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We recently had the chance to chat with Bill O'Neil writer of Crossgen's "Snake Plissken Chronicles" and Image Comics "Violent Messiahs". Bill is also the creator of "Chassis" and "Diplomats" which is due out next year. Bill took some time out to talk what is happening in the world of comics with "Snake Plissken Chronicles" and what we can look forward to in its pages and from Hurricane Entertainment! So, read on and enjoy the conversation and interview with Bill O'Neil.

Dragon's Keep: Bill, how did you form Hurricane Entertainment?

Bill O'Neil: That is sort of a long story; I will give you the shortened version. I was doing a comic book called "Chassis". We were publishing that at Millinium Comics way back in 96. We weren't very happy with the way the situation was being run over there. So, I suggested to Jan my wife, "Why don't we just start publishing on our own, start our own company". Jan considered the idea and decided that might be a good idea. We decided at the time, I had another idea for another book called "Violent Messiahs". We brought Joshua Dysart on as our writer and I drew the original black and white issue that we did. We self published that through our own company Hurricane Entertainment. That is the book we first did, that issue, to get our whole apparatus up and running. Shortly after that we brought "Chassis" over to our own company Hurricane. That was just selling better because it was in color. Eventually, a few years after that in 1999 both properties got picked up by Image.

DK: How did Hurricane Entertainment get the gig with "Snake Plisskin", how did that come down?

BO: Well, we are represented by two gentlemen by the name of Kevin Cleary and Josh Morris. At the time they were repping us, our properties in Hollywood at a company called ACME. Now, all of us are at Maverick. They are now representing us over at Maverick, which is Madonna's company.

DK: These are your agents then?

BO: Yeah. The two of them were working with producer Deborah Hill and John Carpenter; director of "Escape from New York" and "Escape from L.A." on re-launching the "Snake Plissken" franchise. Kevin and Josh mentioned the idea of doing a comic book as part of the re-launch. Since they knew us from our work on "Violent Messiahs" and they are still representing the property in Hollywood, they set up a meeting with us and John and Deborah. Tone did some sketches of Kurt Russell as "Snake Plissken" for the meeting. It went well and we joined with them in a partnership with the property as opposed to a license. We are not paying them to do the comic book, it is a partnership situation.

DK: I have scene the preview and pics from Crossgen; it looks really cool and exciting. I love the whole apocalyptic feel, the futuristic feel, I love that whole vibe. How closely related is the series to the movies? Is the series after "Escape From New York"? What can we look forward to?

BO: The comic book literally picks up the very next day after the first film. In our meetings with John and Deborah, he (John Carpenter) was very open to ideas. When we sat down he was like, "So, what do you want to do"? "What time period"? "Do you want aliens"? "What do you want do"? He was very open to ideas. If I could come up with a cool way to put aliens into the Snake Plissken world and John thought it was cool, we could give it a try. I was very excited about that. If I had a cool reason to shoot Snake to Mars, "Escape From Mars" we could do it.

DK: A lot of creative freedom.

BO: A great amount of creative freedom in part when it comes to adventures and the environment. "Snake" is a pretty well defined as it where. So, I can't deviate much from him. I can't give him a love interest. I can't have him stray too far from his core archetype of character. But I have got a really good range of space to cover other concepts in the book.

DK: Is this series on going or a limited?

BO: It is on going. Generally told in four issues story arch's, like complete movies. The first story arch brings "Snake Plissken" to Atlantic City. Because of some legal situation, Kurt Russell, John Carpenter, and Deborah, have the rights to "Snake Plissken" but not to "Escape From New York" or "Escape From L.A." So, we can't mention either film by name in the comic. So, when people ask me, "What is going on with Snake"? I generally do a play on words like, "After Snake Plissken's little trouble in the Big Apple...." After that distraction (Big Apple) Snake goes back to his life of crime and he heads down to Atlantic

City to team up with a partner in crime of his. Their big scheme is to steal the car Kennedy was in when he was assassinated. It is on display in a casino called, "The Dead Presidents", which has this whole presidential money thing going through it. It is Atlantic City, but it is an alternate Atlantic City that takes place in the world of Snake Plissken. So, everything is pushed to eleven. Casino's are eighty stories tall and have giant cartoon characters on them. Like the things in Vegas, like that cowboy. Just real big and gaudy. That's the plot, to steal the car for a client who will then give them a lot of cash for it. It is the element that gets the story moving and then lots of chaos ensues from there.

