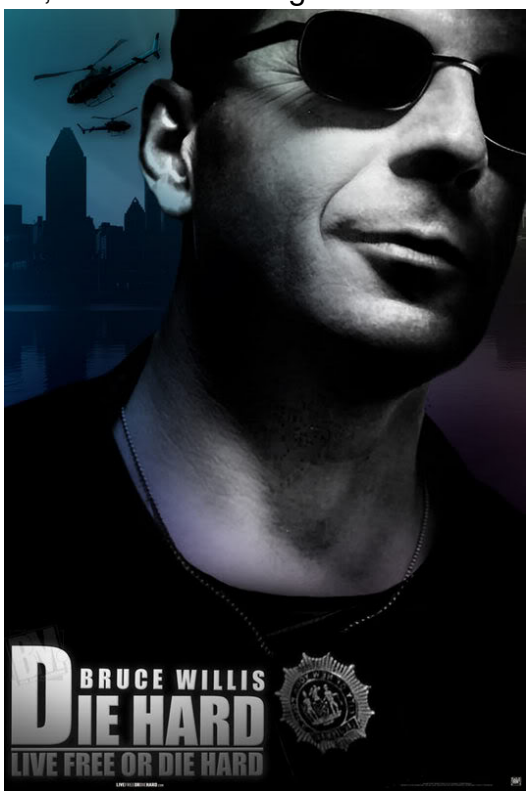
Yippie-ki-ya mothersporkers! Bruce Willis is back as John McClane after a twelve year absence following the pedestrian "Die Hard with a Vengeance", and the summer is much better for it, as Mitch says this is the best of the series since the original; two hours of unadulterated adrenaline, grip-the-edge-of-your-seats stunts, and wisecracking humor. Mitch reviews the latest from the "Die Hard" series.




Finally, there is something at the movie theater that is simply fun to watch. To paraphrase that movie trailer announcer guy with the deep voice: In a Summer full of bloated sequels, moody superheroes, and convoluted plots...One Man steps up and kicks all of their asses, not with high tech or superpowers, but with a wry grin and a hearty "yippie-ki-ya, mothersporkers".

Bruce Willis is back as John McClane after a twelve year absence following the pedestrian "Die Hard with a Vengeance", and the summer is much better for it, as this is the best of the series since the original; two hours of unadulterated adrenaline, grip-the-edge-of-your-seats stunts, and wisecracking humor.

I didn't care much for the second or third episodes of this franchise. At the time, Bruce Willis was too busy playing superstar, and the movies drug due to his sense

of self importance. This time, he's got it right. Willis is much more comfortable with the character now, and probably with his own age as well, and it shows on screen. John McClane is no longer the hotshot clown that battled Hans Gruber in the original...but he's not the brooding martyr he portrayed in the last two. His job as a policeman has cost him a lot; but he has accepted that as a price to pay for doing the job he loves, and does so well.

As we first catch up with him, he's doing something we would completely expect of him...spying on his college aged daughter, and pulling a potential boyfriend out of his car when things get a little too steamy between the couple. Lucy, his daughter, is not the least bit happy, and she lets him know about her displeasure.

But McClane doesn't have time to dwell on the rejection. It seems that the FBI Security Division has been hacked, and McClane has been requested to pick up a known hacker in nearby New Jersey (McClane is still a NYPD, but was at Rutgers University to spy on Lucy), and bring him to Washington for questioning. He better hurry, because we've already seen that several other hackers have been getting killed.

McClane's timing is still remarkable. Of course, he would be the one detective who shows up to pick up his suspect right when a hit was going down. From that point, we get an interesting buddy movie, as McClane must keep the poor geek (Justin Long) alive, but also has to rely on him to help unravel the mystery.

On that point, I'm reluctant to say much, as to not give away too much of the plotline, which can get a bit muddled at times, but still offers a puzzle that needs to be solved which I don't want to spoil. Suffice to say, no "Die Hard" movie is complete without the obligatory megla-maniac mastermind, and this time the role is filled by "Deadwood's" Timothy Olyphant as a computer genius with a diabolical plan for mayhem. Sinister second-in-commands are also required in these movies, and in this case the role is filled by a woman; the exotic Maggie Q, last seen as a martial arts hottie in "Mission Impossible III"...so yes, you can probably guess what will happen with her at some

point.

