

I THOUGHT YOU WERE DEAD... marj ihssen

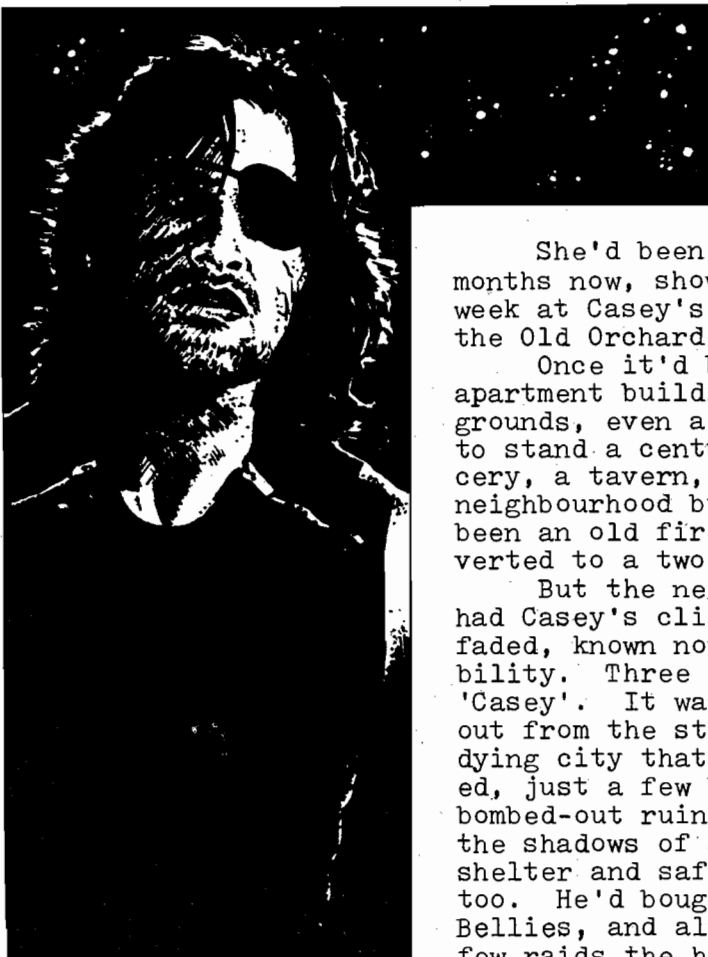
INTRODUCTION

Some of us like snakes. Well, one Snake at least! Let's see, there's Nan, Mary Lee, Lori, and me...and Marj, of course, which is why she authored this prequel to ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK, the film featuring the exploits of our favourite future super-criminal, Snake Plissken. You don't like Snake really, and you can't love Snake - but no one can tell me you can't be "in lust" with Snake, as Lori once penned to me. The lady in this tightly-written, fast-paced and somewhat violent passage learns, in rather graphic terms, what getting involved with Snake is really all about. He's got an unusual bedside manner, to say the very least.

With this Snake story, Marj Ihssen makes still another stride forward into a professional career as both an author and an artist. Those of us who know her have been enjoying her development with a great deal of pride and pleasure. A relative newcomer to fannish activities, Marj's interests include STAR WARS, BATTLESTAR GALACTICA, ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK and she is a Dungeon Master for her local D&D group. Born in Syracuse, New York, and now living in the wilds of Sterling, Illinois, she has had her writing and her artwork appear in such fanzines as PURPLE AND ORANGE and GALACTICA, among others. Her work will soon appear in the JEDI QUARTERLY, Lori Chapek-Carleton's ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK one-shot zine and Katherine Kurtz' DERYNI ARCHIVES #8. Marj is gifted in building costumes and making masks, and if this weren't enough she has had her photographic studies published professionally. When she said she's been writing fiction in the hopes of being published professionally in the fields of sf, fantasy and medieval genre, we feel confident her aspiration is going to come true in short order.

