

# CONSPIRACY OF THE PLANET OF THE APES

With Drew Gaska

The first Planet of the Apes offering from BLAM! Ventures, "Conspiracy of the Planet of the Apes" will be an over-sized illustrated novel. Set during the classic 1968 film.

"Conspiracy" tells the story of what happened between the scenes and centres on the astronaut Landon, Chimpanzee scientists Dr. Milo and Dr. Galen, and Gorilla Security Chief Marcus.

The novel, due to hit stores in 2010... is written by Andrew E. C. Gaska, Christian Berntsen and Erik Matthews, and contains over 20 full colour paintings from various top talents in the industry.



Please tell us a little about yourself and life before BLAM!

Was there ever life before BLAM!?

In many ways there wasn't - as BLAM! is simply an extension of where my life has been leading me all along. I knew at an early age that I wanted to create stories. I was also a continuity Nazi. Even when I was seven years old and playing with Star Wars figures with the other kids on my block, everything had to count, everything had to make sense. One of the kids would have Han die, and I would step in and be like, "No, no, no! He has to be alive for the next movie! and he is in this month's issue of the comic!" Another kid would join in and have two different Luke figures. I would be like, "Unless one of those



Lukes is a clone, and this has something to do with the clone wars, you are outta here!" I wasn't very popular - until I got a little older, and Dungeons & Dragons replaced action figures. Then I was slightly more popular with the nerd crowd - because I made a great Dungeon Master, and everyone else just wanted to play.

I was always in advanced art classes and whatnot growing up - and then went to the School of Visual Arts for college. I have a degree in Illustration with a focus on cartooning - which means, um - a comic book diploma. In college I studied under masters like Carmine Infantino (creator of the Silver Age Flash and Batgirl) and Walt Simonson (Thor). I learned that I knew an awful lot about how to do comics, but my art wasn't as strong as my stories, so I concentrated on my writing. I was privately tutored in writing for comics by Denny O'Neil at his insistence. Denny was at the time in charge of Batman at DC Comics (and was so consecutively for 15 years), and had written many comics over the years, such as Sword of Azrael, Green Arrow, the Question, and more, as well as editing G. I. Joe and Daredevil. While at school I worked gratis for several up and coming comic companies that up and went. I graduated college just as comics was at an all time low, and was lucky enough to get work in the video game industry, doing freelance graphic work for Rockstar Games. It was then that I finally started to become financially stable enough to figure out exactly what it was I wanted to do with the rest of my life, and that was form a studio that could both allow me to purge the creative urge and help me conquer the entertainment industry, one forgotten sci-fi license at a time. Thus, BLAM! was born.

Who else forms BLAM! and what credentials do they bring to the table? Are you all avid Apes fans?

We are very much all ape crazy. BLAM! is actually run by myself, my fiancée/producer Leisa Lacovetti, and my wookiee/assistant Jim Chulbna - BLAM! Ventures is essentially a family of people working together who all love what they are doing and care about each other.

Everyone else involved works on a freelance basis. Christian Berntsen and Erik Matthews both served as my co-writers on Conspiracy. Christian is a long time collaborator of mine who wrote for the former comic book industry trade magazine Comic Culture. Erik is one of the owners/creators of Tombs of Kobol (formerly the Cylon Alliance); a popular sci-fi fan website dedicated to preserving the gems of Science Fiction from 1800-1990. Consulting Editor Rich Handley is best known for his "Timeline of the Planet of the Apes" book, and his 'Lady Luck' comic story appearing in Star Wars Tales, as well as various articles written for Star Wars Insider, Star Wars Gamer, and Star Trek Communicator.

*Where did the idea to produce an original APES novel originate?*

I first became an apes fan as a child watching the ABC 4:30 movie. I remember catching the first movie and being surprised to see the story continue throughout the week; especially after the world altering events in 'Beneath the Planet of the Apes' (Interesting enough as 'Battle' was not part of the line up, I didn't even know the movie existed until about a decade later). As these movies were repeated quite often, even as a child as I watched multiple viewings, I would see questions that seemed to remain unanswered between each film. As an adult, I know that these were continuity errors. As a child, I used my imagination to fill in the blanks and cover the mistakes. So it could be said that the genesis of these novels was actually in my childhood. The plan for this series of books has always been to enhance the greater story of the entire POTA saga by filling in the holes that the feature films left wide open.

