

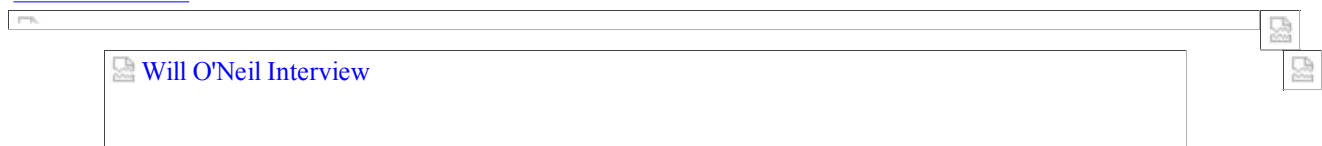


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Will O'Neil, writer of the new Snake Plissken comic book
Exclusive interview by [Daniel Robert Epstein](#), contributing editor

As the writer of the first original Snake Plissken comic book, William O'Neil is at the forefront of the new wave of properties - including an animated film and a video game - based on John Carpenter's famous character. William is best known to this point as the co-creator of the hit series *Violent Messiahs* and *Chassis*.

John Carpenter's *Snake Plissken Chronicles* is coming out from Hurricane Entertainment and CrossGen Comics. The first issue hits the stands this week and is written by William O'Neil and Tone Rodriguez

Check out CrossGen's Snake [here](#)

UGO: How did you get the gig writing the Snake Plissken comic?

William O'Neil: I got it through our two people who are our representation in Hollywood. They are also working on *Violent Messiahs* for motion pictures purposes, and also represent John Carpenter, Debra Hill and Kurt Russell regarding the Snake Plissken property. All three own Snake Plissken. They wanted to relaunch the character and rebrand the franchise. They have several ideas of what to do with it, and one of our agents suggested they do a comic book as well. They were open to the idea.

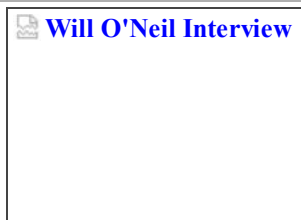
So they asked me if I was interested in doing a Snake Plissken book, and I was like, "Yeah, of course!"

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UGO: Is he going to be escaping from a major metropolitan city in the comic?

WO: Yes and no. It depends on where the story leads me. The first story arc takes place in Atlantic City, but it doesn't involve escaping in or out of the place. It's actually more of a caper type story, but told in the dark humor that is the Snake Plissken world.

But I'm hoping that the second story arc will take place in Philadelphia, and my logic for that is that, if New York is where they sent all the criminals, then where did all the wealthy people from New York go? They went to Philadelphia, and it's become the ultimate gated community. It's sort of the reverse of New York. Instead of a big wall to keep the riff-raff in, it's a big wall to keep them out. Snake has a personal reason he has to break into the city, and he's definitely a fish out of water in the pristine, clean and ultra-politically correct environment that is Philadelphia of the future.

UGO: How involved are John Carpenter, Debra Hill and Kurt Russell going to be in the comic series?

WO: They're involved in different degrees. John Carpenter and Debra Hill are very involved. Debra is the most involved, because she's the most accessible and a business person. John is very much a loner-type guy who isn't very social, but he is still very nice. Kurt Russell is off making movies. I pitched an idea for the first arc. They liked it, so I wrote a treatment. I wrote my first issue and they liked that too. So far, they've been very responsive to all of them.

UGO: It must be fun knowing that they are reading it.

WO: Oh, yeah. I'm very pleased, and I know through them that Kurt has read the story, seen the artwork and thinks it's great. Because we have his involvement, we are able to use his likeness, which is very nice.

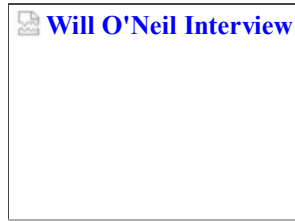
UGO: When did you first see *Escape from New York* [released in 1981]?

WO: I didn't see it in the theater, because I was too young and I had parents that wouldn't let me go see an R movie. I did watch it repeatedly on cable the next year. In the summer of 1982, it was on HBO all the time. If it was on at 2

AM, I would stay up until then. This is back in the time when you watched something on TV when it was on, because we didn't have a VCR back then. That and *Heavy Metal*. Both those movies were on really late at night.

UGO: Were you ever Snake when playing around?

WO: I was in my early teens by that time, so I didn't do that too much. But he was definitely in my sketchbook a lot. A lot of dorky kids like me used to hold up their tape recorders to the TV to tape scenes off of it. I remember specifically taping John Carpenter's music from *Escape from New York* off the TV. I think I still have that tape somewhere back in New Jersey.



UGO: Are any of the ideas in the Snake comics stuff that you came up with when you were young?

WO: I tend to do that a bit on a couple of the projects I'm working on. Most people draw a bit when they are kids, but there are certain people who don't stop drawing. I'm glad I'm one of those people that never stopped drawing. There have been little ideas that I came up with a long time ago that I used now. So as a creative endeavor, I have done it with other properties, but not yet with Snake Plissken.

