

It's good to be BAD

When we found out about ITV's newest recruit to *Bad Girls* – Snowball Merriman – we thought we'd put her to the test. We say, call the Guv'n'r and brief the screws... Has Larkhall Prison met its match?

Nicole Faraday, 25, is the latest jailbird to join the award-winning ITV drama *Bad Girls* as Snowball – an ex-porn star, murderer and drug-smuggler doing life at Larkhall. Not a particularly pleasant character by all accounts. 'Snowball's a really bad girl but there are some aspects of the character I can relate to,' admits Nicole. 'I've always got into trouble for misbehaving. My mum found my old school report the other day and the headmistress had said: "Nicole is an intelligent girl but she needs to be kept busy to steer her out of mischief." Says it all really.' But is Nicole as lowdown and dirty as she thinks? *M Celebs* set her four challenges to find out...

Pump up da volume

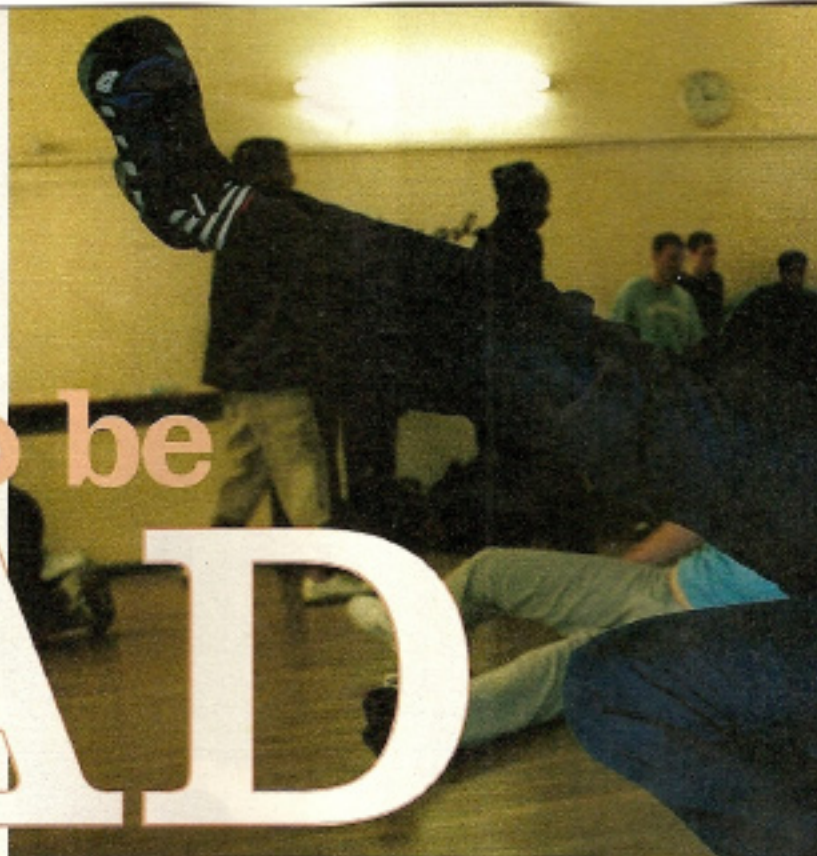
We decide that if Nicole really was that 'hard' at school, she'd have picked up a few 'street' moves. Given a Larkhall dance-off, could Snowball

hold her own with da posse? Down at Pineapple Dance Studios in Covent Garden, Nicole's dressed with attitude in baggy track-pants and combat T-shirt for a breakdancing lesson. She could be over-egging it, after all, this is where Debbie McGee has ballet classes. Still, Nicole's taking to her monkey step (a sideways running move) with panache. A fellow breaker offers Nicole a cigarette, which she refuses. 'I've given up. I used to smoke at school and we got fined £20 if we got caught – I was very poor,' Nicole reminisces. 'As for boys, I wasn't really interested. When I went out with the captain of the rugby team, I'd hide when he came to visit and tell my mates to cover for me.' When the class moves on to spins, Nicole doesn't fair so well. In fact she looks like a spider going down a plughole – not a good look.

It's not the first time her attempts to look cool have misfired. 'When I was little, I formed the Blu Thumbnail gang. There were five of us, and we wore Blu-Tac on our thumbnails. How sad is that?' Er... very. However, researching the role of Snowball has honed her gangleader skills. She can make her own chiffie – a home-made knife built with stuff you might have in prison. 'You melt the end of a toothbrush with a lighter, then slide in a razor blade and there you have it,' she explains. Seeing Nicole gyrating with the Home Counties lovelies in her class it's hard to imagine her tooling herself up in *Bad Girls*. And sadly, her moves turned out to be less So Solid Crew, more A Bit Lame Posse.

Above: For Challenge One, Nicole reckons she can hang tough with the home crew at Pineapple Dance Studios. The stripy socks say otherwise

Right: Heading to the dogs for Challenge Two, Nicole's betting system's hardly the stuff of a hardened gambler: nice names and pretty colours





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Gone to the dogs

It's Saturday night, and Nicole meets us at Walthamstow dog track in East London, a regular hangout for real hard cases and fakes alike (Guy Ritchie and Vinnie Jones are known to fancy a flutter there). So will Nicole turn out to be more mockney than Cockney in our second challenge?