Her artwork has been on display and sold (rather nicely, we might add) at Midwest fan conventions and she has an ever-growing clientele for commissioned artwork. We hear lately she's been playing with airbrush work in art - never let it be said there is an end to this young woman's curiosity or creativity. Most recently, Marj has also joined the staff of GALACTICA fanzine in the capacity of editor. We're sincerely hoping all of this explosive creativity doesn't prevent her from reserving another niche in the second volume of OUTLANDS.

But listen, you're never supposed to keep a lady waiting and there's a certain lady who has a date with a Snake...



She'd been working their turf about two months now, showing up three or four nights a week at Casey's bar at the corner of 76th and the Old Orchard highway.

Once it'd been a nice area, with older apartment buildings, vacant lots for playgrounds, even a park where the orchard used to stand a century ago. There'd been a grocery, a tavern, two delicatessens, the normal neighbourhood business corner. There'd even been an old firehouse down the street, converted to a two-flat, now a burned-out shell.

But the neighbourhood had changed, as had Casey's clientele. The tavern sign was faded, known now more by reputation than legibility. Three owners in ten years, all named 'Casey'. It was a sweet set-up. Far enough out from the still 'civilized' sections of the dying city that the Black Bellies rarely raided, just a few blocks from the burned and bombed-out ruins where the crazies ruled. In the shadows of a dying city, Casey's offered shelter and safety. This Casey was smart, too. He'd bought off someone in the Black Bellies, and always had advance warning of the few raids the hated police did send into this shadowy area. No matter if you were predator

or prey, whore or mark, if you were one of his regulars, had paid his price, you had safety inside his doors.

It was these streetwise regulars who sized up the new trick within thirty minutes of her first appearance. Better looking than they were used to. Tall, flashily dressed, with bright crimson dyed hair, and thin, the kind of thinness born of heavy drugging. Her voice was a high whinny, her laugh raucous, and her prices, put her beyond the touch of most of them.

But before midnight she'd made her score, a high-rolling inner city dude, using Casey's to hide until the heat cooled off. Her approach was smooth. In thirty minutes he was leading her off, but she spurned Casey's 'safe' rooms, taking him to some place of her own.

The high roller turned up the next day, broke, dazed looking, with scratch marks on his neck and face.

So they watched. She sat alone some nights, other nights efficiently cut someone from the crowd. Rarely did she service any of Casey's regulars. They were always strangers, and some of the strangers didn't come back. The word went out that she was a honey-trap, a sweet lure for a pimp who rolled and dumped where there was money. Let the buyer beware.

Another stranger came to town. He took a semi-permanent booth at Casey's, showed four-five nights, and raised no trouble. The camouflage pants, the protective boots and Kevlar vest he wore, that wasn't anything too unusual. But the patch over the left eye, the hawklike blue eye on the right side, the husky gas-damaged voice, and the confident, uncaring, yet deadly way of moving sent a ripple through Casey's clientele.

They weren't nosey. 'Mind your own business' kept many a man out of trouble. But at the same time you don't ignore the tiger when it begins to prowl your turf - or the Snake.

She recognized him, too. Watched him walk in the fifth night and stiffened like a bird dog in heat. All that night, as she played an inner city rich kid out to the whore's final dance, she watched him. The regulars smiled. That one could cut the bull from the herd all right. But this was Snake. Any man who'd dodged the USPD for four years could be a dangerous mouthful.

Snake lounged in his booth, one boot propped on the opposite seat, jacket open, but still covering the knife that rode at his waist. He was aware of the whore, as he'd been aware of the others plying their trade in Casey's, but he wasn't interested, not this night. He ordered a full meal, a stew of some sort, over bread with limp greens to one side. Unappetizing but designed to fill a man's stomach. Two weeks evading the Chicago Black Bellies had left him little time to eat, and he'd holed up for two days in the ruin he'd claimed as his lodgings here, living off a roll of hard sausage he'd bought from a roadside diner while he convinced the crazies he wasn't to be messed with. Now he was making up for missed meals.

He was aware of the looks the red-haired whore kept giving him, but he finished his meal. Casey came to his booth to talk, and when he'd finished settling with the tavern owner the woman had already left with her night's mark.