UGO: So what did you think of *Escape from LA*?

WO: It was OK.

UGO: Are you being nice?

WO: I'm being very diplomatic. I felt they bit off far more than they could chew. They should have cut the amount of special effects they used in half and made the ones they did use better.

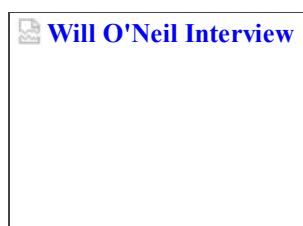
UGO: There was definitely no reason to have him escape from a city again.

WO: Yeah. It was a little too close to being an exact template of the first one without doing anything clever with it. John's not too crazy about it, either. He admits that he fumbled the ball a bit. The film's definitely got its moments, and it's great seeing Kurt as Snake. He cuts a mean form. The first one is kind of charming in a bizarre alternate universe kind of way, which probably has a bit to do with Nick Castle co-writing it with John. I've read interviews where John said it was Nick who added a lot of the humorous elements.

UGO: Well, Nick went on to do a lot of charming films.

WO: He was definitely your poor man's Steven Spielberg for a while, with *The Last Starfighter* and *The Boy Who Could Fly*. I enjoy both of them for their sappy sentimentally

UGO: I like them both, too. What's your favorite scene from *Escape from New York*?



WO: I never thought about that before. The bridge scene at the end is really cool, and there are a couple of little things that Kurt does. Like when the head police officer goes, "A small jet went down inside New York City. The President was on board," and he says [in Snake whisper] "The president of what?" I like moments like that. Another scene I really like is the one where Bob Hauk says, "You climb out; I'll burn you off the wall." Snake holds out the walkie talkie and says, "A little human compassion." I thought that was really cool. Amongst his hardass attitude, there is little bit of, cut me a break. Any scene with Harry Dean Stanton rocks, because he's great.

UGO: There are a lot of Snake Plissken fans out there. Do you feel any pressure?

WO: A lot of fan sites have popped up recently. When we were first approached about doing the comic book, I went online to do some research, because I wasn't sure if anyone would want a Snake Plissken comic book. I knew I did, but I could be completely out of touch. There were some John Carpenter sites with a section on Snake.

Pressure-wise, I don't feel much, really, because John, Debra and Kurt like it. So right there, I'm satisfied.

UGO: They just need to buy 100,000 copies a piece.

WO: Yeah. But I hope the fans like it, and I'll be upset if they don't, because who wants rejection? But I'm relatively confident about the book from the level that Tone [Rodriguez] has drawn some of the best stuff he's ever drawn. The book looks gorgeous. I'm showing it to people that are writing the new Snake Plissken animated movie, and they like it.

UGO: Why are you listed on a Scooby-Doo trading card page?

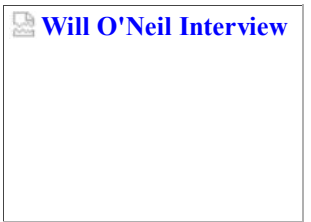
WO: A couple of months ago, Tone and myself were contacted by a friend of ours, and he said that Inkworks is producing a line of Scooby Doo trading cards. They were looking for some artists to do some chase cards for a paycheck. So Tone and I drew 200 pictures of Scooby and the gang for these cards. Each one of them is an original drawn right onto the card. I drew one picture of Shaggy in a suit. He's got a look of shock on his face that I took to be, "Oh no. I'm the Man. Zoicks! I sold out."

UGO: Do you think there will ever be a time when there are no comics, and you just download them to your computer?

WO: That's a yes and a no. There might be a time when there are no comics because no one is reading them any more, which would be sad. But on the other hand, I don't think it would be because people are looking at them on the computer. I just don't think that works. The whole computer revolution is shaking down what works and what doesn't work. The Internet works better as an information and a communication source as opposed to reading *Hamlet* on your laptop.

UGO: I know your hope is that *Violent Messiahs* turns into a movie. But do you think the current craze of turning comic books into movies is just a fad?

WO: Everything in Hollywood happens in waves. Comic books were really big in the early '90s up until Schumacher made *Batman & Robin*, which literally killed comic books in Hollywood for five years. This is just about the time when I started doing comic books and was trying to sell it for movies. However, this is the second wave of successful comic book movies. A lot of people really consider *Spider-Man* the beginning of it, but I think it was the first *Blade* that did it.



UGO: If you had to be stuck on a desert island with three characters from movies - not actors, but fictional characters - who would they be, and why?

WO: Well, the professor from *Gilligan's Island*. If we couldn't get off the island, at least we'd have coconut radios.

UGO: Ginger and Mary Ann.

WO: Mary Ann. I don't need Ginger. I don't know who else. I can think of some real people, like Albert Einstein. Dana Scully from the *X-Files*.

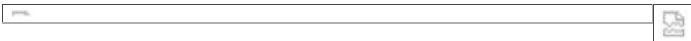
UGO: Now just say Superman, so you can fly off the island.

WO: [laughs] Yeah. Definitely.

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