As the greyhounds are paraded past, she scans the group for a sure bet. 'I've got three rules I use to pick a winner. Firstly, it's got to be the one with the nicest name. Secondly, it must have the most colourful jacket. Finally, if it's been to the loo before the start, then it'll go quicker.' Hmm, it's obvious she's no pro. 'I only really gamble once a year, and that's on the Grand National. In the last five years I've picked four winners, so I'm pretty good at it,' she protests. Number six in the first race has a

nice name - Lislevane Molly. Not only that, she's spotted taking a pee. Nicole's thrilled. 'Fifty pence on six at 5-3 to win,' she announces, and runs to the betting booth with two minutes to spare. And they're off. Nicole does a fabulous transformation from sedate and stylish actress, to devil-possessed gambler, waving her betting slip and screaming. 'C'mon Molly, move yer bleedin' arse.' Eliza Doolittle-style, but not as convincing. She doesn't win, and Nicole slinks off to the bar. 'Bad girls need a drink to commiserate. I'm a real girlie girl when it comes to alcohol. I change my tipples all the time - Malibu, pineapple and lemonade's a favourite, or Tia Maria and coke, lager and lime, Babycham, Martini Rosso and tonic and, of course, Snowballs.' Not the *Bad Girl* drink list we'd hoped for, but at least with these tipples she fits in with the sheepskin coat crowd.



Left and below left: Demolition Derby - Nicole brings the house down

Right and below: Nicole tries to pull a fast one on our wily pawnbroker



Demolition Derby

Nicole is 10 quid down from the dogs the night before, and when I meet her, a whole five minutes late, she is furiously tapping her foot and pointing to her watch. She looks quite scary when she's angry. Thankfully, we've arranged to test her anger-management skills and given her full rein of a million pound's worth of demolition machinery and a condemned building site. Nicole is briefed by Erith construction workers on safety, then she snatches a hard hat and rubs her hands in glee.

'I do have a temper on me,' she confesses as she sidesteps a giant swinging ball and chain and takes the driving seat. 'I stamp my foot a lot, but I'm always as nice as pie five minutes later.'

For a sex siren she doesn't take any prisoners when it comes to wrenching down half a ton of disused flats. 'Hee, hee, this is fantastic,' she squeals as a mound of debris falls around her. 'Ooops, I didn't quite realise how powerful that lever was. Is it alright if I bring that bit down that's hanging off?' Sound like she's still a bit too polite to be a true tough cookie.

When we finally manage to pull her off the crane, she is flushed with excitement. 'You know, sometimes life can be really frustrating and it's great to go to work and get it all out of my system. If the acting all falls flat, I might apply for a job here,' she decides. And the workmen around her seem perfectly happy with that.



From porn to pawn

Nicole is scanning the market stalls of Lower Marsh market in Waterloo for our final challenge. In true crim style she must hunt down a piece of cheap costume jewellery and then flog it for a hugely inflated price down the pawnbrokers.

She's brazenly checking out a damaged silver-plated ring in clear view of the pawn shop window. 'I'll take it for two quid,' she barter, and the sale's agreed.

Boldly entering the pawnbrokers, she spins a yarn that might convince even the most weathered pro.

'It was actually left to me by my poor Great Aunt Violet,' she explains, lying through her teeth. 'It feels quite heavy. How much do you think? I could really do with the money...' she concludes, like butter wouldn't melt in her mouth.

Despite her charms and highly plausible lying, the assistant is having none of it. Nicole wonders if his claim that he only deals in gold jewellery is just a way to let her down gently. After all, she seems more head girl than bad girl.

'I do tell little white lies to save feelings,' she admits. "'Does my bum look big in this?' for example. If the answer's "Yes!" I'd say, "No," but suggest they wear something else.' So she's not all bad then?

'I turned into a bit of a rebel because school was really boring. Sometimes



'This ring was left to me by my poor Great Aunt Violet. It feels quite heavy. How much do you think?'

it was awful being in trouble, but other times - and I shouldn't say this - I really thrived on it. Because I was good at drama I got away with more because they needed me for school plays. I was the lead in *The King and I* and I bunked off classes for the day to go in to Bournemouth and eat pizza. I got caught sneaking back for rehearsals the wrong way through the school gates, but they couldn't suspend me because they needed me. I just got a detention,

and that was it,' Nicole smiles. So Snowball is a dope-taking hooker from Blackpool while Nicole is a rebel actress from Bournemouth. They both have a lust for life but the truth is, unlike Snowball Merriman, Nicole Faraday is naughty - but very nice.

● *Bad Girls* is on Thursdays, ITV1, 9pm
 ● For info on Pineapple Dance classes, call 020 7836 4004 and for details on hospitality at Walthamstow Greyhound Stadium, call 020 8496 3300