

Phann Out!

Issue #2 • \$4.00 U.S. • \$5.00 Canada

**MARKED MAN:
MARK HAMILL
ON STAR WARS
n' MORE**

RETROSPECTRE:

THE FOG

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THE FOG pic © 1980, 1997 Arco-Embassy & New Line Cinema. All Rights Reserved.

— **ELITE ENTERTAINMENT**
— **THE ADVENTURES OF
SNAKE PLISSKEN
COMIC TEAM**

AND MUCH MORE...





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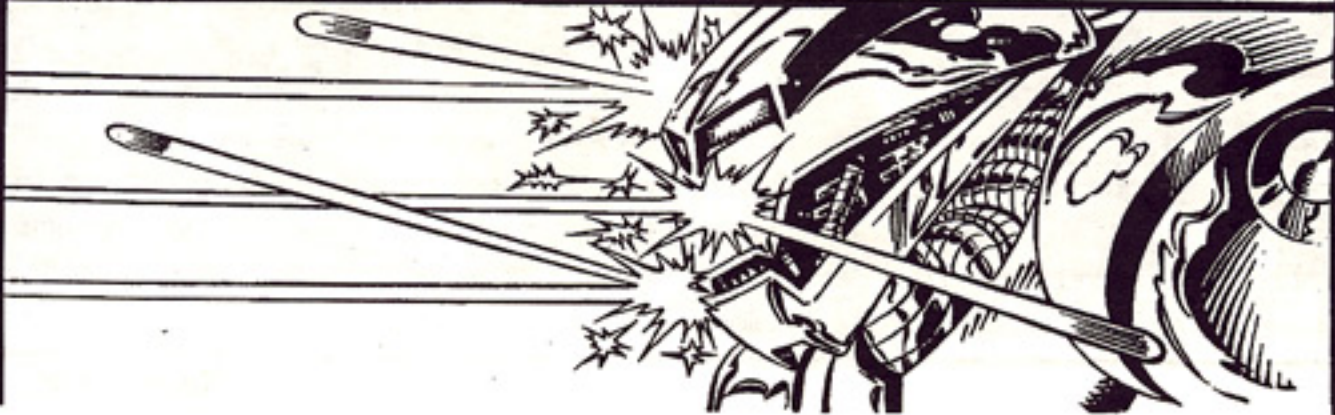
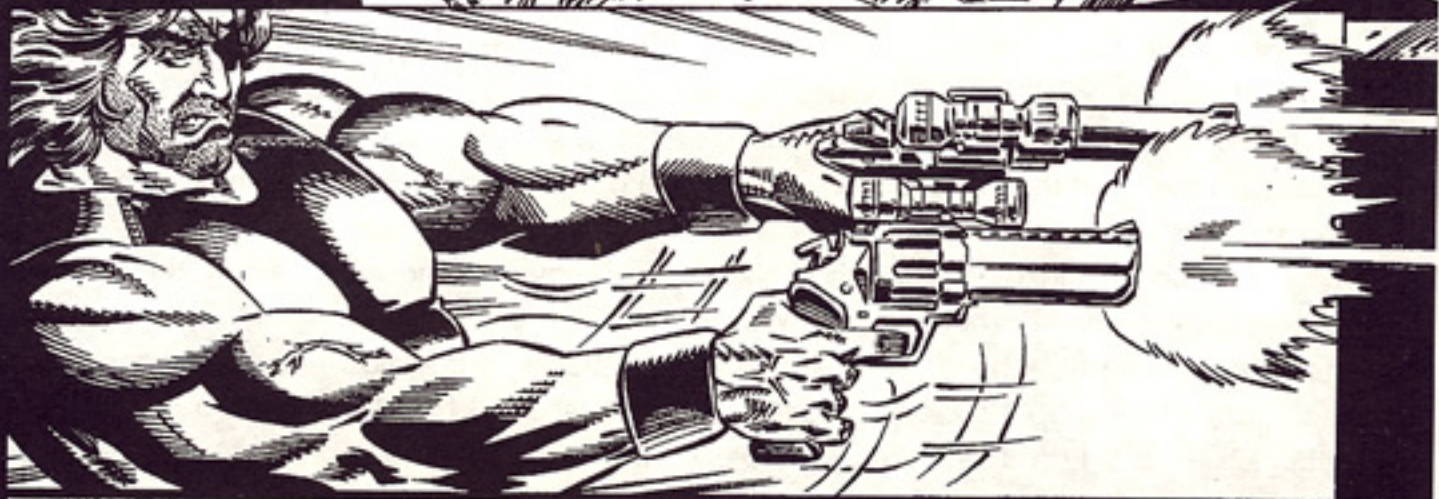
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"...I GUESS I GO IN ONE WAY OR THE OTHER..."