These plots and character devices are really just tent poles used to support the true point of "Die Hard" movies; showing John McClane as an indestructible fly-in-the-ointment agitator defying impossible odds while making wisecracks as he goes about getting a higher body count than Jack Bauer ever thought of. And this is where the film most closely resembles the original. They once again give McClane a "partner", but it's quite different from Reginald VelJohnson's radio partner Al Powell, or Samuel L. Jackson's urban store owner Zeus Carver. Willis and Long are in most scenes together, and have a wonderful, almost father-son chemistry, with Long's Matt Farrell getting almost as many comedic lines as Willis. The relationship between the two is allowed to slowly build throughout the movie, and does not seemed contrived (given the implausibility of the story-line, that is).

I also liked the fact that for once, they did not employ the tired plot device of having some high ranking bureaucrat getting in the way due to not believing All Things McClane. In this case, McClane is dealing with the FBI Deputy Director of Security Bowman (Cliff Curtis), and Bowman is actually a decent person who not only believes what McClane is saying, but isn't thwarted by anyone when he's finally called to help out...a welcome relief from the usual idiots McClane has to deal with.

Timothy Oliphant is sufficiently creepy and nerdy at the same time, but he suffers the same fate as William Sadler and Jeremy Irons in the second and third movies; they cannot help but pale in comparison to the fantastic job done by Alan Rickman as Hans Gruber. But despite that, he still comes across as a viable foe for McClane. Especially when it involves putting McClane's daughter Lucy in danger. It was a terrific combination of directing, writing, and acting by Mary Elizabeth Winstead that made you really see the similarities in young Lucy to both her mother and her father. One hilarious line from Farrell to McClane after he first listened to Lucy talk was "it's like I'm hearing you, except from someone with hair."

Justin Long shows that he is much more than just the guy who plays the "Mac" in Apple's "Mac/PC" commercials (although I was never able to tell for certain whether or not the computers he was using were Macs or PCs...that was probably intentional). He was quite believable in the role, whether it called for complete panic, scared senseless heroism, as the straight man to Willis, or cracking his own jokes. In fact, a lot of the humor in the movie came from the contrast between the uber-geek and the "analog dinosaur" McClane. Also, watch for a very funny ten minute cameo from a well known celebrity playing the prototypical stereotype of a "control-the-world-from-my-parent's-basement" fanboy.

What really makes these movies entertaining, however, is McClane himself. He has always been an Everyman version of James Bond; nearly indestructible, but not quite so, as he tends to leave a pint or two of blood behind each movie. But unlike Bond, McClane is a reluctant hero; a simple man who has the wherewithal to step up when circumstances demand it. There is a nice scene half-way through where Farrell asks McClane what it takes to "be The Man". McClane's eloquent answer goes a long way in establishing the bond between the two men, and sums up the character of McClane so well, and why we admire him. Bruce Willis has truly aged well, and his maturity as an actor and as a person resonates throughout the film.

As far as the plot itself...eh...what plot? It's all an excuse to blow things up, show men outrunning fireballs, dodging bullets, and making harrowing escapes. The stunt pieces get more and more elaborate (and more and more hokey) as the movie progresses, but it's enjoyable nonetheless as McClane still prefers using his brain, brawn, and shear audacity to outwit those that have superior fire-power. I'm not even sure that the X-Men's Wolverine and his mutant healing powers could survive the punishment McClane takes, but that's the willful suspension of disbelief required to enjoy these movies.

And I did thoroughly enjoy it. This wasn't the best movie I've seen this summer, but it was the most fun I've had watching one. Don't look for "meanings". Don't look for deep plots. Don't look for Oscar nominated performances. Because you won't find them. What you will find is an entertaining

little gem that will leave you smiling long after you leave the multiplex.

## My Rating: Frank Ryan (3 Footballs)