DK: You talk about chaos and the client there. I noticed in the preview book there was this big dude with a goat-tee and a baldhead, what is the scoop with him?

BO: Oh, yes! Tone just did some sketches for the book and some ideas. I liked what he drew for this guy who is called "Big Red". Where actually going to use him. He is going to be one of the villains in the first story arch. He is a Russian immigrant who is now basically a mob boss. He shakes down people for money.

DK: He is a major opponent to Snake?

BO: Yeah, he is definitely one of the major villains in the first story arch.

DK: You guys have no doubt established yourselves in the industry. You have a high caliber agency representing you; you have been very successful with "Violent Messiahs", and a high caliber project with "Snake Plissken". What is your work ethic as a writer and businessperson, how do you make it happen?

BO: You literally keep slugging away and keep working at it. If you get something going, you continue moving forward. Everything that we have done has gone in steps; fortunately for us it has mostly been steps forward. Ten years ago I was just another struggling comic book artist trying to find work. Basically, I decided instead of trying to get work at Marvel, which was proving to be difficult for me; I would just create my own comic book and work on that. So, myself and a partner I had at the time developed a property and we went around to a comic-con in early 1995 and just hit up all the small retailers pitching the property. We had some sample pages of the artwork; this is for "Chassis". We had sample pages of the writing. It was placed in a binder so, it was professionally organized and a professional pitch. Eventually we found "Millennium" was willing to publish us and we did that for a little while. Then Jen and I decided to take the big leap and start our own company altogether. It is definitely a situation where you can't view it as a hobby per se, if you are going to be "quote un quote" self-publishing. If you have any intentions of ever making a profit you need to be in it for long term and constantly trying to move forward.

DK: Evolving, developing, moving forward?

BO: Constantly evolving, moving ahead. Continuing to go to the conventions and meet the fans, as well as meet other professionals. Do the best work you can. That is always very helpful if your work is actually good. Allowing the public and the professionals to see, that definitely helps.

DK: How about writing, you have done some work as an artist. What is your approach to writing?

BO: Writing is really new to me to an extent. Up until this project, this is the first project where I am solely the writer. On "Chassis" and "Violent Messiahs" I was involved in different areas; I am the creator of both properties.

DK: Did you co-plot the projects?

BO: In "Violent Messiahs" I provided the initial premise, the name of the characters, and the look of the characters; stuff like that. Some idea of the plot and then Josh (Dysart) fully fleshed out. I was more involved with the writing as well as the art in "Chassis". So, this is really my first gig as solely the writer. Basically, I tend to be a night person; most of us tend to be night persons here at our company. Both myself and Tone tend to be night people; myself more than him, I can stay up until six in the morning. If I get up at ten in the morning, I still get a second wind around eleven at night and I am up all night. So, I tend to do both my artwork and my

writing at night. The process I have been breaking down on the writing, because also I am trying to branch out and work in Hollywood. My process right now of writing with each different project, lets say with "Snake Plissken". Each issue I buy a notebook. Of course I did a treatment of the whole story, I wrote down the whole storyline in a treatment format. Which is a very basic description of the story without going into too many details. You know, Snake goes to Atlantic City, Snake meets up this person, this thing happens that thing happens, hitting all the points without putting all the dialogue down or without going into all the elaborates of an action sequence, you just put "car chase". You know, "Big car chase, Snake escapes". And then come up with all the interesting stuff that will make it an original car chase a little later. So, that is actually the process that I am doing with "Snake Plissken". I wrote a treatment of the first four-issue story arch, which I then provided to John Carpenter, Deborah, and Kurt Russell and they all liked it. So, the process I am now doing for all of my writing is generally I write the first draft in a notebook. I can free think it, I can write quicker than I can type. So, if I am busy trying to figure out

how to spell "gymnasium" or something in the computer, I can forget what the idea was.

DK: Lose the flow?

BO: Yeah, lose the flow, so, I just write it in short hand with bad spelling and all in the notebook form; I write the complete issue that way. Then I type it into the computer. When I type it into the computer that is basically the second draft. That is when I do all the tweaking and I modify the story, the fixing and re-tweaking of the dialogue; elements like that. I am finding this process works very well for me. First doing it very quickly, well relatively quickly I should say in the notebook format, where I can just free think it and get the ideas down on paper before I forget them. Then be more precise about the language, the spelling, and everything else when I put it into the computer.

