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Escape from New York Blu-ray Review

By Chris Chiarella ★★☆☆

The Movie

One of the truths about entertainment that I've figured out for myself: If a movie or TV show does enough right, audiences will willingly forgive the stuff that's not-so-right. I frequently apply this equation to later episodes of *The Simpsons*, but perhaps no movie better illustrates the principle than *John Carpenter's Escape from New York*. The basic premise doesn't make a lot of sense, that the island of Manhattan (per square foot, the most valuable real estate in the world... anybody?) has, in 1997 -- more than a decade in the future when the movie was made, now more than a decade in the past -- been converted into America's single maximum security federal penitentiary. Why is that, exactly? Because there's a lot of crime there? But aren't crooks arrested and transported elsewhere? What about Wall Street, the museums, and the millions of private citizens? Where have they all gone to?

Audiences have chosen to overlook these trifles, and Donald Pleasance as the British President of the United States, for almost thirty years now, mostly because of the bold imagination and deft execution of this story. When Air Force One goes down into this law-forsaken hellhole (yes, there is something chilling about watching a hijacked jumbo jet crash into lower Manhattan), super-criminal Snake Plissken accepts an offer he can't refuse, to infiltrate the city and rescue the Commander in Chief. As Snake, Kurt Russell is in full-on [Clint Eastwood](#) tough-guy mode, so much so that director John Carpenter, a fan of classic Westerns, has cast Lee Van Cleef as his nemesis in black.

It's that love of film and sense of fun that helps raise one of the Carpenter's most ambitious films beyond genre silliness and into the realm of cult favorites.

The Picture

The AVC presentation benefits from a pleasingly high bitrate, routinely in the upper-30 megabits per second. Blacks are thankfully natural, essential since most of the movie takes place at night. High-def and a big screen even reveal the limits of the focus in Carpenter's preferred 2.35:1 Panavision process. Sure, there's some ringing, and it's noisy in places, but overall it's better than I was expecting for another MGM catalog reissue, and the best I've ever seen this movie look, although not exemplary home theater demo material.

The Sound

The pristine quality of DTS-HD Master Audio lays bare the striking simplicity of John Carpenter's musical score, one of his very best. For 5.1-channel action, there are helicopter flyovers, flyarounds, and a generally surprising amount of busy-ness in the rears, military formations and incidental noises and a sequence when Snake's car is assailed as he drives down Broadway. Dialogue is a little low here and there, but otherwise this is a fine track.

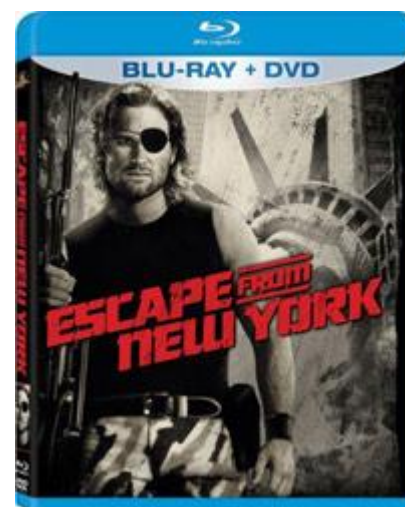
The Extras

Disc Two is an old widescreen/standard flipper DVD, with just the trailer as its sole bonus. MGM did an excellent two-disc *Escape From New York* Special Edition DVD set in 2003, unfortunately none of that supplementary material (the deleted heist opening! two commentaries! "making of!") is included here.

Final Thoughts

Escape from New York is still a fun jaunt, especially for folks old enough to watch the analog special effects (matte paintings by a young "Jim Cameron!") with nostalgia instead of disdain. The picture and sound have been significantly, if not monumentally upgraded, but the utter lack of bonus content is the real punishable offense of this Blu-ray.

Product Details



- Actors: Kurt Russell, Lee Van Cleef, Ernest Borgnine, Donald Pleasence, Isaac Hayes, Harry Dean Stanton, Adrienne Barbeau, Tom Atkins, Season Hubley
- Director: John Carpenter
- Audio Format/Languages: DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1 (English), Dolby Digital 5.1 (French), Dolby Digital 2.0 Surround (English)
- Subtitles: English SDH, Spanish
- Aspect Ratio: 2.35:1
- Number of discs: 2
- Rating: R
- Studio: MGM/Fox
- Release Date: August 3, 2010
- Run Time: 99 minutes
- List Price: \$24.99
- Extras:
 - DVD of the movie

Where to Buy:

- [Escape from New York Blu-ray \(Amazon.com\)](#)

OVERALL	★ ★ ★ ★
VIDEO	★ ★ ★ ★
AUDIO	★ ★ ★ ★
MOVIE	★ ★ ★ ★
EXTRAS	★ ★ ★ ★

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