

Stanley Kubrick – an Enigma to the End

There's nothing like an eccentric, reclusive genius to rouse curiosity and admiration in the general public. When the reputation is accompanied by an enormous amount of diverse and often contradictory data, the individual in question becomes a mystery that needs to be solved. Well, that's not going to happen here and probably nowhere else, since Stanley Kubrick died in 1999. The fact that much of the work he wanted to do never got done is part of the intrigue, but what did get done is legendary.

Born July 26, 1928 of Jewish immigrant parents in Manhattan, New York, Stanley was reportedly far from a star pupil as a youngster. His father, a physician named Jacob Leonard and his mother, Sadie Gertrude both believed in his native intelligence and tried sending him to an uncle in Pasadena for a change of scene that might sharpen his learning curve. He was 12 years old at the time; the change didn't have much effect on his grades or his attitude towards school.

Other efforts definitely did; at least two of Jacob's early attempts to spark his son's interest were very successful indeed. When introduced to the game of chess, Stanley took it for his own; he became a highly skilled player and chess became one of the trademarks in his later films. However it was the gift of a camera for his 13th birthday that undoubtedly set the boy on his path to fame, fortune and notoriety.

After several years of traveling around the city of New York and other spots, taking pictures of whatever interested him, Stanley sold some photos to *Look Magazine* and got a foot in the door of that popular publication. Taking pictures and going to movies at every opportunity over the next few years convinced him that making a film of his own was the way to go. He put together a few documentaries starting with *The Day of the Fight* in 1951, continuing with *Flying Parade* and *The Seafarers* in 1952.

Kubrick's earliest feature film was *Fear and Desire*, made in 1953. He raised money from investors – and by using his chess skills to hustle unwary players in Central Park. *Fear and Desire* is most interesting in that it was written, produced, directed, filmed and edited by him alone, on a miniscule budget that would barely make a short commercial today.

The film became available on DVD in 2013, though the story goes that Kubrick hated it and made an effort to remove all copies from circulation. Every Kubrick fan ought to catch it if only to appreciate the 'opening scene' in his cinematic career. CinePassion called the film, “. . . Kubrick's lugubrious, arresting, disavowed feature debut . . .”.

His next effort, *Killer's Kiss* in 1955, was praised for its inventive and unusual camera work but didn't go over well at the box office. Undeterred, he teamed up with producer James Harris to make *The Killing*, his first full-length film with professionals hired to do some of what Kubrick was in the habit of doing himself. However he argued with his crew, and in fact threatened to fire Lucien Ballard, the man hired as photographer, who was a pro and a good 20 years older than the then-27-year-old Kubrick.

The Killing didn't get much acclaim either, partly due to its last-minute promotion, running as second feature to a Western called *Bandido*. However it has since been re-discovered as one the best films of Kubrick's early career. It also got the attention of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and one of the company's executives called on the Kubrick/Harris team to be writers, producers and directors for a new film that ended up being *Paths of Glory*.

Filmed in Munich in 1957 and starring Kirk Douglas, *Paths of Glory* was the first of Kubrick's films to be a commercial success, though it was banned for some time in France due to its less-than-salutary depiction of the French military forces. The movie is based on an anti-war novel written in 1935 and it was about as unsentimental as Kubrick could make it – which is also one of his trademarks, and one reason for the conflicting opinions of his work.

Following that success, Kirk Douglas asked Kubrick to take over direction of another film in which he (Douglas) had the starring role – *Spartacus* would also be a winner at the box-office and in critics' circles. During production there was plenty of strife on the set in addition to scripted battles. Douglas and Kubrick fought over creative control – not to mention the director cutting the star's lines to almost nothing in the first half hour of the film.

Disputes notwithstanding, *Spartacus* won four Academy Awards and even though Kirk and Stanley never worked together again, it was clear to Kubrick, “. . . the youngest director in Hollywood history to helm an epic”, and to the rest of Hollywood's moguls that Stanley Kubrick the director was capable of great things.