**THE STORY OF BRINGING
Snake Plissken
To Comics.**

**INTERVIEWS
WITH:**

**WRITER
LEN
KAMINSKI**

**EDITOR
MARK
PANICCIA**

**ARTIST
ROD
WHIGHAM**

**ALL INTERVIEWS
BY KIM AUGUST**

Editor/Writer Mark Paniccia has seen much in his tenure as a Senior Editor and Comic Scribe at MALIBU/MARVEL Comics. Long versed in the Star Trek universe (Paniccia even wrote a couple of Thomas Riker issues), Mark was the perfect candidate to head up the team that would bring infamous Outlaw and Bad Boy Snake Plissken to the comic realm.



into a comic store to ruin the movie for him or herself. And the comic fan is going to see the movie anyway. Since studios would only allow an adaption to come out weeks after the movie has been released, you're only giving the reader a flat version of what they have seen on the big screen with Snake Comic Interviews: Pt 1M. surround sound and flashy effects. As I mentioned earlier, straight adaptations just don't work anymore, so we decided it best to give the reader new material featuring the characters and the universe that they live in."

Editorial Escapes

Being that Mark has a history with Paramount's STAR TREK properties, this landed him the slot of Editor on the Adventures of Snake Plissken. "I have a very good relationship with the people at Paramount," he says. "Having worked on the Deep Space 9 comic for over two years and solidified friendships that I'll always have. I was happy that they requested me to work on this project since Marvel wanted to relaunch all of the Star Trek books out of their New York office. ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK has always been one of my favorite movies and I was jazzed about the chance to do a comic based on that character and his environment."

When I first heard about the project, it was mentioned that the comic would be a graphic novel version of ESCAPE FROM L.A., this was not the case. "When Marvel entered an exclusive publishing deal to handle all of Paramount's properties, one of the things we agreed on with the exception of the Star Trek movies, was NOT to do adaptations. They didn't seem to make sense anymore. At one time, adaptations came out prior to a movie, so there was interest in them. But now, the studios are so concerned that a secret from a movie or the movie's ending will be revealed and somehow effect the box office receipts," but Paniccia knows better. "When you think about it, the typical movie goer isn't going to rush

Snake Comic Interviews: Pt 1M. surround sound and flashy effects. As I mentioned earlier, straight adaptations just don't work anymore, so we decided it best to give the reader new material featuring the characters and the universe that they live in."

Snake Bit

Paniccia's reasons for choosing the team of Artist Rod Whigham and Writer Len Kaminski were simple: both really were into Snake. "I have a great working relationship with both, and feel that they are quite talented at their crafts. Rod has worked with me on DS9 before, doing excellent likenesses, and I thought they wanted Snake to look like Kurt. But they declined likeness rights and Rod still pulled through with an action-packed story telling and great art. Both Len and Rod were perfect for the job. Len knows the Snake universe like the back of his hand."

And Len and Rod weren't the only ones who appreciated John Carpenter's anti-hero. Mark too is a fan. "Snake. He's a rebel. He doesn't care, but he's not stupid. He looks around at what the world has become and is the ultimate survivor. In a fictional world, he's the archetypical anti-hero," Paniccia is quick to add what made Snake so real. "Of course, Kurt Russell's portrayal of him had a lot to do with his believability." **PO!**



Rod Whigham, a veteran artist of the industry has had his hand in many series: *TERMINATOR 2: Nuclear Dawn*, *STAR TREK: DS9*, *DEMOLITION MAN* etc. But of all the projects Rod's lent his penciling prowess to, few have brought as much pleasure to this artist than working in the *ESCAPE* universe and 'capturing' Snake Plissken and the very ugly world he roams in.



PART II ARTIST ROD WHIGHAM

Rod, you mentioned that you had ideas for a Snake comic 8 years ago.

Rod Whigham: "Yeah. I pitched it to DC and Marvel. The people that I spoke to about it said it was a movie that came and went, nobody paid attention to it. Well *ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK* obviously has a solid cult following, but they wouldn't nibble at it. I had some ideas about chasing Snake all over the country, and different parts of the world. And designing that dystopian future. Starting in one place and going, so every new set of stories would be a completely different situation. It's kinda weird and surprising that all these years later I got to do Snake."

Paramount rejected your original concept art for Snake because it bore Kurt Russell's likeness?

