

MICHAEL AVALLONE

Beneath the Planet of the Apes
A Bullet for Pretty Boy
Cannonball [aka Carquake]
The Cannonball Run
Charlie Chan and the Curse of the Dragon Queen
The Doctors
Felicia
The Felony Squad
Friday the 13th Part 3
The Girl from U.N.C.L.E. [2 books]
Hawaii Five-0 [2 books]
Hornet's Nest
The Incident
Kaleidoscope
Krakatoa, East of Java
The Last Escape
Madame X
The Main Attraction
The Man from U.N.C.L.E.: The Thousand Coffins Affair
Mannix
The Night Walker
One More Time
The Partridge Family [8 books]
Station Six Sahara
A Woman Called Golda
Young Dillinger

Nova materialized in the door . . . She saw Taylor, saw the fight. The shock and the joy combined in one mammoth surge of emotion that needed some outlet, some vent through which to escape. Some avenue along which to meet the world.

The miracle occurred.

Nova's neck muscles arched, her lips parted and she spoke.

The name.
 The magic word.
 "Tay-lor."

Beneath the Planet of the Apes

The exceedingly prolific Michael Avallone has written more novelizations of movies and TV shows than most other authors; in fact, the New Jersey-based Avallone has written so much, and done it so quickly, that he's earned a reputation as "The Fastest Typewriter in the East." He's written more than 180 novels (often using one of more than a dozen pseudonyms), most in the mystery and suspense fields.

Avallone's first novelization was *The Main Attraction* in 1963. He received the assignment from his editor at Belmont Books, who was familiar with his frequently Hollywood-oriented suspense novels. "In 1962 I'd already done about ten Ed Noon novels, and they'd always been cinematic and had a lot of movie references in them," said Avallone. "So I was already known for a certain kind of movie expertise and knowing my Hollywood." [1] *The Main Attraction* was the first of twenty movie novelizations, several of which have gone on to become well-respected novels apart from their original films—*Shock Corridor* and *Beneath the Planet of the Apes* are two others which have gone on to become cult classics. Avallone also novelized *The Last Escape*, ghostwriting for Max Walker (aka James T. Bryans) as a favor at the last minute.

In 1964 Avallone novelized Robert Bloch's psychological suspense script, *The Night Walker*, about a killer who tries to drive a woman to madness by simulating nightmares. The book was published in 1965 under Avallone's pseudonym "Sidney Stuart," but the publisher emblazoned Bloch's name prominently across the cover and spine in an attempt to cash in on Bloch's post-*Psycho* fame. "Bloch had no idea that I was only getting \$500 to novelize that script," said Avallone. "He told them to give me more money, but they didn't. What's even worse, the book comes out and they make it look like Bloch wrote it—it's an old publishing trick."

Avallone got the *Night Walker* assignment during a particularly lean period. "We had just moved out to New Jersey, I had sued somebody in New York for something they did to a book of mine, and I couldn't sell anything. I had to take a job at J. C. Penney's

for \$50 a week as a clothing salesman. When the *Night Walker* job came and I was offered only \$500 for it, I was thinking of ten weeks times fifty dollars. I thought, 'I can do this in three days and make as much money as I would in ten weeks at Penney's. So it was sort of my break-out book, and that summer I did *Station Six Sahara* for \$2,000.'

Avallone did in fact break out in a big way in his next book. Although he only got \$1,000 for the job, the book has become his most famous novel, and in fact can be cited as the book that began the modern phenomenon of TV-based novels. While there were TV novelizations previously—shows like *Ben Casey*, *Arrest and Trial*, and *Dr. Kildare* inspired a few books—Avallone's *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.: The Thousand Coffins Affair* was the book that really started the ball rolling. Ironically, Avallone wound up with a rotten deal from the publisher on the project. "I did it for a flat fee of \$1,000 with a handshake deal to do the rest of the series," said Avallone. "Then Ace double-crossed everybody and they got follow-up writers to do the others. They sold it to sixty foreign countries, and it stayed in print until 1970. Every copy of the book says April 1965—there's no record of a printing order or anything—but they had five printings in the first three months! Everything worked right in *The Thousand Coffins Affair*, and it sort of set the pattern for all kinds of TV spy books. I was very satisfied with it, and despite the monetary beating I took, it did get me a lot of work down through the years."