DK: Bill, you have done "Violent Messiahs", you have got "Snake Plissken" going on. You mentioned a little about Hollywood, what are some of the other things we can look forward to from Hurricane Entertainment or yourself?



BO: Well, I am developing another new property, which is going to be called the "Diplomats". It is a science fiction piece. I am going to be the artist and the writer on it. It will be a four issue mini series, which will be coming out next year.

DK: From Image Comics, Crossgen?

BO: From Crossgen. We have included a four-page sneak preview of the "Diplomats" in "Snake Plissken" #1. So, you know what else Hurricane Entertainment has planned. It is definitely another high concept sort of piece. Basically it has got the feel of Cowboy Bebop and Star Wars, fun science fiction piece to it.

DK: Anything else?

BO: We are also working on developing the relaunching of "Chassis", so, we should be bringing "Chassis" back hopefully sometime next year as well. There is at least one more story arch of "Violent Messiahs" in our future as well.

DK: You have a lot of good things to look forward to; sounds pretty cool.

BO: Yeah.

DK: What feedback do you have for individuals trying to break into the comics industry, (pointers on inking, etc.)?



BO: You have to be very social. If you are an outgoing person and can communicate with other individuals, especially other professionals; that helps a lot. That has always been a stumbling block for me. I don't want to use the term "shy", just sort of anti-social but not like in a negative meaning or anything. I am just sort of an isolated type of guy. So, "schmoozing" for me has always been very difficult, which, is where Jan is very helpful running Hurricane Entertainment. She is very gregarious and an outgoing person and she also already has experience in Hollywood. She has produced a film in the past. Jan knows had to network and schmooz with people, but not be fake and contrite about it. She knows how to talk to people. So, we make a pretty good team that way. She sets up the conversations with having the nerve to go up and talk to people and stuff like that. When I am with her, I support her. I am sort of like her pop culture fact machine.

DK: She helps open the door.

BO: Yeah. Then, I touch base on a lot of artistic stuff. You know, "Oh! That reminds me of that film or there is a cartoon that is like that!" "He made a film in 84" or something like that.

DK: That is good feedback, being able to socialize.

BO: Being able to socialize and also don't be too hard on your own work in front of other people. That can be a little irritating.

DK: You have to believe in yourself.

BO: Yeah believe in yourself, but don't be arrogant or cocky; but don't down grade your work in front of other professionals. Don't go in, "I am the greatest there is and don't question me". On the other hand, don't go into an interview or portfolio review already apologizing for your portfolio. Be confident but not over bearing.



DK: That is great feedback for young people striving to me artistic and writing goals or any goals for that matter. Especially to hear from someone who is doing it already is great!

DK: There are all these properties being made into movies, Hollywood is in love with comic books right now. What do you think about that?

BO: I think its good. It is nice to see comic properties being made into movies and being made into some pretty good movies. Spider-Man was really good. Daredevil was B+. It wasn't a perfect movie, but at least it was serious.

DK: I think too many people were comparing it to Spider-Man.

BO: Spider-Man was such a really good comic book movie. If Daredevil would have come out before, say, shortly after those really bad Batman and Robin movies, people would be saying, "Daredevil was brilliant". It was much more serious.

DK: I like the grittiness and the dark setting.

BO: Yeah, which is really what the public and comic book fans want. This is my advice to Hollywood, "If you don't respect the source material the fans, the public are not going to respect your film and not going to go see it". So, if you already think the material is crap, why is the public going to go see it? I mean, you make a movie about "Josie and The Pussycats", but you hate the comic book and the cartoon, why are you involved in the project.

DK: Yeah, there is no heart in it.

BO: Right.

DK: There has been some cool stuff out and coming out.

BO: Yeah, looking forward to it. This whole thing has had little effect so far, with getting people to go hunt down comic books.



DK: I wish it would have more of an impact.

