


# From Pharr Out! #1, the Interview with Mike McQuay, the ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK novelist.

by Kim August

## Planning his ESCAPE...

McQuay initially sparked my curiosity via his novelization of ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK.

 Landing the job was easy, seeing it through was something else entirely. "I'd gone to work for Bantam in 1979 on a series of books called Matthew Swaine. They're detective stories set in a city kind of like Dallas about 50 years from now in a city that is bankrupt. Goods and services are done on a one-on-one basis. You have to pay the firemen to come put out the fire and the like. It's about a private eye in that time, kind of Chandleresque, but maybe more of a cyberpunk style.

"I think I invented Cyberpunk years before Bill Gibson did. I just didn't have the guts to follow it through! In one of the Swaine books, I have him actually going into a living computer and becoming a part of it. The gritty and deteriorating conditions were all a product of this and ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK.

"So I was was writing these Swaine books and my editor called me and said she had suggested me for this movie project that they thought the Swaine style might translate very nicely to this story. And I got involved at that point I got the script, it was an old script. So I looked at a very early script which was quite different from the movie that was actually made. And I said 'Well, yeah this could be fun,'" the author recalls. "So they sent the Swaine books out to Los Angeles for the final decision, and basically they thought the style that my detective fiction was written in was perfect, so I got the job. I just wrote it in a modified Swaine style. I also worked from later scripts, they were still filming while I was still writing."

## McQuay's encounters with Snake

All Snake fans know that his bank job and subsequent arrest never made the final cut of the film, but it is in Mike's book. "I was really surprised to find the movie starting at Chapter Five. I like the opening that was not included, because it showed Snake having a little bit of compassion and that's the part that they cut from the movie. There's obviously the difference between books and movies," he says. "It's pretty evident in the novelization that Plissken is a protagonist in every sense of the word. In the movie he's just a typical anti-hero that you just can't do in a book because nobody would want to sympathize with that character for very long. And the difference between the book and the movie comes down to the McGuffin. The tape in the movie, he took the tape that could save the world and destroyed it. Giving the president Bandstand Boogie. And in the book that song..." he says with hints of laughter. "I couldn't use 'Bandstand Boogie'. I mean what would you put down in the book: ta-da, dada... tadadadat... So I thought of 'Satisfaction' by the ROLLING STONES which was perfect. And they said 'No way can we get the rights to this! The royalties would be out of hand, so I should write a song. I wrote this song called 'Night Music'. I sent it in and my editor Fred

**Klein, he wrote a song called “Getting Even”.**

**And I liked my song better than his song. He said ‘No, I write all the songs for the trade shows. I write all the songs for the songs, I write all those, I’m great at this.’ he said ‘I tell you what I’m going to go an uninvolved source and it was his secretary. So “Getting Even” appears instead of “Night Music” or “Bandstand Boogie.”**

**We were talking about why Plissken and ESCAPE remains popular and Mike has his own theory. “I discovered something really simple when I was in my ten years as a Science Fiction writer. Science Fiction celebrates the triumph of the individual over his society, and mainstream fiction celebrates the fact the we’re all the same, we’re all alike. If that’s the case and my theory is correct; then it’s seems to me that Plissken is the ultimate anti-establishment hero. He’s the fourteen year old that thumbs his nose at everybody. If you look at a lot of Science Fiction you’ll find that this is a basic theme. I think Snake Plissken represents that really well for an audience. Science Fiction readers, at least those I see at conventions, don’t see themselves as part of the mainstream. I see the loners, and I see that a lot of the hardcore fans function well around themselves, but not in society as a whole. And I think that’s Plissken.”**

**Mike kept tabs on the ESCAPE fandom which at the time of this interview consisted of SNAKE BIT magazine (which is still in existence). So what was it like to see how other people use his interpretation of Snake. “I’ve read some other stories and I think it’s fine. For me, this is a real joy because I wrote the book more emotionally than they did the movie. Whenever I see other writers interpreting the characters, they always interpret Snake emotionally also. A lot of stories I’ve seen write him the way I wrote the character, so to me that is flattering. I think it’s fun. It’s cool that people are still keeping it going.”**

**Author’s Note: Mike McQuay passed away about six months after this interview was conducted.**

**Snake Bit the Snake fanzine mentioned during this piece is still available please email me for the contact address.**

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