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CREATORS SKIP BRITTENHAM AND BRIAN HABERLIN DISCUSS THE EVOLUTION OF ANOMALY: THE RUBICON

ANOMALY: THE RUBICON, sequel to the ground-breaking sci-fi graphic novel ANOMALY, is set to be released this fall. It continues to push the boundaries of storytelling and imagination, with an oversized, 250-plus page, fully painted edition. Creators Skip Brittenham (writer) and Brian Haberlin (artist/writer) discuss what readers can expect from the new book.

To start with, could you give readers a little refresher on the first installment of Anomaly? What should they expect in the follow up? And will readers be able to enjoy this as a stand-alone story if they have not read the first book?

BRIAN: Let's start with that last question first. New readers can definitely jump into the second volume and follow the story. There's a lot more depth to the characters and their motivations if they read the first book, of course. More so if they read the huge appendix we've included through the AR app. *(More on that later!)*

The first ANOMALY focused on Jon, an Enforcer blamed for countless casualties on a first contact mission that could not have gone any worse. His shot at redemption is playing bodyguard to a wealthy shareholder seeking to change the Conglomerate's culture from one of *shoot first and take what you want* to one of negotiation. They're marooned on a remote planet and need to survive the fanged (or worse) critters of the world itself and a civil war headed by a genocidal telepath named Erebos. Oh, and they also need to find a way to get back home. Easy!

RUBICON picks up a few months after *(spoiler alert!)* Erebos's defeat, so you'll see a continuation of the themes and characters from the first book. The tribes of Anomaly experience their first peace ever, but Jon has bigger fish to fry. He also has new friends with unique abilities willing and able to join his quest. First there's Aodh, the hot-headed sword master of The People. Then of course our favorite Monc, Bal'ka, who's not only able to make himself invisible but, as you'll see, has a very special ability that goes beyond his physical charms.

Jon, Samantha and Tonni could live out their lives on Anomaly as free people, but the Conglomerate sent Samantha and her crew there to die. Jon wants to show the bully isn't indestructible... to give hope to those still under the thumb of the brutal regime, and perhaps to start a rebellion. The group comes up with a plan: Sneak into the most secure planet in Conglomerate space, hijack the signal of their once-every-seven-years, most-watched, system-wide live event – the Rubicon – and plant the seeds of liberty. That's what you'll experience in Rubicon.

The word "Rubicon" alludes to crossing a boundary that commits a person irrevocably. What does the Rubicon of the title refer to in terms of the story?

SKIP: The lead character, Samantha, decides to cross a line she can never go back from, and support the revolutionaries... not her own class.

BRIAN: Right. Samantha turns her back on her life of privilege to support the cause of freedom. “Rubicon” is a theme mirrored in other places, too. Aodh and Bal’ka leaving *Terra Anomaly* for space. Jon abandoning his Enforcer roots to help those he once fought to crush. The lines crossed are literal and philosophical... but like Skip said, no one can ever go back. The consequences are inescapable.

This is a massive graphic novel, 250-plus pages. How long did it take to go from conception to printed page, and tell us a bit about that creative/collaborative process?

SKIP: It took three-plus years. Brian and I go back and forth on every creative aspect of the novel: story, dialogue, layout and art.

BRIAN: Skip had the broad strokes of this story bubbling through his head before we finished the first *Anomaly*. That one took a little over three years as well, by the way. It took us a while catching up with the pretty pictures, AR and such. The process is pretty much creative ping pong... back and forth on story and art.

Brian, give a sense of what it takes to go from rough sketch to fully painted page.

BRIAN: Sure. In a nutshell, everything starts with a handy sketchbook and pen for layouts. Nothing high-tech there. Can’t tell you how much more thought goes into this step with the book being landscape format rather than your typical portrait-format comic! These are used as guides to setup/create the 3D, after which I go in and — either digitally or with good old pen and ink — add my own style and flourish. Our superstar painter, Geirrod Van Dyke, then goes in to work his magic bringing the image to its colored form. After that, it’s just some fine-tuning or special effects by me.

The book is also unusual in its physical layout, being landscape rather than portrait. Talk about that decision, and the advantages and challenges it creates for storytelling.

BRIAN: Okay. I might’ve jumped the gun just a bit with that last question. You really have to rethink story and panel flow when you go landscape. More so when you go 250-plus pages of landscape with *oversized* pages! Your eye instinctively wants to track a certain way across the page according to its lifetime of hardwiring — the “Z” flow. It’s our job to make sure the reader’s attention follows the story’s intended path. Usually that means longer panels. Sometimes it’s an oddly shaped panel. On a subconscious level, elements within the panel will pull the eyeball along, and we even use the lettering to guide the reader if a script-to-art situation cannot be solved by layouts alone. Even the gutters and their insinuated passage of time feel different when the page is landscape. And again, that perception is magnified by the sheer size of the page. It’s a constant balancing act but one I think we’ve learned to handle.

You mentioned the book’s Augmented Reality (AR) function. Can you briefly explain what that is and the opportunities it provides for enhanced storytelling and reader experience?

SKIP: The Augmented Reality opens up so many opportunities when we pair it with the book. You download an app for your phone or tablet and then point the camera at the book and the magic happens. Depending on what page you’re looking at, it could be a character pops out of the page, a

game appears, character appendix is shown, or you get a behind-the-scenes look at how we created the book.

BRIAN: Think of it as “DVD extra features” (is that already an outdated phrase?) for a graphic novel. You don’t need the app to enjoy the book, but you get a ton of extras and fun if you do. Best part is that we update the app every couple of months so the Anomaly universe still expands even after purchase. No other book out there can do that!

Science fiction has a long tradition of depicting the future while commenting on the present. Could you talk about how ANOMALY fits in that tradition and what, if anything, it has to say about our current world?

BRIAN: I’d say so. One reason we all connect to sci-fi and fantasy is that people don’t fundamentally change. We are what our genetics tell us to be, and very rarely do we try to push past those limits. Aside from wearing clothes and using iPhones, we’re still pretty much the same genetic species we were from the beginning. Sci-fi tries to push, usually building out universes where things have gone horrifically wrong...or horrifically right. We, as flawed creatures, always manage to muck up a good thing, and we’re all drawn to stories that point this out.

SKIP: Samantha is rebelling against a society where there is tremendous economic disparity between the top one percent and everyone else, the “underclasses.” They have virtually no rights and no say in the governance of their society. Sound familiar?

Is there anything else you’d like to add?

BRIAN: I think Anomaly is a unique experience.

SKIP: It was also a labor of love and we hope that shows.

ANOMALY: THE RUBICON will be in comic book stores September 27, 2017 and in tradition and online bookstores November 15, 2017.