Not a man to back down from challenges, he next tackled what would become a successful and highly controversial project, *Lolita*, starring James Mason, Sue Lyon, Shelley Winters and Peter Sellers. Filming *Lolita* in 1960-61 required a move to London, mostly to get away from the censors in Hollywood. Based on Vladimir Nabokov's novel, the plot involves a middle-aged professor and a 13-year-old girl – pedophilia in most books – but the vast majority of Nabokov's eroticism had to be cut out and/or camouflaged with comedy, which got the final edition past American and European critics.

The role of Quilty in *Lolita* also showcased the wildly diverse acting talents of Peter Sellers, which got the actor three roles in Kubrick's next film, *Dr. Strangelove, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*. This was a black comedy and political satire that had Sellers cast in three different roles, starring along with George C. Scott and Sterling Hayden. *Dr. Strangelove* got a lot of criticism at the time of its airing in 1964, but it also got a lot of major awards.

That film was also shot in England, due to “technical and political” difficulties; it is interesting that *Dr. Strangelove* was nominated for four Oscars and did not win any, but it won numerous British film awards including the BAFTA for 'Best British Film' and 'Best Film From Any Source' and the British Hugo Award as well as various other international kudos. In response to the New York Times critic who said the film showed “. . .contempt for our whole defense establishment”, Kubrick responded that he was a satirist with enough optimism to make a joke, even a brutal joke.

During the next few years Kubrick was involved in several projects that never quite made it to completion – including the epic about Napoleon Bonaparte that he is said to have considered his lifelong goal – and it was not until 1968 that his next ground-breaking film came out. *2001: A Space Odyssey* remains one of the Science Fiction classics of all time.

In close collaboration with Arthur C. Clarke, author of the novel by the same name, Kubrick wrote the screenplay – but won the only Oscar of his career for his visual special effects. It was his work on *2001* that later inspired rumors that he was involved in faking the first moon landing in 1969 and even all those that followed. Conspiracy theories flew around like confetti for quite some time; though they were generally accepted by only a small minority, there are some who believe in them to this day.

Many critics rate *2001* as Kubrick's finest production ever, and omniscient computer HAL has become a sort of icon for cinematic depictions of artificial intelligence. Literally volumes have been written about "the meaning of Kubrick's Space Odyssey" but there is a general consensus that it is a masterpiece; it's not certain whether Kubrick would agree.

After that marathon of painstaking research and technical perfectionism, Kubrick launched his next project as one that could be made with minimum time and money; *A Clockwork Orange* was the result. Based on the novel by Anthony Burgess, the film was in part an exploration of the 1960s perceived 'degeneration of youth' with its violence and sexual freedom.

Again a dark satire with comedic undertones – as opposed to a comedy with dark undertones – the movie was a critical and financial success. However when it was first released in Great Britain, Kubrick actually received death threats after “copycat crimes” were reported based on scenes in the film. He personally took it out of production in the UK, and it was not aired there legally again until after his death.

By the 1970s Kubrick's reputation as an outstanding director was confirmed beyond any doubt; he could make a film about anything that captured his interest. *Barry Lyndon*, completed in 1975, was another divergence from the norm; it went for three hours and at a leisurely pace that put many movie-goers off but ultimately worked exactly right for what Kubrick was trying to do. Ryan O'Neal was probably the perfect choice – Kubrick's, of course – for the title role of an ambitious but not terribly bright young Irishman.

Again Kubrick had to move locations during filming; he was reportedly made a target by members of the IRA, and had to pack up and move from Ireland back to England to complete his 18th century epic. *Barry Lyndon* also underlined the director's radical perfectionism; one scene with O'Neal required 150 takes before Kubrick was satisfied. However in later discussions the actor had nothing but praise for Kubrick's methods, and stuck with it for the year it took to complete because he felt part of “something great”. The film was not a commercial success upon release, but has since gained great acclaim.

From historical drama to supernatural horror may be quite a leap, but Kubrick made it with bells and chills on when he made his own version of Stephen King's novel *The Shining*. Filming took much longer than anticipated, as was usual for Kubrick's films, and the cast was subject to his trademark repeat takes, but the 1980 film is now considered a horror classic.