About five years ago, BLAM! was working with Battlestar Galactica actor/author Richard Hatch on his Great War of Magellan comic series, and the decision was made to broaden our scope by producing sci-fi properties that had been left by the wayside. When FOX showed interest in bringing POTA to our illustrated novel format, the decision was made that this would be our flagship release under our Lost Tribes imprint.

*So 'Conspiracy' is the result of ideas that have been fermenting in your collective heads for many years - not a relatively recent brainstorming session?*

Correct. This goes back to the 4:30 movie in my camp, and my obsession with Dr. Milo. Milo shows up briefly in the third movie, is the chimp who made everything happen and he's dead before the first reel is over. My intention all along was to tell over this two novel arc the story of how Milo was able to raise the astronauts' ship, repair it, and get himself, Cornelius and Zira "back in time." When co-writer Erik Matthews was brought on board the project, and I expressed to him my desire to not only tell Milo's story but also set the first book during the first movie, he imparted to me that since his childhood, he was always concerned with what had happened to Landon - and had gone so far as to generate the complete scene of Landon's lobotomy and interrogation by Zaius in his head. Upon our creative meetings, Christian Berntsen developed a liking to and an affinity for the good Chief Marcus. Christian's take on the gorilla security chief helped us to abolish preconceived notions and stereotypes about gorillas specifically and the other ape archetypes in general. When I had writer's block, my producer and soon to be wife, Leisa Lacovetti, helped me on a crucial plot point that I don't want to give away here - one which allows Landon and Milo to make their first connection. Now enter consulting editor Rich Handley. A latecomer in Conspiracy's genesis, Rich is possibly the only bigger Apes nerd on the planet than myself. His timeline book had already served as

necessary reference for my writings before he was involved, and his extensive knowledge helped us to pull our separate visions and writing styles together and unify them. So while the whole genesis of this project was from my court, and in the end it is being completed by me as well, I could not have pulled it off without everyone involved. The whole package that is Conspiracy is truly a collaborative effort.

*How involved are FOX in the production? Do they have a say in what you can or cannot include?*

FOX has been making approvals at each stage of the series' development. They seem excited by both the direction and format we have chosen to bring Conspiracy to audiences.

*How far-reaching is your license? Are you restricted to using only characters and situations from the films, or can you explore the TV series, the animated and comic book incarnations too.*

Our license specifically states that our books are based on the characters, situations, and settings from the original 1968 Planet of the Apes movie. That said, that film's sequels, television series, animated series, and comics are also based on characters, situations, and setting from the original 1968 movie. Take that as you will.

*Is anything off-limits to you, Boulle's novel or Burton's film, for instance?*

As far as I know, the Boulle novel is not part of FOX's POTA franchise - while the first film is based loosely on the book, the recognisable characters, setting and situations of the POTA films are not present in that novel. It was always my goal to set BLAM!'s novels within the framework of the classic POTA series, and FOX has indicated that the Burton film and it's ancillary offshoots were part of their own universe separate from the classic line. Therefore, these two are off limits for us.

*Do you also have a Planet of the Apes comics license, and if so, do you plan to pursue that line of publishing?*

Due to the nature of licensing deals, an illustrated novel is considered a "graphic novel" in legal terms. Our current deal is for two illustrated novels with an option to renew if these do well. So while we currently are not planning to produce POTA comics, the rights to do so are tied up in our license until it expires. I personally would love to see our Apes projects do so well so that we could expand in that direction - BLAM! is in production on several comic projects at this time, including the upcoming sci-fi series Critical Millennium (created by Christian and myself and to be released through Archaia in 2010), our Space: 1999 comic series, and our BLAM! Comics Anthology (both due out in 2010 as well). So if the novels do well, the sky's the limit!

*How were the 'Conspiracy' artists chosen - did you go after the people you specifically wanted to work with, or was it a case of using who was available?*

The initial Conspiracy artist list was chosen from a group of artists whose work I have long admired and hoped I would be blessed to work with someday. Jim Steranko and Ken Kelly have been good friends of mine for the past several years. Others were chosen during convention searches - wherein my fiancée and I would scour artist alley at numerous shows to find artists that were just right for specific pieces. I am very happy with the artists that are appearing in the first book, and have a few surprises in store for the second, and am proud to be working with all of them.