Avallone faced some minor editorial restrictions on the *U.N.C.L.E.* book, at the studio's insistence. The villainous organization of the book, Golgotha, was described by Avallone as being German. "M G M insisted on making them Russians—and of course this is 1964, the height of the Cold War," said Avallone.

Avallone normally novelizes the movie from the screenplay, and doesn't see the film until after he's finished. On several occasions, he's found that the resulting movie is nothing like the script he worked from, or his novelization—often the changes have been infuriating. "Some of these scripts were absolutely marvelous," Avallone said. "And that's why I was able to do such a good writing job on them. The only reason they're not really famous is because the pictures weren't that good—their directors really bombed."

Avallone considers *Beneath the Planet of the Apes* to be the

worst film he ever novelized, a misfortune because he found the original script to be so good. "Nobody will ever know how [director Ted] Post screwed up that movie," Avallone said. "He really blew that picture; he blew all the punch lines. [For example,] in the script and in my book I built up carefully the fact that Nova cannot speak English. The whole thing builds up to the first time she's able to say Charlton Heston's name, Taylor, and it gets her killed. It's completely thrown away in the movie—but *not* thrown away in the book."

Beneath the Planet of the Apes was also the quickest novelization he's written, completed in only three days. "As you know, I write very quickly," said Avallone. "New American Library gave me the assignment on, say, a Friday. The editor says I should get the contract by Wednesday, but I already had the script. So I'm out here, and it's snowing, and I've got this crackerjack script in front of me, so to make a long story short, by Monday I got the book finished. I just fell in love with it. Here comes the punch line—Tuesday, N.A.L. calls me and tells me they lost the contract! So here I am sitting with what I thought was a masterpiece, and they lost the right to do a novelization of the movie! But I kept my mouth shut and waited." Bantam Books won the bid for the novelization license, and signed Keith Laumer to write it. Something came up, however, and Laumer had to back out; Avallone's agent got wind of this and worked out a hasty deal to have him replace Laumer on the project. "Here's Avallone sitting with an already completed manuscript, so they got the damn thing for \$3,500 flat! It went into eight printings, two editions, and I probably lost another \$50,000 again, without a royalty!"

Avallone has normally worked without any cooperation from film companies when novelizing their movies. The opposite has been true for the television novels. "For instance, when I did *The Doctors*, they sent me copies of seven programs," said Avallone. "They sent me their entire format for the series, how all the characters broke down, what had gone on before. When it was an ongoing television show, they were very concerned. A film is already completed, so they're not that interested."

Avallone's latest novelization was *Friday the 13th, Part 3*, published by Leisure Books in 1982. Interestingly enough, in 1987 when Signet Books obtained from Paramount Pictures a license to novelize all of the *Friday the 13th* films, they issued a

new novelization of *Part 3* by “Simon Hawke” (Nicholas Yermakov), and Avallone’s book disappeared in the process. In his novelization, as he has done in all his books, Avallone took great pains to make all the characters *real*. “In the movie, the thirteen people are just thirteen people who get chopped up,” he said. “In my book, I made *people* out of them. The couple in the beginning—the farm couple who run the little roadside store—are two living, breathing people in the book. In the picture, they’re just two people who walk around and get chopped up.”

It’s this kind of expansion of character and narrative that Avallone excels at in his novelizations—taking the very brief instructions from the movie script and breathing life and blood into them. “For example, take *Krakatoa, East of Java*—that should have been one of the all-time great movies, but it didn’t turn out that good,” said Avallone. “In the screenplay, you get this: ‘Fade in on Singapore harbor. The *Batavia Queen* is docked. Captain Hansen is up on the railing. Captain Hansen speaks.’ Now, in my book, in the first page and a half I describe *Krakatoa* the volcano as a person, stirring fitfully and awakening. I spend the next three pages describing Singapore harbor, to set the stage—something a movie does in one second.