The Shining, starring Jack Nicholson, Shelley Duvall and a very young Danny Lloyd in his first acting job, was intended to be scary; it most certainly was, and is. Nicholson outdid himself as the writer going mad from a combination of his own demons and the one lurking in the Overlook Hotel; even with Kubrick's meticulous scene-setting, some of Nicholson's ad libbed remarks and actions made the film an even more intense experience for theatre-goers.

Novelist Stephen King did not like Kubrick's interpretation of his book and his characters; he re-wrote the screenplay, which was aired as a mini-series in 1997. Regardless of intentions good or bad, Kubrick's movie is the one destined for cinema history books; King's re-write basically flopped.

The same year that *The Shining* came out, Kubrick began working with two novelists who had written books about the Viet Nam war; he wanted to make his own war/anti-war movie, to be as brutal and realistic as the real thing. In that he succeeded, but *Full Metal Jacket* was partially eclipsed by *Platoon*, a similarly themed film directed by Oliver Stone that was released a year before Kubrick's film came

out in 1987.

Most viewers will not be aware that the entire film was made in a derelict iron works right in East London, not 20 miles from Kubrick's home. Aside from the mostly unscripted, now-famous maniacal speech to new recruits delivered by R. Lee Ermey as Gunnery Sergeant Hartman, *Full Metal Jacket* is about the consequences of war. The message is both horrifying and thought-provoking, not just for audiences but even for the actors involved. Kubrick has said that the film was his answer to *Rambo* – meaning films that over-simplify and glorify war in general.

The final project of Stanley Kubrick's career was yet another topical leap, this time to the exploration of sexual mores, marriage and reality versus sexual fantasies. *Eyes Wide Shut*, starring one of Hollywood's most viewable couples, Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman, does not qualify as pornography – far from it in fact. The most scathing reviews cited a lack of 'titillation', but much of that is due to censors.

Kubrick had reportedly just finished final editing when he died before the film was released. He had kept all of the production strictly under wraps, and of course that fostered nearly hysterical speculation about a 'Kubrick porn film', which did not materialize. *Eyes Wide Shut*, according to Kubrick himself, was meant to be a psychological drama; he has been quoted as saying it was his best film ever. As always, critics' opinions differ, but all agree that if nothing else the film is “Kubrickesque”. For fans, that's all the recommendation needed.

It must be noted that another of Kubrick's projects, one he worked on since the early 1970s, was another science fiction film titled *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* or just *A.I.* It was finally released, ironically enough, in 2001 by director Steven Spielberg. Kubrick had gone to Spielberg in 1995 with his pre-production notes; it was his contention that the subject matter and special effects were closer to Spielberg's “sensibilities” than Kubrick's.

Both men were busy with other projects, but when Stanley Kubrick died unexpectedly in March of 1999, Spielberg went ahead with production, sticking as closely as possible to Kubrick's vision, and when the film came out the credits showed it was dedicated to Stanley Kubrick. *A.I.* has since been described as a combination of Kubrick's cold detachment and Spielberg's warmhearted optimism.

What's really fascinating is that in a later interview, Steven Spielberg told interviewers that the critics had it all wrong. He said the reverse was true; all the “sweetest” parts were Stanley's; the “dark center” of the movie was all his. Stanley, of course, was not around for comment but it certainly makes us wonder what else we might have missed in Kubrick's long and complicated career.

One of Kubrick's cast in *Full Metal Jacket*, in an interview long after the film was released, made the statement about Kubrick that what he expected from an actor was “. . . show up. Know your lines. Don't bump the furniture.” He surely expected more from them than most directors – and almost to a man, or woman, they rate the experience of working with Kubrick as the high point of their careers.

The bottom line would seem to be that Stanley Kubrick always has been and will remain an enigma, a complex individual who brought us a great deal of entertainment and probably some enlightenment, depending on how his films are interpreted. He left quite a legacy for movie buffs and critics to ponder, and since he used each film as 'experience' for the next, better film, we can only wish he'd stayed around longer.

Moors and Christians Festival

In the history of Spain and Spanish civilization there is enough violent action with dramatic conquests and defeats to make a fantastic computer war game – or better, a fabulous Festival. Spaniards in general tend to be enthusiastic, adventurous and volatile; perhaps it has something to do with the climate. Far more than weather, however, the historical heritage of today's Spanish people is a huge factor, which also accounts for one of the most beloved and elaborate of Spain's many festivals.