"We thought the comic would be more closely tied to the second film, and that Paramount would want likenesses, so I literally did a realistic Kurt Russell as Snake Plissken. Apparently, they had been thinking about getting Snake into comics for a while and they had their own ideas about the approach. They wanted it to look more like action comics. We were informed that they wanted something that looked a little more superhero. Like the Punisher and kind of a Conan direction. Real rough,


tough. I never did find out why they didn't want to go with Kurt's likeness. That took a little bit of the pressure off, not having to do likenesses. When you're not dealing with this, it's easier to make the stuff a little more dynamic because you don't have to go back and match your work to photographs. So it was a trade off."

Yeah there were a few panels in the comic where Snake looks quite beefy.

"They wanted Snake to be much heavier than Kurt, not muscle-bound but much more of a comic book looking character. I love Kurt Russell, he's been in 10 of my all time favorite movies, but I also like Snake. The challenge was to have Snake look like Snake but not Kurt Russell. Snake's cool, he's not that big. He's kind of lean. The fact that he is so nasty makes it even better!"

So what is it about Snake and his universe that has appealed to you for so long?

"The entire concept. It just sort of boils down to what kid that grew up in America as a teenager didn't kind of want the whole thing to fall apart. And just go and dust anybody that got in your way. There's a sense of distrust and angst. The whole idea of 'If you're doing what you know is right and no one gets in your way'. I think that's a centerpiece of a lot of Carpenter's stuff. His films are vaguely subversive. It's like the Old West. It's not so much that people don't play by the rules. If you know the entire game is stacked to begin with. So you walk around it and everything else you go right through."



So what was your favorite page or panel to draw from the Snake comic

"Oddly enough, it was the simplest one. The splash page. Just Snake Plissken. A full shot of him in a dead run coming towards the camera.

The 'Plissken has left the building' shot?

"Yes. The title page. Everything went into that page and it came out. I was really happy with it. And Len said 'Well I wrote a page where Snake is running down an alley, but damn!' I've been in love with Snake since the first movie came out. I waited a long time to draw that..."

PO!

Chances are if you follow comics, you've read at least one of Len's books. From *IRON MAN* to *GHOST RIDER 2099* to *BLOODSHOT* (which he is also working on the video game version of for *ACCLAIM*), Len has 'been there and done that' for years. When I rang up Kaminiski to set up the following interview, I didn't expect to speak to someone who digs Snake Plissken as much as myself. Our conversation bled into his pet project at DC; *SCARE TACTICS*. The book that arose from the ashes of *FATE*, resurrecting the rather paranoid Arnold Burnsteel character.

Infamous Inspirations

Kaminski acknowledges that *ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK* showed him which direction his writing style was going to take. "*ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK* was, I can't overestimate the impact it had on my sense of aesthetics in fiction. I had just then begun thinking about writing for a living," he recalls. "And it really had a major impact in my interest in what kind of characters to write. All of my favorite characters are outlaws, misfits, anti-heroes. I wouldn't know what to do with Superman. I can enjoy a Superman story written by someone who really knows him. But if they asked me to write him I'd be like 'What do I do...'. So the chance of getting to write Snake...when Mark Paniccia called and asked me if I was interested I said 'How much do I have to pay you for the privilege!'"

After landing the project Kaminski spent endless hours editing and reworking his script, fellow fans of the character juiced up the pressure of getting Snake right. "When I first got the comic I called up penciler Jim Fry (an *IMAGE* artist) to tell him. He said 'I gotta tell you if there is one person in the world I trust with Snake Plissken, it's you'. And



PART III WRITER LEN KAMINSKI

writing that I did a lot more drafts than with most comics," the writer says.

"This one, not only did I do several drafts before I handed it in, but I would call them back 2 days later and say 'Wait! I want

to change a couple of things.' I wrote the Snake comic full script which is not the

way I usually do things. Mark Paniccia was really helpful in suggesting that we do it that way for the movie people. So I made it look and read like a screenplay. This format is a lot harder. When I started getting pages in and began comparing them, I was like 'Oh man! I have way too much dialog on that page!' So I was calling Malibu up and saying 'I've got to rewrite page 1 otherwise we won't have art, just a full page of word bubbles.'" Kaminski recounts. "Malibu was paying me the lowest rate I'd ever gotten from anybody but I was like 'I don't care about the money!' There may never be another Snake Plissken comic book and I'm NOT going to fuck it up!"

One thing that I really enjoyed finding in the book were all the Carpenter in-jokes. References to *THE THING*, *THEY LIVE*, *BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA*, *ELVIS* and one that caught Len by surprise.