“That was another crackerjack script, good characters, good dialog. But the director seemed to lose the ball on the damn thing. If you remember the opening, Squid is up on the thing that’s going into the hold and he suddenly falls—the picture starts with a death. That’s thrown away in the movie, it just happens. But in the screenplay, and in my book, it’s got dramatic size. Squid is a person we know, and we see how all the people react to him. There are lots of key moments like that, which are just thrown away in the picture.” One of the values of Avallone’s novelizations is that they preserve the potential found in the script that many of these films seem to have lost in their screen versions. What they could have been, and unfortunately weren’t, can still be found in Avallone’s books.

NOTE

1. Michael Avallone, interview by author, Nov. 16, 1989.

JOHN JAKES

Conquest of the Planet of the Apes

Cries of animal fury filled the plaza. Governor Breck’s twitching body finally went limp. The screeching of the frustrated apes grew louder as they searched for new targets for their unleashed resentment. By twos and threes, they broke away from the circle of light where Breck’s body turned slowly. They raced toward the growing crowd of human prisoners in the holding area.

Firelight. Gleaming eyes. The sound of tracheons. And apes screaming their blood-mad rage . . .

Almost pityingly, Caesar said to the black man, “Do you doubt me? Why don’t you answer, Mr. MacDonald?”

But MacDonald had closed his eyes as the silent tears ran down his face.

Years before John Jakes achieved fame for his best-selling *Kent Family Chronicles* and the *North and South* saga, he was writing in the fantasy and science fiction field—a fistful of short stories and some two dozen novels, including a moderately successful series of sword-and-sorcery sagas featuring his character Brak the Barbarian.

In 1973, when Award Books was novelizing the last three *Planet of the Apes* movies, they sought well-known science fiction authors to write them. Jerry Pournelle was contracted to novelize *Escape from the Planet of the Apes*, and David Gerrold wrote the final one, *Battle for the Planet of the Apes*. Jakes received the assignment to novelize the fourth film, *Conquest of the Planet of the Apes*, from his then-agent, Scott Meredith, for a flat fee of from \$1200 to \$1500.

“The only challenge I can remember in connection with the job is the challenge to deliver the finished manuscript in about three

weeks,” Jakes recalled. “I did not relish the assignment, but I took it because I needed the cash, and had seen and enjoyed all of the films in the series.” [1]

Jakes worked without any contact with the *Apes* film company, working simply from a screenplay he had received from the Meredith Agency. “I don’t recall making any significant changes in the material,” Jakes said. “Of course, there was inevitably some internalization of characters’ thoughts—the obvious sort of thing you come up with in transferring material from a dramatic medium to a narrative one—but beyond that, I felt obligated to present a novelized version of what was on the screen, not a new and unfamiliar variant.”

Jakes found movie novelizations as legitimate a category of fiction as any other. “You read a book—you then want to see the movie. Why not the reverse?” he reasoned. “The novelization is merely a convenient way to make this possible, and as long as it’s honestly presented, what’s the harm? As a kid, I devoured magazines which turned my favorite movies into short stories (not novelizations). There was *Movie Story* covering A and B films, and *Cowboy Movie Thrillers* which did the same job on Saturday-afternoon westerns. There were probably others as well.”

Despite this, Jakes felt somewhat degraded while novelizing *Conquest of the Planet of the Apes*. At the time of the assignment, he was going through a period of depression about his writing, seeing it as leading nowhere. He had begun writing s.f. stories in his twenties and by his late thirties had published two dozen novels. “With the exception of two or three, I did not feel any of them came off well,” said Jakes. “I certainly never received any recognition for them, even within the field.” *Conquest of the Planet of the Apes* seemed even more degrading. “At the time I took the job,” said Jakes, “I was feeling so bad about my writing career that this assignment had special impact. It almost drove me to quit altogether. I thought, in effect, ‘If this is the best assignment I can get after twenty years of selling material, what’s the use?’ Rightly or wrongly, I took the assignment as a signal that the Meredith Agency had downgraded me to the lowest basement of writing talent (Scott later denied this vigorously in a personal letter; but my feelings didn’t alter very much after I received it, and I left the agency soon after).”