Indeed, leave it to the Spanish to turn centuries of warfare and clashing cultures into a joyful and raucous yet grand and (occasionally) solemn week-long festival they call Moros y Christianos, or Moors and Christians. This event happens once a year but in Javea, as in many a Spanish town, preparations for the next year's festival begin immediately after the conclusion of the current year's blowout, and it's very much a community effort.

Tourists love to catch a festival like the Moors and Christians, but the majority of visitors (and probably quite a few of the participants) know very little about the origins of this battle-cum-celebration. The fact is that knowing some background helps a great deal especially if you're a 'foreigner' watching the goings on; if nothing else you'll get some understanding of the costumes, the action, the rhetoric . . . and the ear-splitting noise. So let's take a little jaunt into Spain's long ago, whence came the Moors and Christians Festival of today.

This will necessarily be a greatly condensed and general account, but the story basically goes like this: at the beginning of the 8th century AD Spain (actually most of the Iberian Peninsula) was at least nominally under Visigoth control, and Catholicism was the reigning religion. However the Visigoth kingdom was already in severe decline.

When in 711 an army of about 10,000 Arabs and Berbers from North Africa, under the leadership of Tariq ibn Ziyad, landed near what is now Gibraltar, they defeated the armies of Visigoth King Roderic and basically opened the door for a continuing influx of what came to be called Moors. These people were followers of Islam, and brought their religion with them as well as significant aspects of their cultures in areas such as medicine, art, agriculture and architecture.

According to records, within less than a decade from the first invasion in the south of Spain, the Muslim Moors were basically in control of almost the entire Peninsula, which is now referred to as 'Islamic Spain' and then as Al-Andalus – since morphed into Andalusia. In general, the Spaniards got along fairly well with what came to be a ruling class of Middle Easterners (mostly Arabs). Many aristocratic Spaniards were able to retain their land and properties, though the general population paid taxes to the rulers of Al-Andalus.

There were plenty of disputes over religious preference, with the Spanish becoming indignant about Islam taking precedence over Christianity. However as time went on and folks realized that Christian taxes were higher than Islamic taxes, many of them went ahead and converted just to save money and hassles. Those who didn't convert were free to follow their own religion – they just paid higher taxes, but otherwise were treated about the same as converted Muslims.

Spanish kings in the north of the country were more agitated about the invasion and throughout the next couple of centuries (the 9th and 10th) there were a lot of raids and battles and bloody clashes as the monarchs up north sent their various armies to try and roust the invaders. A sort of stand-off resulted, with the Moors unable to gain more territory in the north but holding on to what they already had – and

over the years even the Northern kings had to acknowledge that many improvements were being made.

Cohabitation, in fact, became a fact of life; when the Moors first came to this land, the majority of Spanish natives had blonde hair and blue eyes, but due to considerable intermingling the dark hair, eyes and complexions of the Moors became dominant traits in much of the new Spanish aristocracy. Cordoba was a centre of culture, and it has been documented that in many cases formally hostile northern monarchs sent their children to the courts of Cordoba to learn how to behave in proper society – and then married them off to Muslims.

The Moors gradually became integrated into Spanish culture, adding the arts and sciences they brought with them, including a much improved system of irrigation, based on the ancient Egyptians' channeling of the Nile. In fact they provided a huge boost to Spanish agriculture, bringing in such new edibles as figs, dates, apricots, olives and citrus fruits. Rice, several varieties of wheat, sugar cane and many other dietary staples were also introduced, and farming became a lucrative and well-supported industry.

Again, the very short version is that during the relatively short term (less than five centuries or eight of them, depending on how you calculate) of 'Islamic Spain' life was better than it ever had been for the ordinary fellow. Health care was much improved, even the poorest had access to it, and – it's true, believe it or not – often physicians did not charge a fee unless their patient was wealthy.

