

A dream movie revisited

As a huge new book is published about Stanley Kubrick's unmade Napoleon film, **Rob Sharp** speaks to the director's relatives and collaborators, and gets rare insights into his famously assiduous working methods

It's almost dusk in Hertfordshire; end-of-day gloom envelops a boulder bedecked with flowers that marks the last resting place of Stanley Kubrick. Several dogs bound over to greet Jan Harlan, Kubrick's brother-in-law and long-time producer, who stands motionless looking at the grave before making his way back to the house behind him.

Harlan needs to get ready for a launch party for Stanley Kubrick's *Napoleon: The Greatest Movie Never Made*, a luxury reference book published by Taschen last month, which contains much of the preparatory material for one of Kubrick's greatest projects, a biopic of "Boney" that was never born, let alone allowed to conquer the world.

In the late 1960s, the studio MGM pulled the plug on what could have been Kubrick's finest work, in part spooked by spiralling budgets (it would have cost \$5.2m, around \$100m in modern terms). Depressed by the knock-back, Kubrick threw himself into his adaptation of the 1926 novella *Traumnovelle* or *Dream Story* by the Austrian author Arthur Schnitzler; that went on to become *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999), Kubrick's final film. That movie's final cut was screened here, at Childwickbury House just outside St Albans, Kubrick's long-time refuge and home, four days before he died. The auteur was buried next to his favourite tree in the estate's copious grounds.

"It was very tough to find out it wasn't going ahead," says Harlan a short

while later, sitting in his own house a 10-minute drive from the director's former residence. "Stanley was extremely unhappy. I'd thought I'd go back to Zurich, where I come from originally, but then my wife and I fell in love with England. She wanted to stay here and Stanley liked me and I liked him. So we all settled here, and threw ourselves into our work."

Harlan and Kubrick went on to collaborate on *Barry Lyndon* (1975), *The Shining* (1980), *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) and *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999). Harlan was also an assistant to the producer for *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) and executive producer for Steven Spielberg's *Artificial Intelligence: AI* (2001), for which Kubrick led much of the initial development work.



Harlan is avuncular and warm, surprising considering his movie-business pedigree. He is happiest when name-dropping the meals he has enjoyed with Spielberg and describing how he still gives lectures at film schools across Europe. He slaps a copy of the £450 book on to his dining table and takes a step back – at 12 by 15 by five inches, and weighing an impressive 22lb, the gilt-edged tome is quite the whopper. It has a hollowed-out interior, the kind of thing in which Victorian gentlemen used to secrete their pistols. Here, 10 smaller volumes are neatly secreted. There is the film's script, in full; a book of correspondence between Kubrick and many of the actors he hoped would work on the film (David Hemmings was a probable for Napoleon); a catalogue of pictures of extras in period costumes; and a book of production memos featuring a discussion about using "a special Dupont fire-proof paper" for the extras' uniforms (they could each be made for as little as a dollar, apparently). To give you a hint at Kubrick's obsessiveness, he took 15,000 photographs of potential locations for *Napoleon*. His index-card system, which he used to coordinate all his characters' movements so that he knew where each of them was at any one time, ran to 25,000 entries.

"At a deeper level, his never-ending interest in observing human folly was the wellspring for nearly all his films," writes Harlan in the book. "Napoleon was the ideal study subject. One of Stanley's often repeated notions was that, since we are all driven by our emotions, our belief that we might be governed by rational thought is a vain illusion." Kubrick's widow, Christiane, believes he struggled to understand how such a capable man as Napoleon could be so manipulated by the philandering Josephine, or have so hopelessly miscalculated the Russian campaign that defeated him. "When Stanley was young, he played chess for money for a while in New York," she says at the book's launch party later that evening. "[He believed] Napoleon might have learned to control himself better had he played chess. Stanley thought if you are too emotional, you lose."

Harlan says Kubrick's work on

Napoleon epitomises his excessive work ethic. "Stanley loved to study," he continues. "He always studied. I mean, for *2001*, he talked to scientists, philosophers and clerics about space. He loved to pick people's brains. He was a dream student. He knew a lot about astronomy, philosophy, various elements of space and life, what people feel about creation, or evolution, and he put all that in his film. With *2001*, his conclusion was that we don't know what is going on. The experts have no idea. With *Napoleon*, Stanley picked out the people who really knew about him. He read every book in the English language about the period and he obviously became a tremendous scholar. Professor Markham actually served as his one-to-one tutor at the beginning."