But that night, his sleep was troubled. The whore kept wandering through his dreams, laughing. Finally he gave up, rolled on his back, and stared at the ceiling. Why was that broad bothering him so? What was it about that high-pitched laughter? He ran the evening through his memory. Her leaning over her john, teasing, brushing against him, wetting her lips in invitation, laughing...laughing...

Snake sat bolt upright, nostrils flared, adrenalin racing in a sudden surge of anger. His hands dug into the blanket as if it was an enemy.

He remembered. He knew that bitch, Black Bellie bitch, police bitch. Oh yes, he remembered. That whole damned day. He, Harold, and Frisco Bob. Buddies--partners. But something'd gone wrong. He and Bob'd fled the building to find Harold'd run with the car, and the Black Bellies were all around. He and Bob'd split and run. He'd made it to hiding, Bob hadn't. And Snake, trapped in his cubbyhole, had had to listen while they skinned Bob--alive. And that laughter, the bitch's laughter, as she'd leaned over, watching, savouring...

Then, the game done, they'd carried their trophy triumphantly back to their headquarters, leaving Snake behind.

That was a mistake. He'd claimed revenge for Bob before he left. A molotov cocktail, an accident, a bomb placed in a patrol car. But he'd never found Harold, or her.

Snake lay with a slow smile growing on his face. So the bitch was here now.

Snake was back at Casey's the next night, inquiring of the regulars about the red-haired whore. The answers brought an edge of tension to him. Police bitch. She was still playing their game. The tale of the disappearing johns--yes, they were probably robbed, but Snake knew it was the Black Bellies behind her. Well, she wouldn't be plying that trade much longer. He took the same booth, ordered dinner, and waited.

The second night she showed. Snake eyed her from his booth as she made her way to the bar, ordered food and drink, and asked a question that made the bartender look straight at him. She looked, too, but moved to eat her meal at a small side table, alone. She was good at the game, only after she'd finished did she begin her stalk.

Snake eyed the smooth walk, the flashy dress over an almost gaunt figure, hair dyed to an unnatural shade, in the style so popular among the inner city crowd. No great looker, but the great lookers didn't operate on this level.

"You. You're Snake Plissken, aren't you?" She stopped by his table.

Snake tipped his head, studied her silently.

"Might be."

"I heard they had you in Chicago. What are you doing here?" She nervously reached up and patted one of the oriental looking hairpins that kept her elaborate hairdo in place. The move drew the side slit in her skirt apart, affording him a view clear to her hip bone. But his attention was on the hairpins. He had a very clear memory of the tiny tracer device he'd carried into Leningrad. Smaller than the round heads of the hair ornaments. So she'd been set on him already? Ah, but two could play that game.

"Just moving," he gave her question the traditional answer.

"Sheesh--Snake Plissken." Very deliberately she put down the empty glass she carried, bending to do so and giving Snake a good look at the other merchandise. Snake felt his skin tighten, opening move.

"What're you drinking?" he asked.

"Angel sour."

He ordered another for her, a light drink for himself, and as they sipped he felt her thigh press closer to his. Then in getting something from her purse she leaned so her top gapped again.

Snake let interest show on his face. She sidled closer to him on the seat.

"My name's Judy," she whispered in his ear, breath stirring his hair. He smiled at her, let his hand drift to her knee.

Two drinks more and he was escorting her to the door.

"My place is that way." She pointed when they reached the sidewalk, then patted her hair into place again.

"No. My place," Snake stated flatly, and watched her weigh his words. Then she patted her hair again.

"Which way?" she asked nervously.

He smiled, so he'd read right. 'Her place' had been a trap. Snake crossed the street, slipped onto a beaten path, hard to see in the dark, and within two blocks she'd stumbled, her fancy shoe catching. He caught her before she hit the ground, solicitously helped her upright, picked up her purse, and a fallen hair pin from the ground, tried to help her repin her hair.

"How far is it?" she inquired breathlessly as she pushed his hands away and re-did the knot.

"A few blocks, and easier going," he answered, then led her out into a street. No need for a path now, he'd accomplished his purpose.

Two blocks later she was walking as close to his back as she could without tripping. They'd sighted several of the local crazie population, one following them for almost a block.