Architecture is another legacy from the Moors; they built numerous castles and monuments; many of Spain's most famous tourist attractions came from the Moors, and in just about every town and village in southern and eastern Spain you'll still find a monument or two along with other remnants of architecture from that era. If you want to see a classic example of Arab architecture in Spain, go visit the Alhambra Palace in Granada or the Mezquita in Cordoba, two of Spain's national treasures.

Alfonso XIII of Castile is credited by most as beginning, in 1212, what came to be known as the Reconquista – the taking back of cities and lands controlled by Al-Andalus. King Alfonso brought in other Christian leaders and Pope Innocent III championed a crusade to drive the Moors right out of the country.

Alfonso's successor, Fernando III, carried on with the project in a determined and bloodthirsty series of battles and conquests. This went on for years, but Christian forces took back the major cities and territories and by the mid-13th century the rule of Islam was pretty much broken and any Moors who remained were forced to convert to Christianity. Except, that is, for the kingdom of Granada. Now we're getting back to the point, which is (more or less) the basis of the Moors and Christians Festival.

Around 1236 the Muslim ruler of Granada, Mohammed ibn-Alhamar, approached Fernando with a deal: in exchange for the Moor's aid in taking back Seville, Alhamar could keep Granada (which at that time included modern-day Malaga and Almeria) as an independent subject of Castille. That deal is reportedly the reason Alhamar went back to Granada and told his disappointed subjects that “there is no victor but Allah” and had that sentiment carved in stone all over the Alhambra Palace.

So in fact the Moors remained in that kingdom for another couple hundred years. If it hadn't been for the Muslim habit of harems, it's possible they'd still be there, and Spain might still be a Muslim country. As it was, the ostensible rulers tended more and more to stay in the Alhambra Palace and party, whilst major conflicts arose because sons born to harem members could be equal in their right to

the throne. When the Sultan chose the son of a Christian prisoner in his harem over the son of his wife, civil war broke out and the realm of Granada ended up crumbling from the inside out.

Therefore, about 200 years after the 'Granada deal' when the kingdoms of Aragon and Castile were joined by the marriage of (yet another) Fernando and Isabella, both confirmed Christians, they met with a lot less resistance than they might have otherwise. Both Malaga and Almeria were taken back by the Christians, and Granada itself was under a blockade set up by Fernando's armies.

The stalemate ended with Moorish king Boabdil handing over Granada in return for concessions that included amnesty for his subjects. In 1492 the Christians under Fernando and Isabella took control of the Moors' last stronghold, the Emirate of Granada, and Islamic Spain became, quite literally, history.

However, along the Mediterranean coast, where Moors and Christians had gotten along fairly well over the years, Berber pirates continued frequent raids on towns and villages including, of course the Costa Blanca. Those continuing raids were the reason all those watchtowers were built in Javea and all along the southern coast. From the 14th through the 17th centuries pirates were a scourge in many areas, taking Christian prisoners as slaves.

It was not until the 18th century that these attacks finally ceased or at least diminished to a major degree, but finally they did and the watchtowers, or Miradors faded into history also. Now they are a big part of the attraction for tourists, who find the stunning views well worth a hike and climb. You're not likely to spot any pirates unless they're in costume and part of a parade.

The Moors and Christians Festival celebrates the history of Islamic Spain (with emphasis on warfare of course) but also with undisguised admiration for the contributions and legacy of the vanquished Moors. This elaborate and complicated Festival is part of Spanish tradition all over the country, but though the basics are similar, some places really go all out. This festival was first introduced way back in the 16th century, and has only gotten more extravagant over the years.

Different cities and towns dedicate the Festival to their own patron saints; usually an historic figure who overcame great odds to whop the stuffing out of the other side – and of course it's always the Christians whopping the Moors in the final accounting, but not until a lot of heads had rolled, both Moor and Christian.

In all cases, as far as we know, the first big pageant of the Festival involves a shipful of Moors - or helicopterful in at least one case – arriving with their invasion forces at the most convenient spot for re-grouping and preparing to march on the local residents. From that point the festivities depend partly on the size of the city or town and how the local geography conforms to the boat situation.

