

Charlton Heston's likeness couldn't be used for Colonel Taylor. The man writing the adaptations didn't even see the fourth and fifth films in the series. The later adaptations changed artists between chapters, and the whole film series was over before the magazine even got started.

Why then is Marvel's *Planet of the Apes* magazine collected so avidly and remembered with such affection by its fans? The answer probably does not rest with the strip itself.

The recent 30th Anniversary re-issue of *Planet of the Apes* and its four sequels (*Beneath the Planet of the Apes*, *Escape from the Planet of the Apes*, *Conquest of the Planet of the Apes*, and *Battle for the Planet of the Apes*) stirred up great memories for long-time fans. The re-release and its surrounding hoopla also brought many newer fans into the fold.

With the films cleaned up, enhanced and restored, and with a brand new documentary about the series, it seemed apes fans had everything they wanted except the one thing they've wanted since 1973 when *Battle for the Planet of the Apes* ended: more.

The ill-fated TV series, the cartoon series, the toys, the novelizations... none of it has ever proved enough.

Like a somewhat cerebral, regularly bathed version of *Star Trek* fandom, *Apes* fans have talked about and sought the films and their related collectibles for years. The marketing arm at 20th Century Fox wasn't as savvy in those days as they later proved to be with *Aliens* and *Predator*, so while there are a lot of great apes items, there aren't as many collectibles as fans would like.

Unlike those and other properties, though, there's never been a fictional accounting of what life was like on the rest of the Planet of the Apes, how things got that way, and so on. Except in comics.

Marvel's *Planet of the Apes* was part of their old black and white magazine line that included *Deadly Hands of Kung-Fu*, *Dracula Lives*, *Savage Sword of Conan* and others. In this incarnation, fans got to see not only adaptations of the five films but exploits set in a variety of

A WRITER ON THE **PLANET OF THE APES**

Writer
Doug Moench
looks back
at Marvel's
*Planet Of
The Apes*
magazine and
working with
Mike Ploog,
Tom Sutton...
and all of
those apes.

**AN INTERVIEW
BY J. C. VAUGHN**

different regions, eras and conditions. Eventually the comic version even filled in the missing years between the fourth and fifth films.

The stories were generally (but not always) matched up: one chapter of an adaptation and one chapter of an original tale. Marvel's *Planet of the Apes* featured different environments, different artists, and different relationships between men and apes, but only one writer.

Veteran comics scribe Doug Moench is known to many Bronze Age collectors for his long run on Marvel's *Master of Kung-Fu* where his collaborations with artists Paul Gulacy, Mike Zeck, and Gene Day turned the book into a cult favorite. He also created and wrote a lengthy run on Marvel's *Moon Knight* and has had a long association with Batman, writing many of DC's Bat-titles including *Batman* and *Detective Comics*, as well as graphic novels and "Elseworlds" stories. Along the way he wrote just about every major Marvel character and developed his creator-owned *Six From Sirius* at Marvel's Epic line with fellow *Master of Kung-Fu* alumni Paul Gulacy.

Moench, in addition to writing several Batman stories, is presently developing a conspiracy theory television program with *Homicide: Life on the Streets* star Richard Belzer. CBM asked him to turn back the clock and take a look at his work a quarter century ago on *Planet of the Apes*.

CBM: You're noted as the driving force behind both *Shang-chi*, Master of Kung-fu and Moon Knight. Master of Kung-fu began around the same time as Apes while Moon Knight came much later. What was your background prior to Apes?

MOENCH: I started with Warren which was of course *Creepy*, *Eerie* and *Vampirella*. Then for Skywald I did *Nightmare*, *Psycho* and some other titles. I had written for the *Chicago Sun Times* [Moench lived in Chicago at that point]. I sent some scripts to Archie Goodwin, who was editing the war comics at DC, and Joe Orlando, who was editing the horror titles like *House of Mystery*.

Actually, Archie was the editor at Warren when he bought my first story, (Continued on page 54)

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so he was the one who bought my very first story. I sold some scripts to DC and I was about to do even more work for them. I went to New York and Julie Schwartz took me into his office, swept his hand at some art and asked, "What do you see? What do you like? Justice League? Flash? What do you want?"

I went back to Chicago and thought I should send some stories to Julie. I had also done a proposal for a big coffee table hard cover book, *The Encyclopedia of Horror*. The day that A. S. Barnes—now Barnes & Noble—accepted the book and sent me a contract, Roy Thomas at Marvel called saying, "Why don't you come to New York and work for Marvel?" That was in 1972.