"Jesus. You picked a bad area, Snake." She jumped as a shadow moved in a rubble-filled alley.

"It has its advantages," he answered. No one'd think to look for him in a crazie area, and anyone who did try to follow him, or ambush him would have to deal with the local populace.

She sighed in relief when his door was closed and barred behind them. He smiled, made a show of laying aside his jacket and knife, then moved to gently trace the line of her collarbone. Briefly he wondered how she'd look skinned, like Bob, and unthinkingly his hand tightened, fingers digging in. She flinched, but her eyes held a growing excitement as his hold tightened further. He let his other hand grab the knot of hair, twist her head painfully. Her face loosened, eyes widened, lips parted in offering. So, one of those. It fit with her enjoyment of their game with Bob.

He leaned and kissed her, muscles tight, demanding, tasting the blood he drew from her lips. She moaned and her tongue darted out, her body leaned into his, hips grinding against him in a steadily increasing rhythm. But when he slid his hands to her back, reached for the dress fastening, she backed away. Snake tensed, now what? But he could read the signs of her arousal in the hard knots of nipples jutting against the thin material, in flushed skin, and half-panting breaths.

"Let me undress in the bathroom. I don't have that many dresses, and you," She stepped back into range to trace one finger down the front of the Kevlar vest. "May I help you with this?"

She slid the zippers apart, helped him slide it off, then ran a practiced hand down his chest, traced the outline of the cobra, across its head, down the distended hood, to where the body disappeared underneath his waistband.

"Where does it go, Snake?"

"You'll have to pay to find out."

She laughed, and unpinning her hair, made her way to the bathroom, closing the door behind her.

Snake heard the water run and snagged his vest up from where she'd dropped it. He slipped it on, then his jacket. Knife in hand he silently unbolted the door, removed the bar and slipped out. She'd be some time in the bathroom, trying to delay, to give her Black Bellie owners time to trace her. Though he had no doubts that she intended to lay him. Her excitement had been obvious. The rougher he'd been the hotter she'd gotten. Too bad. It'd be a while before they found her, or what'd be left of her.

He slipped down the hall and out of the building, heading towards the subway entrance two streets away.

The crazies saw him coming. Rag-clad figures piled forth, stood uncertain when they identified him.

"I'm leaving." Snake's voice sent two of the crazies fleeing back into the darkness. "I've left a few things behind, some food. They're yours, if you get to them first."

The crazies watched him to the corner, then scrambled down the street, the way he'd come.

Snake smiled to himself as he picked his way through the ruins. They were both in for a surprise.

She came out of the bathroom, humming. She was naked, hair loose, nipples erect, and lips parted in anticipation. It took her a few moments to realize Snake was nowhere in the dim room. Neither were his jacket, vest, or knife. She swore, took three hurried steps to the battered dresser and lifted one of the hairpins, and stared in dismay as the head pulled free under her touch and bounced to the floor. How long...?

There was a sound as the door swung open.

"Snake?"

But a rag-dressed figure peered hesitantly around the edge.

She was good, the police bitch. That first crazie died before the others overwhelmed her. They grinned down at their prize and the one who led them laughed. The one-eyed man had said they could have what he'd left--including the food.

When they were done, they efficiently sliced her throat and one, with some memory of a prewar hunting trip, field dressed and quartered both bodies. They'd not go hungry for a while.

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The sergeant stood in the center of the blood-spattered room and stared at the entrails spilled carelessly to one side, the blood pooled on the bed, staining the floor. His corporal had already confirmed that one of the piles of guts had belonged to a woman.

Damn crazies. They'd beaten them to the target, gotten both the lure and the prize. The sergeant could envision the bodies entwined on the bed, the woman thrashing and clawing, the door behind them opening...

Then another squad leader reported in. They'd traced the blood trail to a nearby subway entrance. The crazies had gone to ground, and they hadn't the equipment to stage an underground raid.

The sergeant had laughed. It didn't matter. The crazies had done their job for them. He could always find another broad, and he could anticipate the rewards that would be his when he reported that Snake Plissken was dead.