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## Escape from L.A. (Blu-ray)

[Paramount](#) // R // May 4, 2010 // Region Free

**List Price: \$29.99** [Buy now and save at [Amazon](#)]

Review by [Adam Tyner](#) | posted May 2, 2010 | [E-mail the Author](#) | [Start a Discussion](#)

**"You might have survived Cleveland, you might have escaped from New York...but this is L.A., vato, and you're about to find out that this fucking city can kill anybody!"**

Dateline! 1998. An off-the-scale earthquake ravages a hefty chunk of the Left Coast. Los Angeles isn't the entertainment capital of the world so much anymore. Nope, separated from the rest of California by the quake, Los Angeles has been transformed into an island.

Flash forward fifteen years. No booze, no smoking, no premarital sex, no red meat: America is knee-deep in the whole post-apocalyptic thing, sure, but at least it's *clean* post-apocalyptic livin'. Thanks to a Constitutional amendment, we haven't even swapped out presidents in a decade and a half to maintain that moral continuity or whatever. ...and Los Angeles? The President (Cliff Robertson) opts to dump all the repulsive, immoral, and Godless monstrosities littering the U.S. into this island prison, and I guess it makes his job easier that so many of 'em were already in L.A. in the first place. It's a hellhole plagued by violence and immorality where the dregs of society have been abandoned...so crumbled into ruin that its former glory is all but unrecognizable. So, yeah, Detroit with an oceanside view, pretty much.

The Fundies may have a stranglehold on the Land of the



Call me Snake.

doesn't score any brownie points with the current administration. Snake's slated to be dumped off on Los Angeles too, but...eh. They're willing to cut him a break, just so long as Snake carries out one little mission for 'em. A Black Box -- with...well, *something* inside that threatens the security of not just the U.S. of A but the world as a whole -- has fallen into the clutches of a badnik named Cuervo Jones (Georges Corraface). All Snake has to do is snoop into L.A., snag the Black Box, and hightail it outta there. Oh, and just in case that Get Out of Jail Free



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**ADVICE Recommended**

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Free, but there are still a few people out there fighting the good fight. One of 'em...? Snake Plissken (Kurt Russell). Guess having rescued a different President outta New York

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card isn't enough incentive, the Feds have injected Snake with a neurotoxic virus thingie that'll have him keeling over in ten hours flat. He either does the job or geysers of blood start bursting from every orifice and then some.

Not that I'm telling you anything you don't already know, but the original *Escape from New York* is a bleak and gritty post-apocalyptic tale. *Escape from L.A.*...? A campy, deliriously over-the-top action flick. The sequel shows its cards just about from word one. I mean, as we find out how Cuervo Jones got his hands on this nebulous Black Box, a pretty, pretty princess with a pink scrunchie and a suit to match -- with a 'True Love Waits' button pinned on her lapel, fer cryin' out loud -- is pointing a machine gun at a camera. Snake growls a bunch of one-liners in the finest Oversized Hollywood Action Flick tradition. He plows into a shark with his nuclear-powered one-man-submarine. He squares off against the Surgeon General of Beverly Hills: that's an almost unrecognizable Bruce Campbell hiding behind all those facelifts and Botox, and his minions are overcut failed starlets [who look like melted mannequins](#). The dude gets shot in the leg, still manages to get the hang of surfing for the first time without a hitch (and it's during a *tsunami*), gives aging hippie Peter Fonda a high-five, and then Snake leaps from his surfboard into the backseat of a '57 Chevy. How many action flicks lob out a life-or-death game of gladiatorial basketball where our hero has to sink a full-court shot or be decapitated with an oversized pair of hedge clippers?

The smart money says you're reading that and reacting one of two ways: (1) recoiling in mortal terror, or (2) thinking "so, *Escape from L.A.* is clearly the most towering accomplishment in the history of cinema". Back in 1996...? Yeah, I was cringing. Watching it again now...? Love it. *Escape from L.A.* is a parody of oversized Hollywood action flicks, skewering so much of what Los Angeles is about and trumping that glut of mindless popcorn movies by being even bigger and more ridiculous. It's so exaggerated and relentlessly



[click on the thumbnail to enlarge]

over-the-top that John Carpenter turns the knob as high as it'll go, keeps turning anyway, and winds up snapping off that chunk of plastic. Melding together that

cranked-to-11 action bombast with a new shootout or something every forty seconds, a thick absurdist streak, and quite a bit of smart satire, *Escape from L.A.* is just inhumanly fun. It even manages to turn its weaknesses into checks under the 'Win' column. *Escape from L.A.* piles on some of the most howlingly inept CGI ever slopped onto a late-summer action flick, but the effects are so *incompetent* that it just adds to the trashiness and guilty pleasure of the whole thing. This is a movie from 1996, and the computer-rendered submarine that Snake takes to L.A. still looks like something out of *Tron*. Even its more traditional optical effects sometimes look fourth-or-fifth rate, especially when Snake steps foot on a surfboard. Despite its \$50 million price tag, *Escape from L.A.* looks laughably cheap, and that's part of its charm. It wouldn't be nearly as much fun if the effects were...y'know, competent.