The glowing green virus in the vials—a nod to *PRINCE OF DARKNESS*.

"The *PRINCE OF DARKNESS* liquid in the vials! I hadn't even thought of. You found one I didn't know! But now that you mention it, yes. The final script had things in my descriptions what Sasmor becomes: 'this big, tumorous, shuddering monstrosity, almost a *THING FROM ANOTHER WORLD*.' This was done to make sure that Rod got the point. I hadn't worked with him before, and when that happens you usually have to work a little harder."



Len's fondness for *ESCAPE FROM L.A.* also shaped some of what showed up in the book. Such as the ending where Plissken finds that cigarette to celebrate with. "I loved that scene. Seeing Carpenter do that and finding out that he's a die-hard smoker and I am too — partly thanks to him!!! — was where the I got the smokeasy in the beginning. If there's one thing in the comic that would have given Carpenter a chuckle that was it," Len laughs. "I was really pleased with that bit and seeing Snake going through the whole movie 'You gotta smoke?'"

Tactical Terrors

As mentioned in the intro, *SCARE TACTICS*, Kaminski's current pet project at DC Comics is also something held close to the writer's black heart. The one complaint that he's experienced in doing this series was that it didn't start with the origins for the teenage monsters acting like a punk band. "Issue #1 opens with them arriving in NYC having been on the run. These characters—Screamqueen (a vampire), Slither (a reptilian mutant), Fang (a werewolf) and Grossout (a victim of a freak encounter with a meteorite) were to be introduced in *FATE* issues 26-27. However, *FATE* was cancelled at issue #22. Since I had already written the first three issues of *ST* I decided to start playing the origins as a deliberate mystery and pretty much ducktailed doing to the characters which was for the readers to get to know them as the characters get to know each other."

Of all the characters, the one that would appeal to the masses the most is the conspiracy happy Arnold Burnsteel from *FATE*. Not surprisingly, as an X Files Fan, Kaminski admits Burnsteel is his favorite character. "He was the character that got me to say yes to *FATE*. I didn't see much that interested me until I received the first scene where Burnsteel shows up. *FATE* goes to him for advice, because Burnsteel knows all this arcane shit and Burnsteel is freaking because Zero Hour screwed up his filing system! All reality has been changed so now he can't find his photo of the five Hawkmen!

I was like 'okay I'll do it!' When *FATE* was cancelled, I said I wanted Burnsteel. I get custody of him because *SCARE TACTICS* was already in the development stages and I wanted him to drive the bus. Burnsteel's digging and discovery of this Government project (the R Complex) where they

had these kids held captive. He and *FATE* were going to rescue them. That's where it all ties together. The idea of having a team book where Burnsteel is the most *normal* character appeals to me," he smirks. "If *ST* goes south, I have yet another project I'm going to try and sell them with Burnsteel. I want to have Burnsteels version of the DC Universe. Have all this absolutely insane connecting the dots stuff. Like Burnsteel would have proven conclusively that Bruce Wayne was Superman! My take on him is that he thinks the X Files Lone Gunmen are really naive!"

Anti-hero Author

Which revolves back to the type of characters Len enjoys writing.

"I wrote *IRON MAN* for 3 years and I thought I never really hit the mark," he says candidly. "And it wasn't until I'd been off it for a year before I realized the reason was I *never really understood* Tony Stark and his character. All of the characters I intuitively grasp are the misfits, anti-heroes. Like the *SCARE TACTICS* kids and Snake Plissken."

When talk of why Snake appeals to us came back into the conversation, Kaminski fondly reveals what Snake Plissken did not just for his writing but habits too. "I saw *ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK* 6 times when it opened. I had successfully quit smoking for 8 months. Very successfully quit smoking and the first thing I did after walking out of the first showing was to buy a pack of cigarettes! And his whole rejection of authority. You can kill Snake, you can imprison Snake. You can never make him do anything." The writer elaborates. "I think somewhere in my script I described him as the 'Free-st Man on Earth' because he allows nobody to have power over him. There is only so much they can do, but they never really impose their will on him. My personal philosophy is 'All I've ever wanted was for the rest of the world to leave me the fuck alone. All I want is the opportunity to fail on my own terms.' And right from the first movie that grabbed me. It's not that I like that he kills people. I have a lot more ethical problems with most of Schwarzenegger's films than I do with Snake. Snake is an island. And it's got a really, really well equipped Navy. That degree of independence, just not needing anything from anybody else. He's independent in every sense of the word. That has always appealed to me..."

PO!