

WSS
BOOKS

'Brick by 'Brick

A massive collection of Stanley Kubrick marginalia fills in the gaps

By Joshua Rothkopf

Imposingly dense, wide as a barn door and weighing in at a lap-crushing 15 pounds, Taschen's 545-page *The Stanley Kubrick Archives* showed up one morning in our offices, where my editor and I circled it like curious apes. Sniffing, we found it odorless; this is not a tome of gossip about the director's rumored helmet-clad crash paranoia, late-night faxing to Stephen King or other mysterious behavior. Diving in, I devoted several hours. Did I ultimately evolve? Undoubtedly.

Assembled by editor Alison Castle, who spent two years rummaging through the back rooms of the director's sprawling English estate (with the blessing of Kubrick's widow, Christiane), the book—a mammoth collection of film stills, script notes and critical essays—is soberly designed, obsessive in detail and a touch clinical. It's a lot like a Kubrick film. Devotees shouldn't consider going without it, though the \$200 price tag is sure to separate the men from the boys—or, rather, fanboys. Case in point: Each copy in Taschen's first printing includes a snazzy strip of film from Kubrick's personal print of *2001*, an utterly useless object scraping the far edge of cultishness. (Ours was a trippy horizon shot from the final "Star-gate" sequence; yours may be one of the moribund Keir Dullea.)

Why does Stanley Kubrick inspire such crazy expenditures of zeal? That's not an impish question; obviously, a director of so many classics deserves critical attention. But easygoing biography or anecdotal memoir somehow seems out of the question—which is too bad. The Bronx-born filmmaker wasn't superhuman, nor by many accounts a chilly man. To hear his gentle, Noo Yawk-accented voice (so similar to Peter Sellers' befuddled American President in *Dr. Strangelove*) on the companion disc that Taschen provides in yet another slip sleeve is to appreciate a thoughtful responder

who took his time with answers, though not at the expense of wit. (On the topic of directing actors, Kubrick dryly offers, "I tend to believe that if you're right, people realize it.") Laughing at his own hauteur, he adds with great redemption, "I try to be.")

But such personalizing moments are, by and large, the exception in Castle's solemn project. She unearths a trove of process notes



SPACELAB Kubrick, behind camera, lines up a shot for his celestial 2001.

and on-set stills, which mostly play into the well-established image of Kubrick's fastidiousness: braniac, autodidact and superplanner. First comes a deceptively integral section of high-grade reproductions from the 12 features themselves. gorgeously rendered and often filling the entire "wide-screen" page, the images are a subtle reminder of how consistently excellent Kubrick's eye was. (He got his professional start at age 17 as a busy staff photographer for *Look* magazine.) Some might wonder, Why not simply rewatch the films themselves? But the stills—approximately 60 allotted to each movie—make for an absorbing summation of the filmmaker's art. And few film books have achieved this simple act of faithful reproduction as superbly.

The book then repeats its structure, delving deeply into each film with either a long essay or an interview (all of which have appeared

elsewhere; the writers include such respected Kubrick scholars as Gene Phillips and *Positif*'s Michel Ciment), and reams of on-set photos and support matter. It's this margin material that is of the greatest value, and not just to those averse to critical gush. There are script pages for the decoy "happy ending" to *Paths of Glory*, written for the sake of nervous investors: "You boys have got a friend somewhere!" exclaims a sergeant, cutting the ropes that bind the hands of the main characters as they face a firing squad. Throughout, Kubrick's handwritten notations are scrawled confidently on screenplays, technical schemata and poster mock-ups. (Of an unsatisfactory poster for *The Shining*, he notes, "I would like to suggest it is a film of terror (and the supernatural if possible)."

The appendices are the most thrilling, however. Here are sketches and treatments for the long-planned projects that Kubrick never lived to realize: a World War II movie titled *The Aryan Papers*; the sci-fi epic *Artificial Intelligence* (subsequently adopted—and sentimentalized—by Steven Spielberg); and, above all, a biography of Napoléon, Kubrick's most consuming obsession. He had much more work left in him when he died prematurely in 1999 at 70, and even these abbreviated samples inspire both a deep sense of loss and endless speculation. My favorite photo can be found on page 494: a row of typed index cards detailing a mere four months, day by day, of the life of Napoléon. Any director that in love with the card-catalog system has to have been onto something.

The Stanley Kubrick Archives (\$200) is out now from Taschen.