*POTA has a long history of being blessed with the work of many wonderful artists. Is there any chance that BLAM might employ the services of APE veterans such as Bob Larkin and Mike Ploog? (There's also; Ken Barr, Pablo Marcos, Herb Trimpe and Greg Theakston?)*

We have yet to contact Mr. Larkin, Mr. Marcos, Mr. Barr and Mr. Ploog but would love to have them involved in the second book.

We would also love to work with Herb and Greg on comics projects, whether they were APES related or not - (I am a huge fan of Herb Trimpe, having grown up reading G.I. JOE in the 80s!) their styles unfortunately just don't gel with the concept of these two illustrated novel - each piece save for the chapter breaks is a full colour painting. Part of the concept behind this project was to bring well known artists who have never worked on POTA and their unique vision of these classic characters to the table which is why we pursued the likes of Joe Jusko, Sanjulian and Jim Steranko - all legends in this industry who have never visited the Planet of the Apes until now.

*Do you have any plans for APES beyond Conspiracy?*

Currently there are two books planned with the possibility of expanding the story arc to a total of six novels. The first book itself is entitled "Conspiracy of the Planet of the Apes" and tells the story of Landon during the first movie and shows many characters that appear from the films' sequels and what they were doing at the time of the film. The second book (currently untitled) ties up the loose ends between the first and second film and tells what happened to Taylor during the time he was missing in "Beneath the Planet of the Apes."

*Is the first novel fully self-contained? Will it offer a 'jumping on' point and be fully accessible to those that may not be too familiar with POTA?*

Both novels stand on their own, but together paint the larger picture of how Milo, Cornelius and Zira were able to escape the destruction of the Planet. Whether or not we go past the second book depends on sales, so I am not at liberty to discuss the plot lines for the remaining four books. However I will tell you that like the first two, their stories weave in and out of apes canon, and each stands as a complete story in its own right. We want to entertain both long time readers and those with no prior knowledge of Apes as well.

*You've already commissioned work from some wonderful artists - will the format of 'Conspiracy' be large enough to showcase their work - do you have any idea of the dimensions and page count? Hardback or soft cover etc?*

We are going for an either 8.5x11 or 9x12 format for the books, although this is subject to change. The books will definitely be hard-cover and there will be faux leather slip cased editions available as well, possibly including extra paintings but I cannot confirm that at this time. The slipped cased editions will each have a hieroglyph from one of the Apes embossed on the case. Since we are going over final revisions to the draft now, I don't have an exact page count for you yet but it is hovering somewhere over the 200 page mark.

*APES fans are notoriously difficult to please... how concerned are you about catering to the hardcore - or are you hoping to appeal more to a new generation?*

Yes. Next question... No, seriously, I have long believed that you can satisfy both the hardcore fans and entice new audiences to a project at the same time. For example, in Conspiracy, there is a flashback scene to a dinner held by ANSA to celebrate the Liberty 1's launch. Landon chats with several other astronauts at the party. I have placed pertinent characters from the Apes franchise at the party that long time fans will be very excited to see there. However, I have presented it in a way that if you don't know who these people are it



THE HUNT by Brian Rood

doesn't matter, they are simply fellow members of ANSA and serve to move the story along. Basically, it is my goal to achieve the best of both worlds.

*What is your general perception of the Planet of the Apes fan base. Is there any notable difference between 'us' and say, Star Trek or Battlestar Galactica fans?*