In Javea, where Muslim Barbary pirates (Berbers) were still raiding the coast well into the 19th century, you'll see references to that activity also, but the main thrust of the action revolves around the arrival of the first influx of Muslim settlers/invasers and the eventual 'reconquista' of lands they had taken over and occupied.

The festivities begin at the Port, where representatives of all the many companies that will participate in the presentation are gathered, each in full and flamboyant costume according to their designated origin – Christian or Moor. They all proceed through the streets to the centre of the Port where a stage has been erected. Then follows a couple hours of speeches, awards, brief entertainments like dance numbers, and the presentation of each company's representative, with its individual standards and

banners. Following all this, a band concert goes on until the wee hours, with a dinner around midnight for festival participants.

Day two will be another parade, with full musical accompaniment, and another concert with music from both Moors and Christians performed with great panache by Javea's Centre Artistic Musicale orchestra. On day three there is yet another parade, this time along the Promenade in the Playa del Arenal, and organizers provide drinks and snacks for participants and spectators.

Day four: all the company representatives form a somewhat more subdued parade through the streets of the old town to make an offering of flowers to San Jaime (aka "The Moor Slayer") at his niche in the Calle San Jaime. After that more food and drink is offered, and the music of party bands will play long into the night.

The really big show (and noise) begins next day when the firing commences. This one is just an exercise in explosions as some of the companies' representatives spend about half an hour firing blunderbusses in the street and deafening a lot of unprepared spectators; if you plan to see this bit from up close you should probably invest in some earplugs.

There will be another floral offering to San Jaime, this time involving a massive procession around the Port with all the companies plus members of festival commissions – and bands, of course. This parade winds up at the church of Nuestra Senora de Loreto, an iconic landmark where San Jaime's image is placed in the church and the entire company is blessed by a priest. Late that evening there's another dinner for everyone involved, and again, music until 3:00 am.

The fireworks really begin next day when the Moors invade and attack the castle. This takes place at Playa de la Grava, where a mock castle has been erected which the Christians are trying to defend. More horrendous noise from blunderbusses (with considerable shouting, screaming and appropriate war cries) makes quite a spectacular show, as the invaders debark from traditional Moorish boats and clash with the defenders. (This is of course symbolic of the Moors' arrival near Gibraltar in 711.)

After much clashing and bashing and firing of guns the Christians are driven back to the castle where they stand on the battlements, and then comes an extended period of negotiations, well-choreographed battles and finally the surrender of the Christians, whose Captain exchanges the key to the castle for the lives of his troops. The Muslim troops enter the castle and occupy the battlements to loud cheers from the ranks and raise the half-moon flag. Then with stirring music they all march away, Moors gliding proudly in victory and Christians plotting their next move.

That move comes pretty quickly, as Christians are already regrouping on the beach, urged on by their supporters, and with more thundering gunfire and slashing swords the battles resume until the Moors (who left the castle) are slowly beaten back to its walls and battlements. Then more negotiations, more sword and gun-play and shouted invective (all performed with amazing precision and gusto), until the Christians finally prevail, the castle's key is returned and the Christian flag is raised again.

This is the 'reconquista' and it signals the end of hostilities but not the end of the festivities, not by a long shot. Two more days of splendidly costumed companies parading with triumphal music of both Christian and Islamic culture sweeps the spectators up in an enthusiastic communal party that goes on for hours. On the final night, as the last of the parade reaches its destination, get ready for a thrilling display of fireworks to top off the evening and the Festival.

The Moors and Christians Festival is great fun for everyone involved and it's a beautiful expression of community spirit not just in Javea but every town where the tradition is carried on. It's worth noting that only one day of a week-long party is dedicated to actual conflict; the rest of the time is dedicated to parades and music and festive events that include young and old, visitors and locals. Any mere description is bound to be inadequate; you really need to be there.

*In 2016 the Festival took place in July, from Saturday the 16th through the final fireworks on Sunday the 24th. The schedule for this year is not available as of this writing, but it should be very soon.

Ana de Armas

Not long ago GQ Magazine made the observation, or maybe prediction, that Ana de Armas “. . . is taking over Hollywood”. A fairly extravagant statement, but in this case, where there's smoke, there's definitely fire. Ana de Armas is a small Cuban force to be reckoned with.

