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Script Review: Escape From New York Re-Make

Written by Stephanie Sanchez Monday, 02 July 2007 07:02

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We've got a script review from an IESB reader. You guys know we don't do script reviews very often, but, this guy felt like he had something to say, so why the hell not, it's a slow news week. Here you go!

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{sidebar id=1} Hey guys, I've had the Escape from New York script in my greasy paws for a

few days and as a die hard Carpenter fan felt like I needed to say something about it. I read [Merrick's report over at AICN](#) but felt there were more things that needed to be out there. Hopefully this will get posted and you can "Call me Snake."

I'll be honest. I was prepared to dislike this script. A lot.

That being said, I won't bore anybody with my obviously implied unabashed esteem for early John Carpenter films. I won't go on and on about how I love the original, and how it was an integral part of my childhood.

How as a character, Snake Plissken rates among the all time action greats. I'll assume we all know these things. They're cannon and it's a given. Well move on . . .

So when this stint of Carpenter remakes began happening, I was just as puzzled as everybody else. Not so much at the sheer audacity of it all, but more for reasons pertaining to motivation.

Why? Why would anybody feel the need to remake these movies? I mean, special effects aside, I think most of us agree that they're fine just the way they are. Special effects will continue to become more and more special as time goes by, but does that mean we have to update all of the tried and true, just because they're dated by the precision of their rotoscoping? In the case of *The Thing* it's still my opinion that Rob Bottin's work holds up remarkably, and I'll stick by that.

Despite this fact, however, we've seen so-called bad optical work and latex make up effects replaced by even shittier CGI and less-than-stellar creative choices when they make these re-imaginings.

So if it is inevitable that the powers-that-be make an *Escape from New York* remake starring Leonidas himself, Gerard Butler, let's not have us another *The Fog* debacle shall we? If we must, let's aim for *Assault on Precinct 13* territory (a movie with weaker source material true, but a good remake none the less) and come out cleaner on the other side.

Again, that being said, imagine my surprise after having read the script. Despite all my reservations, this project seems to be heading in the right direction. It's not perfect mind you, but it does do a lot right. Sure the question why? will always exist. But if we allow ourselves to put that conundrum aside, we might actually get a good remake based on what I've read.

First and foremost, this is a script that is very respectful to the source material, managing to build upon and make much of what was so groundbreaking about the original, feel fresh again. Namely, it delivers on the film's great original premise. Basically, it's all here. New York is a Maximum Security Prison. Terrorists hijack the President's plane. Air Force one crash lands in post-apocalyptic Manhattan. And of course Snake Plissken has got to bring back the leader of the free world to save his own ass.

It's all here.

Not a thing about that awesome premise has been discarded or changed in such a way as to make the script unrecognizable to an admirer of the original. What has been changed however, are many of the details. And maybe details is the wrong word for the changes, when one considers how much has been expounded upon and increased in sheer size when compared to the original. And that is both a credit and a detriment depending on how you look at it.

Ultimately, what writer Ken Nolan has worked hardest at doing is explaining thoroughly many of the aspects that are taken for granted in the original, and has updated it within the current socio-economic context we find ourselves living in today.

Look out! There will be spoilers ahead, so if you want to remain unsullied with respect to this material, best to avert your eyes now!

When the original Escape opens, we were given a very brief prologue as to how the island works but not much explanation is given as to how the current state of affairs came about. Not so with this version.

Here we begin with a very detailed explanation of exactly what went down globally which lead to the mightiest city on earth being relegated to nothing more than a radioactive wasteland, surrounded by a retaining wall that not only keeps the prisoners in, but also keeps the island itself from flooding. Its explained through montage and voice over that this was due in large part by the effects of global warming, compounded by the detonation of a dirty bomb by terrorists within the city.

Its a much more detailed account of the back-story overall. And its this detail and broadening of the material, which holds true for just about every aspect of the new script. What we now have throughout the script is the expansion of much of the originals concepts and ideas. Ultimately, what we are left with is a story that is very large in scale that tries very hard (often times successfully) to add an air of realism to what were seeing.

Whats the same? Snake Plissken. Still the bad ass we know and love. He doesnt take shit from nobody. Dont worry, they didnt do anything lame, like get rid of his eye patch. Its all there as it should be.

Hauk. Hes the guy that puts Snake in this crap position. Hes still the Commissioner of the Police Force and he still wont call Plissken, Snake. However, here you get the feeling that hes pulling for Snake a little bit more than his former incarnation. The principal reason for this is his uncovering of a plot by corrupt government officials, which will leave the President in New York left for dead.

Rehme, Hauk's right hand man. His role continues to be minor in the proceedings. The Duke of New York is still A number one. But here his motivations are different. Here he has no desire to use the President as a bargaining chip to escape New York. Instead he only wishes to televise the Presidents execution in a gladiatorial game held in Madison Square Garden. He reasons this will, in turn, lead to further turmoil and anarchy in an already miserable world.

Brain. Does all of The Dukes big thinking. Still a turncoat, but here is given a motivation that differs significantly from the original. Gone is he and Snakes prior relationship together. Now hes been given a son, where he will do almost anything to see again. In Snake, he sees a way to get off the island and back to his boy.

Romero is still The Dukes right hand man, but here he seems to have been given less personality than that of the original. Not a big gripe, but in the first film hes a very memorable character.

