

2001: A "Space" Odyssey

Observations by Alan Sadowsky

Can you believe it? Hundreds of millions of people through the ages have never experienced the start of a new millenium, and we've actually had the rare opportunity of experiencing TWO of them! God bless the media, because without their divine intervention, we'd be stuck with just the one "turn of the century", and how boring would that be?

Now we all know that there is actually only one start of the millenium, and regardless of how much of a good time you had on December 31st, 1999, the fact of the matter is that it (finally) started on this December 31st. I should mention that we really owe the scientific "geeks" of the world a big debt of gratitude for their persistence on this whole issue. Rumor has it, that if the media folks actually got away with two milleniums, the IRS was going to try to convince us that April 15th actually happens twice a year.

Being the party animal that I am, I chose to ring in the New Year with a symbolic gesture. What better way to welcome in 2001 than with a screening of Kubrick's classic film 2001: A Space Odyssey. Adapted from Arthur C. Clark's novel, the movie still has the power to spark the imagination as well as it did in 1968. With HAL fresh in my mind, I'd like to share some thoughts with you on the topic of space.

Intellectual Space

As most of you know, I'm an employee of EMC Corporation, the leading provider of data storage solutions. So when people talk about space, I tend to think in terms of storage space. The boon for EMC and other storage vendors is the realization that information is the most important asset that a business has. The more information you have, the more successful you are likely to be... and all of this information has to be stored somewhere!

Now in most large corporate cultures, there are criteria and guidelines established that identify the types and

the value of information gathered and stored. And, in all cases, this information plays an influential role in corporate decisions, which hopefully foster financial gain and subsequent growth. When it comes to the public sector however, we don't have that protective barrier of criteria and guidelines. An odyssey is defined as "a long series of wanderings or adventures, especially when filled with notable experiences, hardships, etc.". Turn on the TV, and you'll find your odyssey cloaked in the faces of Gerry Springer and Judge Judy.

The biggest offender of the airwaves (at least in my opinion) is Entertainment Tonight. Couched in the glitz of celebrity nonsense, ET parades its endless stream of this week's best/worst dressed, who's in or out of rehab, and which couples have either married or divorced. It's certainly not the most critical information in the world, but apparently serious enough stuff for the network executives to air six days a week. With parts of the world suffering civil war, hunger, political unrest, genocide, and terrorism, does it really matter to anyone what the guests at the Michael Douglas - Catherine Zeta Jones wedding wore to their multi-million dollar reception? This isn't just blatant irresponsibility on the part of the networks, but a genuine waste of intellectual space.

Political Space

There's just no getting around the fact that George W. Bush is the new President of the United States. I'm not exactly thrilled about that, but before you brand me as a bleeding-heart liberal socialist, understand that I wouldn't be any more thrilled having Al Gore on the throne. What I do find interesting however, is the way that both the media and the government have treated us. The events beginning on November 7th clearly show that the entire election process is flawed. The very system that forms the foundation of our democracy - our right to chose our elected officials - crumbled before our eyes. Inconsistencies in procedures, ballot formats, voting machines, and methods of

determining eligibility, all combined to divide rather than unite the country.

We were inundated with merciless round-the-clock “breaking news”, and when the legal pandering finally came to a halt, we were gleefully indoctrinated with the belief that “the system works”. Hopefully, the people of this nation will come to understand what the rest of the world already knows. If in fact the system does work, it only works for some of us. With all of the formidable challenges facing the new President, his first order of business should be fixing the system so it works for all of us. If Mr. Bush can’t do that before the next presidential election in 2004, then we’ve wasted 4 good years of space in the White House.

Certification Space

Since we raised the argument for TPF Certification in our last issue, we’ve seen a groundswell of interest develop. The TPFUG Task Force is alive and well, a separate certification mailing list has been set up, and we expect very active participation from the TPF education community at the next user group conference in April. In response to some of the questions being asked, and some of the issues being raised, we’ve obtained permission from the publishers of InfoWorld to reprint a very appropriate article on the subject of certification that I believe provides some interesting food for thought (*see "Do certificates matter?" on page 8*). While I expect that you will each come to your own conclusions on the subject, I firmly believe that there is more than enough space available in our TPF world for technical certification.

Space, The Final Frontier

My children are both adults. Both are college educated, and both unique individuals in their own right. They are unfamiliar with a world where television is only black and white, or where you actually have to “dial” a telephone number. They have grown up in a world where pagers and cell phones are almost fashion accessories, where fax machines are old technology, and where instant email and global “chat” are the norm.

On the other hand, having been around for almost 52 years, I have seen air travel move from propellers to jet engines. I remember the first heart transplants, and I watched when we sent men to the moon. I once worked on massive mainframes with only 16 meg of memory in them. Today, my kids carry laptops with 128 meg of memory in them. In many ways, I’m disappointed that the rapid development of new technologies and the even faster deployment of these technologies hasn’t allow time for us to revel in their wonder. The discoveries of today are quickly overshadowed by the improvements of tomorrow. But there is an exception. There is International Space Station Alpha.

For the first time in man’s history, there is a permanent occupied structure orbiting the Earth. Manned by an international crew, and slated for significant expansion to accommodate larger numbers of people, ISS Alpha is the springboard for all future space exploration. This is the stuff dreams are made of. This is the Star Trek our children will grow up with, and the adventure our grandchildren will live. This is the space we’ve yet to embrace.

Your Own Space

Lastly, I’d like to briefly talk about personal space. Specifically yours. Over the past 10 years, many of you have been kind enough to support this publication through your article submissions, your subscriptions, and your advertising dollars. As such, you have generously invited us into your personal space, and we just want to say thank you for your continued support. Best Wishes for the New Year to all of our friends and colleagues!

Coincidentally...

Seattle - January 3, 2000

A 9-foot-tall steel monolith mysteriously appeared in a city park for the new year. The unmarked sculpture, which resembles the enigmatic extraterrestrial guardian in the movie *2001: A Space Odyssey*, appears to have been put in place on New Year’s Eve. There is no plaque or other clue to the sculptor’s identity.