

Weighty tome takes fans on odyssey into Kubrick's mind

By **STEVE CHAGOLLAN**

Beginning as early as 1967, even as he was still in post on "2001: A Space Odyssey," Stanley Kubrick spent the better part of the next three years meticulously, comprehensively, obsessively researching the life of Napoleon, a project that would combine the themes of social revolution, political corruption, star-crossed romance and the kind of hubris that had become the filmmaker's trademark.

A notorious perfectionist, Kubrick, with the help of a research team, pored through hundreds of books on the subject, amassed 17,000 images from the period, cross-referenced events in the lives of key figures and wrote a voluminous treatment followed by a literate screenplay featuring a voiceover from three different POVs. Budgets were drawn, costumes were made, locations were scouted and photographed, actors approached (Oskar Werner was offered the title role, while Audrey Hepburn turned down the part of Josephine) and even the armies of Romania and Yugoslavia were approached for the requisite "cast of thousands" accuracy that Kubrick demanded in his battle scenes, which he described as "vast lethal ballets."

But even while Kubrick

was attaining visionary status inside and outside Hollywood, timing conspired against him. Historic costume epics on the scale of Napoleon had gone out of vogue, and with a competing film in the works, the ill-fated "Waterloo" (1970), MGM pulled out of the project, followed by the financially strapped United Artists. Along with Orson Welles' "The Big Brass Ring" and Warren Beatty's long-planned Howard Hughes biopic, Kubrick's "Napoleon" might be the most compelling what-could-have-been in the annals of filmmaking.

But art book publisher Taschen, with the aid of the Kubrick estate, has mounted a lavish package devoted to the project, with an equally lavish \$700 pricetag. The limited edition of 1,000 numbered copies, titled "Stanley Kubrick's 'Napoleon': The Greatest Film Never Made," edited by **Alison Castle**, contains all the aforementioned materials, as well as production notes, the director's correspondence with MGM and such figures as Oxford professor and Napoleon biographer **Felix Markham** — all in 10 volumes.

The set of books not only takes the reader deep into Kubrick's mindset, but suggests aspects of "Napoleon" foreshadowed future Kubrick hallmarks: the omniscient narrator and the high-speed lenses that made the candlelit scenes in "Barry Lyndon" so revolutionary; the boundary-pushing nudity and sex of "A Clockwork Orange" and "Eyes Wide Shut"; the horrors of war made apparent in "Full Metal Jacket."

It might not be the most realistic gift of this recessionary holiday season, but the value to filmmakers and Kubrick fanatics may be priceless.