I told Roy I'd try it out for two weeks. It was Manhattan, it was the middle of summer, and it

writing to do. [These pieces] were just like the Warren material. They were 7, 8, 10-page horror stories for *Dracula Lives* and *Tales of the Zombie* and so on. That was to give me enough money to make the move. They told me to voucher as many stories as I wanted. So I was just making up titles, filling out "9 pages" or "8 pages" and putting in the vouchers and they paid me, and then I had to write all of these stories later.

Ghost Rider was the first color book they offered me. I only wrote one issue of that and then they offered me *Manwolf*. That was J. Jonah Jameson's son, if you remember. Then very quickly, it seemed like almost a book a day, I got *Frankenstein*, *Werewolf By Night*, and *Master of Kung-Fu*. This was on top of my editorial duties.

So after seven or eight weeks of this, Roy called me in the office and said "We need more writing from you." I said, "Roy, I'm working here eight hours a day on staff, plus I'm already

writing more than any of your other writers. If you want any more writing out of me, I've got to stay home."

He said, "Well, I thought you'd say that... wait until you train your replacement." That's how it happened. After that came *Planet of the Apes*, *Deadly Hands of Kung-Fu*.

CBM: Don McGregor (writer of *Sabre*,

Nathaniel Dusk, and one of the assistant editors on *Planet of the Apes*) has described you as an infuriatingly fast writer. He said you could get an assignment on Friday and turn it in on Monday.

MOENCH: I could have turned it in on Saturday! I did not know that I was fast until I got to New York. I had no idea. When you write in a vacuum, all alone, you don't know if you're

fast or slow. Then I get to New York and I start hearing comments like Len Wein saying "I had a great day today. I wrote six pages of dialogue."

I said, "What do you mean a great day? Were they really good pages?" He said "I mean it was six whole pages. Usually if I can do two or three I'm lucky."

I've done 28 pages of full plot and script in one day without a problem. That's when I found out I was fast.

CBM: Before you got the assignment to write the POTA adaptation, were you a fan of the films?

MOENCH: I enjoyed the first film a lot. I cannot say I was a big fan of the franchise. I liked the second one, but not quite as much. It was better than most sequels. I'm not even really sure I saw the third one. I know I didn't bother with the last two.

CBM: Did you really write the last two adaptations without seeing them?

MOENCH: I wrote them from the screenplays. That's why the comic adaptations are not accurate with the finished films. I've been asked by many fans "Why did you put that in there?" about several scenes. I worked from the screenplays, so the stories were accurate but not all of the scenes made the final cuts of the films.

CBM: There were two distinctly different prints of *Battle for the Planet of the Apes*, one which had many of the references to the Alpha-Omega bomb from *Beneath in them*. They were in your adaptation and it always seemed to make it a more complete circle.

MOENCH: I was accused of taking all these liberties, but at the same time they would tell me the scenes were really good.

CBM: When you took on the series, did you know it was going to be an on-going thing?

MOENCH: You didn't think like that back then. I loved those days. I hate the way the business is these days. It's such an ordeal to get something going. You have to write a proposal, and then you have to write a shorter proposal because they don't have time to read something that long... then you have to wait for contracts, the lawyers are monkeying around... then you sign the thing, then the editor gets a budget... and so on.



was really awful, but I ended up getting really excited about it. I went back to Chicago, packed up everything, and moved to New York.

CBM: What was your first assignment?

MOENCH: I was hired as an assistant editor which was a glorified proofreader. I think I probably had the shortest tenure on record, something like two months. They gave me all this

Back then you could make a deal with Roy Thomas on second base at the Marvel softball game. You'd run to second base, Roy would be playing short stop or something, he'd say, "Hey, Doug, you want to write the *Inhumans*?" and you'd ask, "What's that?" He'd say, "Monthly, color" and you'd ask who the artist was. He'd say "George Perez" or someone else and you'd agree.

He'd say, "Okay, first one next week" and that would be that. You had no editor looking over your shoulder at that time. The writers were more responsible. Don McGregor was his own editor, I was my own editor, Steve Gerber was his own editor, Steve Englehart was his own editor. Len Wein, Marv Wolfman, Roy Thomas... we all pretty much wrote what we wanted.

CBM: *Don't you think more was actually expected of the writer under that kind of system?*

MOENCH: Yeah. Not only did the editor not tell us what to do, we didn't have to tell the editor what we were doing. Who likes to be a zombie robot? That's why all of the stuff I'm doing now is self-generated.

