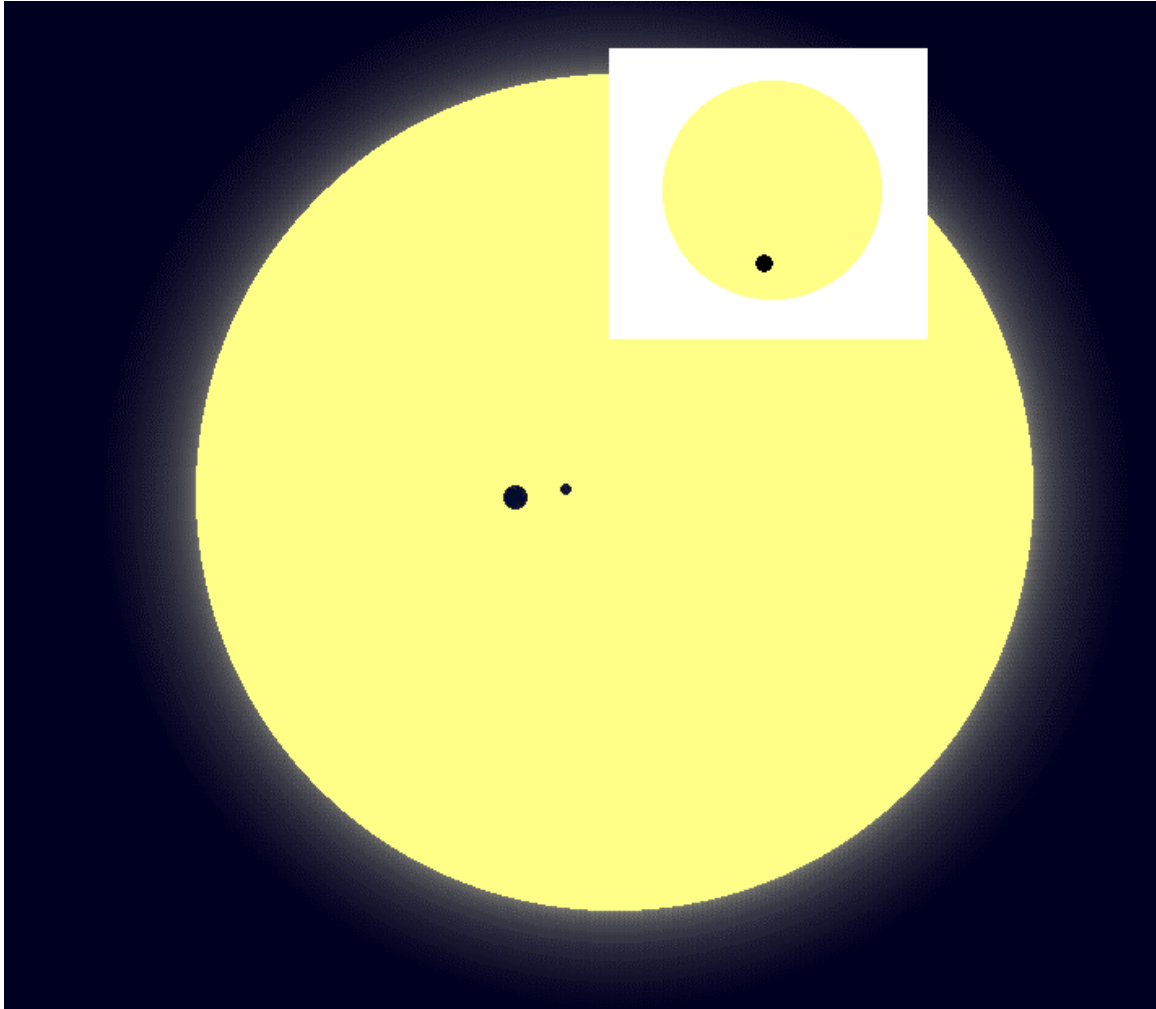


## “Transit of Earth,” By Richard Conn Henry



While New Year's Eve of 1999 was the “false millennium,” full of Y2K concerns, and New Year's Eve of 2000, hardly noted by anybody, was the real millennium, what of New Year's Eve, 2001? Shall we make it ... a Space Odyssey? How very appropriate!

In the 1769, on June 3, Captain James Cook observed a transit of Venus from the south pacific island of Tahiti. His scientists observed, and timed, the passage of the planet Venus across the face of the sun. The idea was that by precision timing, the size of our solar system could be ascertained. What the scientists actually saw was a black dot passing slowly across the face of the sun. The side of Venus toward Earth, of course, was dark, the sun illuminating the other side.

This New Year's Eve, along about midnight, please travel, in your mind, to the planet Jupiter, largest planet in the solar system. From Jupiter, on this New Year's Eve, 2001 December 31, in the hours centered about midnight (on Earth), there will be visible (but, of course, no one there to see it) a transit of the Earth and its Moon across the face of the sun. Such a transit is rare, and having it occur on New Year's Eve is of course even rarer.

The event has no scientific significance whatsoever, it is just “fun science.” The picture shows the transit of the Earth and Moon (about midnight, on Earth), while the inset shows the 1769 transit of Venus. The images were made using <http://carinasoft.com>.