With the partly devoured carcass of a warthog laid out on the ground at the point. he hope the boulder would impact, Moonwatcher and three of his bravest companions wait for two consecutive nights. On the third the lion comes, betraying his presences by a small pebble slide.

When they can here the lion below, softly tearing at the meat, they strain themselves against the massive boulder. The sound of the lion stops; he is listening. Again they silently heave against the enormous stone, exerting the final limits of their strength.

The rock begin to tip to a new balance point..

The lion twitches alert to this sound, but having no fear of these creatures, he makes the first of two mistakes which will cost him his life; he goes back to his meal.

The rock moves slowly over the ledge, picking up speed with amazing suddenness. It strikes a projection in the cliff about fifteen feet above the ground, which deflects its path outward.