Harlan is referring to the historian Felix Markham, whose 1966 biography of Napoleon was Kubrick's key source. Markham employed a team of Oxford historians working full-time to answer Kubrick's questions. Such correspondence numbers among the book's attractions; it includes letters to prospective Napoleons such as Oskar Werner and Ian Holm. A handwritten note from Audrey Hepburn turns down the role of Josephine due to a career break, but she states that she hopes Kubrick "will think of me again someday".

The script begins and ends with a shot of Napoleon's Rosebud-like childhood teddy bear. In between, Kubrick blasts through his career highlights with typical bombast, including the 1793 Toulon siege that made his name and his early forays into Italy and Egypt. Other dramatic highlights include his 1812 entry into an abandoned Moscow after his Russian invasion and a lavish diplomatic reception on the Niemen, a river in eastern Europe. The Battle of Waterloo runs to seven pages.

The most extensive volume, at 500 pages, contains commentaries on the film by the book's editor, Alison Castle, Harlan, and the French cineaste Jean Tulard, a Napoleon-in-cinema specialist who suggests that Kubrick left out Napoleon's mistress Marie Walewska to avoid comparison with Greta Garbo, who played her in the 1937 film *Conquest*. "Reading the screenplay, it is impossible to tell whether Kubrick likes

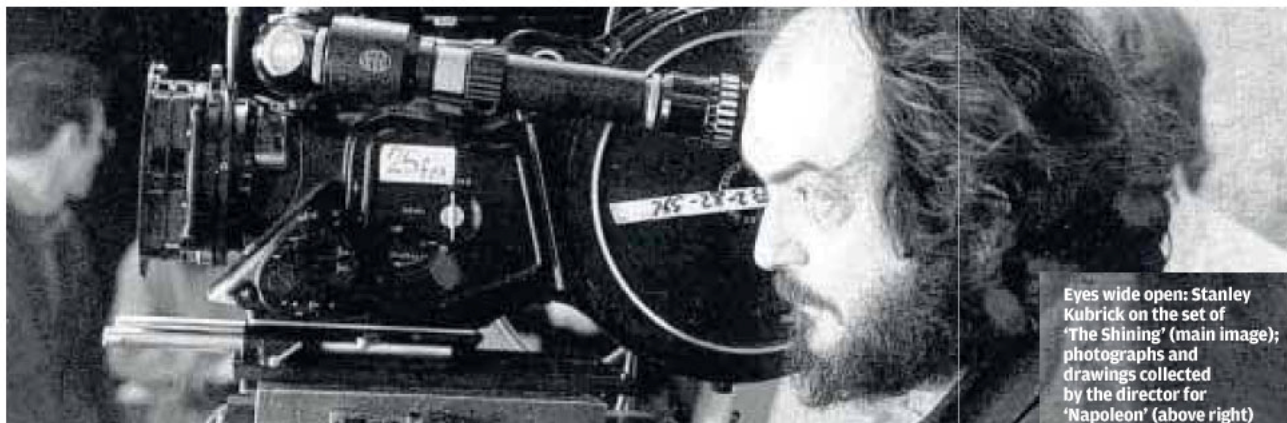
Napoleon or loathes him," he writes.

Crucially, says Harlan, *Napoleon* would have given Kubrick the opportunity to employ front projection – the combination of pre-filmed background footage and foreground acting – for the first time. The director would have to wait until *2001*'s "dawn of man" scene to properly use it.

Castle also edited *The Stanley Kubrick Archives*, an earlier collection of stills and essays about Kubrick's other films. "The family were very friendly and nice, I stayed there for the entire time I was researching the book," she says. "They trusted me with the material; they weren't paranoid or anything. I've always been fascinated by Kubrick's work, it all harks back to my first experience of seeing films; every time I first saw his work it was like a life experience. All of his movies etched themselves inside me. When I was young I was fascinated by him; I still remember what that was like now. I find his vision of the world interesting. The way he treats his subject matter with restraint and audacity, I find that speaks to me."

Harlan says that he has tried to get directors to resurrect the project, with little success. "Ridley Scott knows that we have the material and we put it to Ang Lee," he says. "What was silly was I had Steven Spielberg and Ang Lee on a table and I tried to say, 'hey, this is something real,' instead of *Hulk*. But they went and did *Hulk*, so what can I do?"

Taschen's 'Napoleon: The Greatest Movie Never Made' has been published as a limited edition set of ten books within one, and is on sale for £450. For more information see taschen.com



Eyes wide open: Stanley Kubrick on the set of 'The Shining' (main image); photographs and drawings collected by the director for 'Napoleon' (above right)