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ESCAPE FROM L.A. Blu-Ray Review

By Ron Henriques on May 14, 2010

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ESCAPE FROM L.A. (Blu-ray)

Paramount Home Entertainment
1996/Rated R/101 Mins
Now Available – List Price \$29.99

ESCAPE FROM L.A. Blu-Ray Review

I think it all started when in 1993 Kurt Russell and John Carpenter reunited to record an audio commentary for the laserdisc release of *Escape From New York*. The duo, who also collaborated on the TV movie *Elvis*, *The Thing* and *Big Trouble in Little China*, had not seen each other for some time, and if you've ever heard one of their audio commentaries, you know what a laugh-riot these two are when put together. 1997, the date in which the film was set was fast approaching and Russell and Carpenter seemed to have had such a great time making the picture that the time seemed right for them to try it again. With the success of the western adventure *Tombstone* later that year, Russell became a bankable star and soon would enjoy starring in hits like *Stargate* and *Executive Decision*. Sometime in 1995, it was announced that Rysler Entertainment was teaming up with Russell, Carpenter and his ex-wife/producer Debra Hill for an *Escape From New York* sequel that would be distributed by Paramount Pictures. As a fan, it was an exciting time, because not only had Russell created an iconic character, but he looked basically the same fifteen years later and apparently still fit into his old costume.

Russell and Carpenter clearly admit that the character of Snake Plissken was based on Clint Eastwood's "man with no name" from Leone's "Dollars" trilogy and it was no coincidence that Lee Van Cleef was hired to play against the star in *Escape From New York*. With Van Cleef long gone, the addition of veteran Cliff Robertson as a religious fanatic President seemed like the perfect foil for Russell as well as the fact that Carpenter was getting to make a big Hollywood film after working his way back into the mainstream with a Chevy Chase sci-fi thriller and horror fare like *In The Mouth of Madness* and *Village of The Damned*. Everything seemed to be in place and attending a screening of Tom Cruise's first *Mission: Impossible* movie I almost couldn't contain my excitement at seeing the trailer for *Escape From L.A.* So what happened?

Sixteen years after completing his assignment to rescue the U.S. President from the penal island of Manhattan, Snake Plissken has once again been captured by authorities and is set to be transported to another federal prison. At the beginning of the 21st century, the state of California suffered a massive earthquake separating the city of Los Angeles from the mainland which was subsequently turned into another federal prison. That's the next stop for Snake, but the President is willing to give him a full pardon if he carries out one small mission. The President's delusional daughter Utopia (A.J. Langer) has been seduced by Peruvian revolutionary Cuervo Jones (George Corraface) and brainwashed into stealing a device which enables high-tech satellites to destroy electronic devices anywhere on the planet with pinpoint accuracy. Snake's job would be to retrieve the device and kill the girl who has become a political liability for her father. Naturally, the eye patched outlaw refuses, but soon realizes he has no choice since prison Commander Malloy (Stacy Keach) arranged for Snake to be infected with a deadly virus upon his arrival. In ten hours it will kill him, but if he completes the job before the clock runs out they will provide him with the antidote. Sound familiar?

Escape From L.A. plays very good with an opening that almost perfectly mirrors the original. It feels like a bigger budgeted version of the first film in very much the same way *Terminator 2* can be looked at as an A-movie remake of the original. Everything flows smoothly until Snake actually gets to L.A. From the moment the submarine that delivers him to the island ends up sinking off the coast, the movie sinks right along with it. There's no major conflict within the film once Snake arrives at the city of angels. The late Isaac Hayes made a great villain as "The Duke of New York" in the original, yet Corraface, (who previously starred in that other non-Ridley Scott Christopher Columbus movie) doesn't have much presence or even seem like much of a threat. Too many of the situations Snake finds himself in feel comedic, like getting threatened by a knife wielding Robert Carradine in a bald cap, strapped to a gurney by the twisted "Surgeon of Beverly Hills" (an unrecognizable Bruce Campbell who can't even save this one) or dealing with Steve Bucemi's "Map to the Stars Eddie" who walks a fine line between sidekick and double-crosser. Even great beats from the first one repeated here like Snake taking a moment to sit in a fold-up chair and think or having a doomed girl come on to him – in the original it was his wife at the time Season Hubley, here its Valeria Golino – just don't carry as much weight as they did before. Then there are wasted veteran actors stuck in poorly developed supporting roles like Robertson, Keach and Pam Grier as a what... a transsexual? On top of that the film really attempts to lose the viewer by adding the great Peter Fonda as surfer dude "Pipeline" who along with Snake rides a tsunami on his board down Hollywood Boulevard.

There's been speculation that *Escape From L.A.* was an intentional goof written by Carpenter, Hill and Russell. In fact the latter claims that many fans have personally told him, they got the in-jokes, some of which poked fun at capitalism, right-wing fanatics and the state of California. As crazy as Russell and Carpenter can be, it wouldn't surprise me if these two decided to take million's of dollars from a major studio and produce something that was basically a big FU to the Hollywood system. I hope it was worth it, because both of their careers never peaked any higher than the time they made this picture. If this film was an idea of a joke, then the real losers were the fans, who wanted to see a continuation of what made *Escape From New York* a cult classic and waited fifteen years for it. There's a few things to admire within *Escape From L.A.* but only because watching the bits that work make you wonder what a great film it could have been. Even the visual effects in this movie were poor, which is a surprise for a fifty million dollar production that ultimately ended up making back half.

Video and Audio: For the first time *Escape From LA* can now be properly seen on HDTVs after only



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KLICKA HÄR!

a non-anamorphic transfer on the DVD was available for over a decade. The AVC encoded 2.35 to 1 transfer is the best the film has ever looked on home video, but it feels dated as if its been sitting on the studio shelf for years waiting for the high-def revolution. Though Carpenter and his DP Garry Kibbe have created some interesting imagery, the overall presentation feels a little flat. Ditto for the Dolby True HD 5.1 lossless audio track which has some punch now and then but shows the limitations of late 90's sound mixing hardware.

Extras: Being that this film was a bomb, its doubtful Paramount would ever ask Russell and Carpenter to record an audio commentary or interviews for a featurette, which is why sadly (or not) the only extra on this blu-ray release is the film's Theatrical Trailer in HD.

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preacher · 46 weeks ago

Yep. I totally HATED this movie! And was soooooo looking forward to it because I first saw *Escape From New York* when I was 10 and totally fell in love with it! And yeah, I got the "in jokes" too, but I felt that Carpenter DIDNT care for his fans to have put out this TRASH!

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Mike · 46 weeks ago

Computer generated shark is the worst ever and my sigh in realization the movie was a dud started with it. There's no polishing this turd up whatsoever.

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