I still have to go through the hassle of writing a proposal or two proposals and having it read by a committee, having it approved, having contracts and all that, but at least it's all me. I come up with it and they say yes or no. When you're on a monthly book these days, [particularly] if it has to tie in with other titles and that nonsense. It used to be rare and have some weight, and it used to be a big deal. Well, it's not a big deal anymore.

CBM: *What was the approval process like for *Apes*?*

MOENCH: I don't really know. Everything had to be sent to Apjac [Arthur P. Jacobs was the producer behind the film series and Apjac was his production company] and I know there were some issues with the art. It was always things like, "The character can't look like Charlton Heston." In the original stories I did with Mike Ploog and Tom Sutton there were never any complaints that I know of. The only thing I ever



heard was that they were really big fans of what we were doing.

CBM: *Do you still get feedback from fans?*

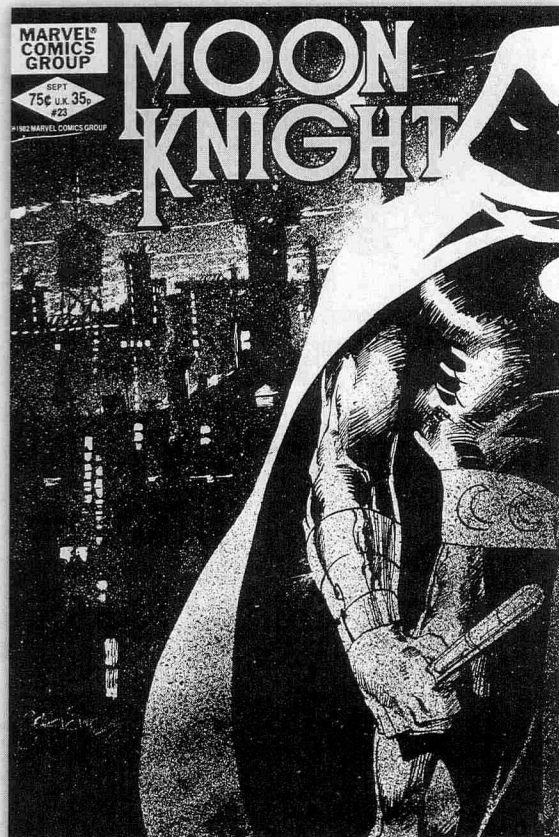
MOENCH: Yes. It's really funny. Because I've done so much, I don't if there are any "Doug Moench" fans, but I've got people who know me only because of *Aztec Ace* [Eclipse series from the '80s] or only because of *Godzilla*, only because of *Planet of the Apes*, only because of *Batman*... there doesn't seem to be anyone who knows all of my work. There is a group that seems to know me from both *Master of Kung-fu* and *Moonknight*. I just did an interview with a guy who only knew me from my horror work, the Warren stuff, Skywald, and the Marvel black and whites.

CBM: *Mike Ploog's artwork on "Terror on the Planet of the Apes" really set an artistic standard for the magazine. What do you think made his work so good?*

MOENCH: I don't know. I could theorize a number of things. Innate talent, and he is old enough to have looked at the masters rather than just comic book guys. And he was trained to a certain extent by Will Eisner.

I don't think there's a better teacher on Earth. If I wanted to be trained by someone, I'd say it would have been Will Eisner or Harvey Kurtzman, and Eisner would probably get the nod.

Not only does Mike know the comic book medium as well as Kurtzman, I think he could



draw a little bit better. I don't know what makes Mike so good. Some guys just are.

CBM: *Were the original stories more of a collaboration than the adaptations of the movies appeared to be, at least in some cases?*

MOENCH: Yes, definitely. I wrote the adaptations full script where I generally prefer to work plot-pencils script.

CBM: *Ploog is someone who drifted—some might say "sprinted"—away from comics pretty quickly. What do you think would have to happen to get someone like that back into the medium?*

MOENCH: We're in contact right now. We're talking about doing something. This is probably the fifth time Mike has said "I'm sick of Hollywood. I'm getting out. Let's work together again." This time it sounds like it might happen. He had some especially bad experiences on the last couple of movies he worked on. He actually sold his house in California and bought a house in England. I think he's in the process of moving in right now. I think he's just tired of the Hollywood nonsense... I think he wants to tell stories again, and I hope we're going to do that soon.

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CBM: In addition to Mike Ploog, Tom Sutton worked with you on several different stories, including the

"Future History Chronicles" with that great City-Ship he illustrated. What was Tom like to work with?