*Escape from L.A.* also piles together an incredibly great cast. Steve Buscemi scores a key role as Map to the Stars Eddie, a sleazy agent-type who helps Snake navigate his way through L.A. whenever he's not stabbing the guy in the back. Pam Greer turns up as a...um, LGBT shit-kicker, Peter Fonda plays an aging hippie surfer, Stacy Keach is on the bill as a gruff military advisor, and hey, that's A.J. Langer from *The People Under the Stairs*! Of course, I mentioned the always-reliable Cliff Robertson and Bruce Campbell a couple paragraphs up, and when does Kurt Russell ever disappoint? Georges Corraface puts in a pretty good turn as Cuervo, chomping on a cigar and doing

his best Che Guevara impression. It's kind of a drag that Cuervo isn't given more to do, though. The character isn't written as menacing enough to



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way The Duke  
does in ...*New*

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*York*, and he doesn't get enough facetime to really revel in the movie's batshit insanity. Not much of a bad guy, no, but everything else about *Escape from L.A.* is so surreally fun that I don't mind that so much.

*Escape from L.A.* doesn't play like *Escape from New York, Mark II*, no, but that's kind of what makes it so great. Rather than take a stab at recapturing the bleak tone of the original, John Carpenter instead veers off in a completely different direction. *Escape from L.A.* is campy, ridiculous, and almost surreally over-the-top, and that's more or less the flick that Carpenter set out to shoot. As dumb as the movie seems at times, there's a pretty sharp satirical undercurrent to it all, and even the absurdity of the action feels like a riff on what Hollywood was (and still is) churning out at the time. Is *Escape from L.A.* a great movie? No, but I think it's pretty much the flick it sets out to be. I don't really feel like typing "fun!" for the eighteenth time in this review to sum it all up, so I'll just shout **Recommended!** and dive into the technical stuff.

## Video

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Hmmm. *Escape from L.A.* looks **okay** in high-def, I guess. There's clearly more definition on display here than DVD could hope to churn out, and black levels are consistently deep and inky. On the other hand, the image can still be very soft, and the presence of fine detail hardly ever ranks much higher than mediocre. An aging master? Too much money chucked at crappy CGI and not enough on good film stock? Maybe Bachelors #1 and #2 are both to blame here?

Sometimes this Blu-ray disc really does impress:



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...and then again...



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*Escape from L.A.* latches onto the lower rungs of 'passably okay' but never really musters the energy to lug itself up any higher than that. My kneejerk reaction is that this is largely due to the original photography and rushed post-production work all the way back in '96, but that's kind of a guess. I don't have the DVD handy to do a direct comparison, but since I could generally pick out that this was an HD image, I'm sure it's worth an upgrade...just keep your expectations in check and probably hold out for a price drop.

*Escape from L.A.* sports a high bitrate AVC encode that spans both layers of this BD-50 disc. Despite the uneven softness, limited detail, and shoddy special effects, there aren't any glaring flaws with the presentation that I could spot. ...and hey, you still get all those great anamorphic lens flares that make me feel all warm and fuzzy inside. The image is letterboxed to preserve

its original aspect ratio of 2.39:1.

## Audio

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The six-channel, 24-bit Dolby TrueHD track that *Escape from L.A.* is packing winds up being kind of a mixed bag too. Oh, don't get me wrong, though. The sound design



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definitely takes advantage of all of the speakers at its fingertips: sprays of gunfire attack from every direction, helicopter blades whirr from one channel to the next, and there's plenty of ambiance like beeping hardware to keep the rears chattering away too. The low-end can be pretty colossal at times as well...on the overcranked and rumbly side, sure, but the earthquakes and synth-bass summon hellish low-frequency belches from the subwoofer. The strange thing is that a lot of the dialogue and effects stems are so anemic. A fair number of explosions, most of the gunfire, and pretty much all of the punches are flat and lifeless. Even some of the flourishes in the soundtrack, like the surf-rock that kicks in just before Snake hangs ten, are bobbing around dead in the water. Again, my ears could definitely pick up on the fact that this is a lossless soundtrack, but don't expect to be dazzled or whatever.

*Escape from L.A.* belts out Dolby Digital 5.1 dubs in French and Spanish while it's at it. Also piled on here are subtitle streams in English (traditional and SDH), French, Spanish, and Portuguese.

## Extras

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Just a high-def theatrical trailer, although, y'know, to be fair, it **is** a pretty great trailer.

## The Final Word

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Don't waltz in expecting something as grim and gritty as *Escape from New York*. Nope, fifteen years in coming, this sequel is gloriously big and stupid...a spoof of these sorts of movies and a helluva action flick in its own right. Hell, even with Snake Plissken in the lead, *Escape from L.A.* feels more like a followup to [Big Trouble in Little China](#) than *...New York*. I wouldn't chalk *Escape from L.A.* up as some sort of timeless classic or anything, no, but it's really not aiming for anything more than a little political satire and two scoops of overcranked action. *Escape from L.A.* is an inhuman amount of fun, and low-rent CGI and all, it's aged surprisingly well. Even if you couldn't stomach it the first time out, give *Escape from L.A.* another look; you might dig it now too. Because of the lack of extras, kind of bloated sticker price, and underwhelming presentation, this Blu-ray disc is probably better off as a rental, but I had enough of a blast palling around with Snake again that I'll lob out a **Recommended** instead.

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