The main difference is not in the fans themselves but in the products that have been made available to them. Both Star Wars and Star Trek (and Galactica to a lesser extent) have had a sprawling series of original novels and comics which literally have expended their universes. While there was much merchandise produced for Apes in the '70s, the only original literature was Marvel's run of comics and the British Annuals, followed years later by Adventure, Malibu and finally, Mr. Comics. While there was a series of novels for Apes released in the '70s, they were all adaptations of films, television episodes and the animated series. The classic Apes universe has not seen the release of an original novel until Conspiracy. Period. What this has done is created a fan base that is ravenous for more. I'm sure you are aware if you search the Interweb, you will find that many fans have taken matters into their own hands and created numerous fan fiction Apes comics and stories. As with any medium, the quality of these stories range from mediocre to excellent (one of my favourite ape stories of all time is in fact the fan comic 'Return to Yesterday' by Mike McColm). Regardless of quality, each of those fan stories shows a love and reverence for the Almighty Bomb (err, Planet of the Apes) and the fans' reactions to these stories, be it love or hate, also show a growing need for them to have more to digest. Conspiracy will be the first official original novel set in the classic time period and we hope to give Apes fans a whole lot to either rant or rave about.

*How did BLAM!'s Comic-Con booth do in San Diego? Are APES still very much in the public consciousness?*

We did extremely well with regard to getting the word out despite the fact that there were some hiccups that caused the advertising for the Con to go into effect only a few days before. We created exclusive bio trading cards for major characters in Conspiracy with art by Matt Busch, as well as Landons's official dog tags as giveaways - and ran out of our allotments each day of the show. Ironically, the dog tags which we were giving away for free were up on ebay the next day selling as a "buy it now" for \$24.99 - \$39.99 with the set of five cards. The fact that people were willing to buy these for these prices on ebay, plus all the positive responses we had at the booth in regard to the Conspiracy storyline tells me that there is still a huge following for gorillas, chimps and orangutans in the world.

Incidentally, if any of your readers were unable to make it to San Diego this past year we still have a number of Alpha and Omega print sets and an extremely limited number of card and dog tag sets available for sale in our online boutique, the AMMO DEPOT

<http://www.blamventures.com/store>

*With the use of 'Liberty 1' you would appear to be incorporating information from the ANSA 'mockumentary' that came with the Blu Ray set last year... were you at all involved with that release?*

We were not. But I was thankful that it came out before Conspiracy was finished, allowing me ample time to use the find and replace feature in MS Word to change 'Icarus' to 'Liberty 1.' I am very continuity driven in my work: I don't believe you have to violate what



Drew Gaska

has come before in order to tell a good story. The past history of characters serve only to flesh them out and make them more human (or ape as it may be). When the Blu Ray set was released, it was important to me to incorporate information from the "mockumentary" rather than contradict it. In fact, some information from the Blu Ray actually inspired specific scenes in the novel, not the least important of which is that both Landon and Stewart had served together on the Mars/Juno mission prior to Liberty 1's launch.

*Beyond APES what other franchises do you hope to resurrect?*

Funny you should ask that. Our second franchise is the 1970s science fiction series Space: 1999. Space: 1999 is an incredible journey that unfortunately has never achieved the audience that it's rich storyline deserves. BLAM! hopes to change all that starting in 2010. We are billing it as sci-fi's lost 'epic.' As for other licenses, I can't get into much detail as deals are pending but I can tell you that both my fiancée and I are rabid Battlestar Galactica fans - both classic and modern (and even 1980). I would love to do something with John Carpenter's The Thing one day as well as Godzilla and Gamera (I am a huge monster fan). I am also a big fan of the original Star Wars trilogy, and would love the opportunity to play in that universe as well - but that would hardly be a resurrection, would it? I've also got a Batman story or two rattling around in my brain. Basically, I have much admiration for the world of comics and science fiction and there are very few franchises that I don't have at least one story to tell in.

*Finally, would you agree that 'Gaska' is the perfect name for a gorilla :0)*

Of course, Gaska is my father's name!

For updates on BLAM! Ventures' Planet of the Apes series, join the Conspiracy List and check out these other links on the web:

THE CONSPIRACY LIST: email at: [thehitlist@blamventures.com](mailto:thehitlist@blamventures.com)

THE AMMO DEPOT: <http://www.blamventures.com/store/>

COPOTA MYSPACE: <http://www.myspace.com/conspiracyapes>

COPOTA FACEBOOK: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Conspiracy-of-the-Planet-of-the-Apes-Illustrated-Novel/143168634554>

THE LIBERTY LOGS TWITTER: <http://twitter.com/thelibertylogs>

COPOTA WEBSITE: <http://www.blamventures.com/pota/>