BO: Yeah, I wish it would have more of an impact, but that could lead us into a much longer conversation with how America is pushed towards illiterate. At comic book shows I am always pitching the book. We did a flea market (Frank & Sons) here in L.A. that emphasizes toys, science fiction, and stuff. So, you have got lots of people there who know what comic books are, it wasn't like talking to people who are like, "What is a comic book?" But, I went through this great pitch about "Violent Messiahs" and this is what the book is about and it has great characters, great depth to it. Then this guy looks at me after pitching and says, "Well I really don't like to read".

DK: What is this guy buying comics for?

BO: I literally looked at him and said, "Look I am just going to stop right here, it is not my job to convince you to read, that is Sesame Streets job, alright". I felt that was an amazing window on the world, you know, it was like "I don't like to read!" I can understand if you don't have time to read, I haven't read a complete novel in years, but not liking to read?

DK: Reading in some type of format is key and important to functioning in the world. I have a community-based program (www.tapthetalent.com), which encourages creativity through comic books; reading, writing, drawing, etc. Too many people out there that can't read, especially kids.

BO: Not knowing how to read is a serious detriment to being able to be a successful person. So, I endorse reading anything.

DK: Yeah comics, newspaper, etc.

BO: Yeah.

DK: I think comic books are a great way to capture young readers attention.



BO: I used to get really upset about the old stereotype about how parents didn't want their kids reading comic books. I feel in some bizarre way that helped the illiteracy of kids in further generations. There was a movement to basically eliminate that stepping stone. Which was as a kid first you "Archie" then as you get older you read some of the mature comic books, then you move on to novels, then fortunately for me anyway, we also now have comic books that adults can read. So, I can continue reading comic books as well as novels. I felt that whole that, don't be reading comic books as a kid, you should be reading books; I feel damaged the whole getting kids to read period.

DK: I think encouraging kids to read things that are going to propel them forward is a good thing and really important.

BO: I think now, parents know much more that, if my kid is reading anything that is a good thing. If my kid wants to read a "Pokeman" comic book fine, as long as he is reading it. That is the first step.

DK: How has it been to work with both Image Comics and Crossgen Comics, any difference between the two?

BO: At Hurricane Entertainment we want to have a working relationship with both companies. We felt that we were breaking new ground, the whole idea that basically we were a content house. We weren't exclusive to one publishing company. We could do a property at Crossgen and we could do a property at Image Comics. Because a year ago or so we were approached by Crossgen and they wanted our whole kit and caboodle. They wanted "Snake", "Chassis", "Violent Messiahs", because they wanted to expand. We are very pleased with their (Crossgen) work ethic; we are very impressed with them. We are also very pleased with the way things have been going at Image and we owe them a lot of gratitude for picking up our properties. So, we didn't want to completely jump ship. So, Jan and I discussed things and thought it would be interesting if we could spread the properties out. So, that is basically what we have attempted to do.

DK: Best of both worlds.

BO: Yeah.

DK: You know Crossgen is awesome with supporting comic books in the classroom and related programs, they are awesome.

BO: One of the things I like about Crossgen, no disrespect to Image, is Crossgen has the ability to get comic books into more peoples hands right now. They have done a really great job with getting the graphic novels into bookstores. They have been actively pursuing expanding the audience, which is something none of the other companies are doing, I am not targeting Image. But none of the other companies, DC, Marvel, Dark Horse, none of them are pursuing to any great extent the idea of expanding the reading audience. Getting the books to the library, the bookstores. I mean the other companies have them in the bookstores, but Crossgen has pursued it very seriously.

DK: Before we finish up Bill, any departing words or final thought you would like to share with the readers?

BO: For the readers who have picked up our last books and have liked them, I want to thank them. I would like to encourage them to please give "Snake Plissken" a try.

DK: I think its cool.

BO: John Carpenter is happy with it. So, if you like the movie at all you shouldn't be disappointed with the comic.

DK: There you have it true believers! Just would like to say thanks to Bill O'Niel for taking time out of his schedule to chat with us. On serious note, Bill is a down to earth to earth and cool guy. I really enjoyed this interview and talking comics, the industry, and the importance of reading. Be sure to check out Bill and the rest of Hurricane Entertainment's work such as "Chassis", "Violent Messiahs" "Diplomats" and of course "Snake Plissken" or go to <http://www.hurricane.com/> "Snake Plissken" #1 is now in comic shops and issue #2 is due out on August 20th, so be sure to grab your copy! Until next time, SEE YA!