Ana was born in 1988 in Havana, grew up there and at the age of fourteen was accepted to the National Theatre School, a highly prestigious institution that takes only twelve new students each year. Precisely what talents and traits were developed prior to that are mostly unknown at this point, and her first appearance onscreen came after only two years, in a film called *Una rosa de Francia*. In 2007 she landed major roles in two more Spanish films, *Madrigal* and *El edén perdido*.

When she moved to Madrid at the age of eighteen and got a starring role in a Spanish series called *El Enternado*, her portrayal of Carolina Leal, a central character who tended towards hair-raising adventures, began to generate more than local interest. That show, by the way, is well worth a peek as it shows pretty clearly the potential of the teenager she was at the time. From that series Ana went on to another TV series, *Havana, la leyenda*, and several short films that didn't get much attention.

In 2014 Ana took herself and her resume to Los Angeles, figuring that if she wanted a career as an actress in the big time, that was her best move. It seems that she figured correctly, and she has the credits to prove it. She landed quite a few roles in films that did not become blockbusters, in fact some of them virtually disappeared from the movie news, but when she was teamed up with Keanu Reeves in 2015 it was *Knock Knock* - and here she is.

That film is more a semi-erotic horror story than anything else, but according to Ana it was great fun to make. She told an interviewer that Reeves' innate tendency to remain aloof in emotional situations – and his dislike of the 'touchy-feelie' behavior of fans or even co-stars made it a delightful challenge to try and overreach the boundaries. There was quite a bit of ad lib action, mostly condoned by director Eli Roth, and overall the film served to highlight Ana's acting talents.

If you watch a few of her interviews, the contrast between characters she plays and the sweet-faced, guileless young woman is amazing. Ana comes across as a basically untouched and innocent presence, though she has developed a professional surface that may or may not be a veneer. She's as wide-eyed and enthusiastic as a kid when speaking to the movie press, but she has no problem projecting powerful emotions – including some serious rage – when the part calls for them.

Of her work in *Knock Knock*, Ana says that she learned a great deal from Keanu, that the role was challenging but overall a very enjoyable experience. In another interview – in which her Spanish accent is much more pronounced than her screen character's – she also noted that all of the three main characters in *Knock Knock* considered themselves victims, which made the action and dialogue believable even though some critics dismissed the film as lacking depth.

It's not only interesting but downright impressive that when Ana first arrived in Los Angeles she barely spoke English. She had already completed filming on *Hands of Stone*, co-starring with Robert De Niro and Edgar Ramirez. The 'boxing flick' was filmed in Panama and is due for release this month; it's likely that her role as the wife of Roberto Duran (Ramirez) was one that clinched her determination to find roles featuring strong women with notable contributions to character and plot – not just 'the wife'.

Ana has another film, due out this week in fact, that leaves something to be desired on that account, but still gives her a chance to demonstrate her considerable acting talents. *War Dogs* (like *Hands of Stone*) is based on a true story, this one involving two small-time arms dealers who run afoul of the big guys, i.e. the U. S. government and the competition. She plays the girlfriend in this case, and can hardly be heard over the gunfire and shouting, so we'll have to wait for the next one, which is also coming soon.

Ana de Armas has stated that she wants to try all kinds of roles . . . “I want to do everything,” she says. So far *Knock Knock* has offered the best indication of her potential – apart from her lovely person and winsome personality. The carefully guarded details of her latest project allow a lot of conjecture but not much more. It's already getting substantial publicity, since it's a sequel to the 1982 hit Sci-Fi thriller *Blade Runner*. *Blade Runner 2* will see Harrison Ford reprising his role as Richard Deckard, and Ana has “a leading role”.

Exactly what that role is has been kept under wraps, though filming is reportedly underway as of last month. Also starring Ryan Gosling, Robin Wright and Dave Bautista, whose precise roles are also undisclosed at present, the movie is scheduled to be out in October of 2017. When asked about the specifics and her role in the film Ana made one of the most quotable quotes we've heard lately- though we're pretty sure it's been made before. “It's the future. Anything can happen,” she said, and that is most certainly the case for Ana de Armas.