The Crazies. These guys are one of my favorite things about the original and theyve been given a more prominent and pronounced place in this film. They play a pivotal part in the final showdown and are much more grotesque, well at least how they are described.

Image

Whats changed? Well, from the beginning we are given via flashback accounts of what lead to Plisskens fall from grace. How he went from one time war hero to disenfranchised criminal badass.

Gone is Ernest Borgnines Cabbie character and the

Girl in Chock Full O'Nuts. Also gone is Adrienne Barbeaus, Maggie. Instead the Cabbie and Maggie are replaced by a character that acts as Brains right hand man, scavenging for drugs in a Brinks Armored Security truck.

Also the Presidents opportunist Secretary of the State, a very Condoleezza Rice inspired character named Mrs. Clarke and a corrupt General Wilkins will further complicate Hawks extraction mission. Throw in a team of Navy Seals that have been dispatched by Wilkins to kill rather than bring back the President and you got a powder keg that is ready to go off.

Next the world itself has been adapted to be more relevant with all that is happening on the news these days. Instead of Snake being a Cold War anti-hero in those flashbacks I mentioned, he is now stationed in some unnamed desert country fighting off insurgents.

And its here I have my first gripe with the script. In trying to make it relevant, it seems at times its trying too hard and ends up undermining itself. We even find out that whats in the Presidents briefcase pertains to an inevitable confrontation with Iran and Syria. What you dont want to do with a piece of material like this is give it an obvious political position that you can read a million miles away.

Snake is a politically neutral character. He sides with no one but himself and the principles he holds dear. The movie too, should be like this. It should have its convictions, but it shouldnt read as heavy-handed or obvious about how it stands concerning our current state-of-affairs. Not that it entirely does, but it treads dangerously close at times.

However, the biggest change from the original is Snakes back-story. As I said before the material has been adapted for greater relevancy. Here we actually get to see his reason for leaving the military and become an outlaw. We even get to see just how it was he lost his eye.

Once again, this something I have a problem with. Namely, part of what makes Snake work for me, is that we dont know that much about him. He is a two-dimensional character in the spirit of great anti-heroes like Conan. By giving him a detailed back-story and justifications as well as motivations that are completely explained, the writer has substantially lessened that mysterious edge the character had. Granted, its not as bad as seeing Leather Faces actual face (remember how bad that remake sucked!) but it does diminish in my opinion some of what made Snake so cool.

Yeah, we all want to know how the hell he got that eye patch. But thats what makes him cool. Its that we dont know, and that we desire an answer that the filmmakers have chosen not to give us. It makes us think.

Besides, honestly, the scripts version of how it all went down is kind of lame. My imagination always thought it would be a tad more eventful than what transpires here.

Also a new subplot has been added. A team of Navy Seals has been dispatched to recover the President to the detriment of the operation, further adding to Snakes troubles. As the script unfurls we learn that Mrs. Clarke and General Wilkins are behind this. Its a new touch, but as it reads now I must say it works quite well.

What works? The general broadening of the stories scale is the most impressive adjustment. Here we see the actual hijacking of Air Force one. We get gigantic battle sequences, and a very kick ass ending that drives the whole affair home. Also, because the writer did such a phenomenal job with Black Hawk Down, hes added a deliberate military bent to the film that once again adds to that sense of realism he is trying to accomplish.

The added subplot concerning the corrupt government officials also works. But most importantly what works the best is how the script is notable not for what it changes, but for what it doesn't change. This script works as well as it does, precisely because it stays faithful to its source. It doesn't try and reinvent the wheel. What it does seek to do instead is give the wheel some thicker tread and better reinforcement. It's not always successful, but most of the time it manages to get it right and you have to give that credit. What with a project that seems to have such an uphill battle in terms of relevance with the fan base, it's nice to know that somebody is taking this seriously.

What doesn't work? I mentioned my distaste for this earlier, how Snake loses his eye. Period. Also, I think it could do without so much of Snake's back-story. Like I said, it loses some of the character's edge as a result.

Also, I didn't like the new running gag that has replaced the originals I thought you were dead? shtick. Put the old one back in there. Or keep them both. Either way, it just seems like something was changed for the sake of changing it, which is something this script never seems to do anywhere else in the story. So, it has the tendency of sticking out if you've seen the original.

Also, when Snake reveals that he's hidden the Titanium Disk that houses the prudent info the President has been so keen on preserving in his hallowed out eye socket. It was the one place in the script where I felt a little unnerved. Once again, this pertains to the mystery element of Snake character. We don't need to see such an intimate portrayal at times. I know this seems counter-intuitive, but I feel it's the right way to go. Leave that one for us, and in the end we'll thank you for it.

Lastly, and this is just my inner geek coming out, but I really wish the line Lee Van Cleef said in the original about kicking Snake outta' the world would've remained. The movie preserves a lot of dialogue from the original (I said it was faithful!), so why wouldn't you steal such an obviously great line! Don't throw away such a great one-liner if a remake is apparently inevitable.

So all in all . . . I can't say I didn't like it. Much to my chagrin what I saw didn't worry me to the umpteenth degree. Still, I can't say that this movie is a necessary one. This film doesn't need a remake, but if the movie gods decide that it's happening despite our protests, it appears as if it's moving in a direction that won't piss off the faithful, or bore the hell out of people who beg the question why it was such a big deal in the first place.

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