MOENCH: Fantastic! He worked on these gigantic pages whereas most other artists were working on pages 1½ up [the art pages were half again bigger than they were reproduced], he was working twice up. My desk wasn't big enough to hold his pages. You could get more copy on the pages and get some denser stories out of it. He could get more detail in. He really got into *Planet of the Apes*. I happen to think that it sort of jazzed him up for a sort of renaissance in his career. It seemed like a quantum leap at the time.

CBM: Was there a distinct difference in how you wrote a script if you knew specifically who would be illustrating it?

MOENCH: Going back to your question about collaboration, I could say things to Ploog in the beginning and then later on I wouldn't have to say them. I could ask him what he liked to draw and then tailor a story to his preferences, and when a guy is drawing what he likes to draw he does a better job, right? That's where the riverboat stuff [in "Terror on the Planet of the Apes"] like Gunpowder Julius and Steely Dan came from.

I forget now what it was he liked, but he had mentioned that he liked Davy Crocket or frontier-type things, and that gave me the idea for those characters. Steely Dan is my version of Mike Ploog. He's the huge guy just roaring with laughter, an extrovert. I just magnified that. He just loved it and did a great job. He got into one so much that we actually just printed the story from his pencils.

CBM: How did you come up with the characters in "Terror?"

MOENCH: You know what I'm most proud of in there? They used all Latin names in the movies, but they didn't think of Brutus. I used that for my evil gorilla leader. I thought that was great. Anyway, Roy called me in and told me that

Marvel had acquired the rights to *Planet of the Apes*. He said Gerry Conway was going to do it, but he had to drop out. He had written one page of notes. Roy gave it to me. It was a very loose thing, but it had the names Jason and Alexander, one human, one ape, they're friends and they get into trouble. From that, I made them young. I wanted to make it an allegory on racism, which was implicit in the movies. And it seemed to me that kids are not as hung up on race.



CBM: You did a one-shot with Ed Hannigan called "Evolution's Nightmare."

MOENCH: Ed became a buddy of mine. I think he was in the Bullpen doing corrections and stuff. He wanted to do his own story. Back then it was easy. You just had to convince Roy or someone to give you a chance. . . I can't remember if Mike Ploog was running late or they just decided to give him some extra time, but Ed wanted to prove he could do a story. That's pretty much how "Evolution's Nightmare" came about.

CBM: There was another one of the originals called "Kingdom on an Island of the Apes" illustrated by Rico Rival.

MOENCH: It gets back to what I was saying before. I used to get these calls like, "Can you do a one-part Apes story?" and I'd ask when they needed it, and that would be that. I think England went *Planet of the Apes* crazy. Marvel

UK started doing a weekly and they actually got ahead of us at one point.

CBM: At least at one point it was called *Planet of the Apes and Dracula Lives!*

MOENCH: We couldn't keep up with their weekly schedule. They asked me to do this original stuff for England that we later put in the American version. That later happened with *Master of Kung-Fu* and *Deadly Hands of Kung-fu* as well. It didn't last very long. . . and I couldn't keep up with their weekly schedule. I don't remember all the stories.

CBM: So you don't remember all of the stories you've written?

MOENCH: No. Every once in a while someone will put a comic in front of me for an autograph and I'll say, "I'll sign a blank piece of paper, but I won't sign something I didn't write," and the person will say, "Yes, you did write this," and I won't believe them. I'll open it up and there will be my name on the credits. I'll read it and then maybe it will come back to me.

CBM: Do you ever get ones that you read and you still don't remember?

MOENCH: Yes. [laughter] I'll actually go back and find a carbon copy of the story and finally have to admit I wrote it. [more laughter]

CBM: Do you have a favorite moment from the series?

MOENCH: I was at an ACBA meeting [the Academy of Comic Book Arts]. Neal Adams was President, I was Vice-President. Ploog was there. I always loved getting together with that guy. He's a rodeo rider, a bronco buster. . . he's just this big guy. He's shorter than I am, but he seems bigger. He had this huge beard. He showed up for a meeting, which he generally didn't do, with the riverboat pages. After the meeting, looking at those pages, that was probably the best time. That was really a quantum leap for Ploog. He was capable of it all along, but he really got into that story. That was really great.

CBM: Hey Doug, thanks for talking with CBM readers.

MOENCH: You bet. . . it was fun.



Want to read more about *Planet of the Apes*? Check out CBM on-line at www.gemstone.com.