Rather than signifying the end of his career, however, *Conquest*

gave Jakes a much-needed reprieve and, as it turned out, was only a few books removed from the light at the end of the tunnel. “After I did the novelization, there was a period of a couple of years in which I wrote only sporadically, and without much heart,” said Jakes. “Then came the assignment to write the *Kent Family Chronicles* (originally *The American Bicentennial Series*—five novels, later expanded to eight). I was so far down, I saw those books as perhaps my last shot at doing something worthwhile.

“The rest is more or less history.”

NOTE

1. John Jakes, letter to author, Nov. 21, 1989.

GEORGE ALEC EFFINGER

Planet of the Apes #1: Man the Fugitive
Planet of the Apes #2: Escape from Tomorrow
Planet of the Apes #3: Journey into Terror
Planet of the Apes #4: Lord of the Apes

Hooves, thundering like the most violent of great storms, broke the gentle quiet of the night. The three gorilla guards rode into the small clearing where Virдон had demonstrated the compass to Galen. Now the trees were lit by blazing torches carried by the mounted apes. Strange, sinister shadows leaped among the branches, and the place that had been so friendly to Burke, Virдон and Galen now looked sinister. The gorilla police reined their horses to stop, but the lathered animals wheeled and pranced, their energies difficult to control. They had been ridden hard all day and night, and now they stomped the ground impatiently. The first gorilla leaped to the ground, his torch in his hand. He walked back and forth over the clearing, scanning the area for any sign of the fugitives. After a time, he spotted what were obviously tracks. "Through here," he shouted. "They've been this way!"

Man The Fugitive

When the popular *Planet of the Apes* movie series was made into a television show in the mid 1970s, a book series was a natural tie-in. Appearing from Award Books, which had novelized the last three *Apes* movies, a four-book series based on TV scripts was written by science fiction author George Alec Effinger.

Effinger, who'd written no tie-ins previously and has written none since, was won over to the assignment by his agent. "At the time, I was very seriously ill," said Effinger. "I required a lot of hospitalization and surgery, and I had no medical insurance. I undertook the four novelizations purely to help pay my hospital

bills. I probably wouldn't have done them otherwise, because they would have taken time away from my more serious writing." [1]

Effinger worked from scripts provided by the show's producers, adapting two scripts into each novel. "The most difficult thing about writing the novelization was the constraint the TV producers put on me," said Effinger. "I wasn't permitted to add any new scenes. And the scripts were very slim. I was to take a couple scripts and make them into a book-length novel. The only way I could do that with the small amount of action and dialogue in the scripts was to describe things a lot and have my characters think a lot. It was almost excruciatingly difficult to get the material to booklength without resorting to very clumsy and obvious padding."

Effinger's second major problem in novelizing the TV series was that he wasn't able to view any of the shows prior to novelizing them. He had only the typewritten scripts to work from. "When I began, the episodes hadn't even been filmed yet," Effinger said. "One of the major characters hadn't even been cast. So when I asked the producers to send me descriptions of the actors so that I could describe the characters in the books, they couldn't help me. I was really given very little to go on."

Effinger felt it was his responsibility as a novelizer to remain absolutely faithful to the original scripts, and strove to do this in the *Apes* novelizations. "I incorporated every bit of dialogue precisely as written, although in my effort to expand each scene, I had to surround that dialogue with a quantity of newly written material."

Effinger admittedly wrote the books primarily to procure badly needed income, and has little respect for the form. "I've never had the slightest desire to read [a novelization]," he said, "and I can't imagine what entertainment is derived by someone who's already seen the movie or TV program. As the property was originally conceived by its author as a visual production, I can't imagine that a novelization can be as successful as the actual film version. That's only my opinion, of course. I wouldn't be surprised to learn that there have been some novelizations that surpassed the screen product. Of course, there is often tremendous commercial potential as a tie-in, and as far as that goes, the novelization is a legitimate project."

Despite the restraints and stigma associated with a novelization project, Effinger nevertheless took the work seriously, and lent his own narrator's voice to the books. "I think I managed to inject a lot of my own writing style into the *Ape* books," said Effinger. "I put in quite a bit more humor, as is my usual technique. I can't say for certain—I've never read the books once they came out of my typewriter, and I don't remember them very well at all."

NOTE

1. George Alec Effinger, letter to author, Aug. 9, 1990.