

Nick Prescott's Reviews

Die Hard 4.0

Talent: Bruce Willis, Timothy Olyphant, Justin Long, Maggie Q, Cliff Curtis, Mary Elizabeth Winstead, Kevin Smith.

Date of review: Thursday 9th August 2007

Director: Len Wiseman

Duration: 127 minutes

Classification: M

We rate it: 4 and a half stars.

When it opened in 1988, the original Die Hard wowed audiences, ushered in a new generation of blockbuster Hollywood action-thrillers, and made a megastar of Bruce Willis, who was, at the time, the still-hirsute star of TV's Moonlighting. The director of the original film, John McTiernan, was a young filmmaker whose skills with an action sequence were considerable; he would return to the franchise a few years later to make the third instalment, Die Hard With A Vengeance, a disappointing though still very bankable entry.

Now, with Die Hard 4.0 (and yes, the odd title does have something to do with the plot) the still-tough as nails Bruce returns, under the direction of young action-thriller wunderkind Len Wiseman, who was responsible for the wildly entertaining popcorn thrillers Underworld and Underworld Evolution. The results, I am delighted to say, are absolutely smashing, in every sense of that word.

The use of software numbering in title refers to the modus operandi of the badguys in this film. The tough and rather chilling conspiracy at the centre of Die Hard 4.0 involves technology. Criminal mastermind Thomas Gabriel (Timothy Olyphant) is a coldly brilliant computer genius who has assembled a group of America's most gifted mercenary programmers and computer hackers in order to carry out an elaborate cyber-attack on the country's entire electronic infrastructure. Gabriel has surrounded this geek enclave with a small army of ruthless guns-for-hire, and it is these toughguys who first attract the attention of our hero, John McClane.

McClane, a wisecracking and somewhat embittered police officer, is one of modern cinema's iconic action heroes. Taking over from the kind of snarling cop Clint Eastwood used to play, and coming to prominence in the 1980s alongside actors like Stallone and Schwarzenegger, Willis managed to make McClane a tremendously likeable figure, as well as a convincingly tough and resourceful one. Here Wiseman

puts both actor and character through their paces from beginning to end, and Die Hard 4.0 emerges as one of the must-see Hollywood concoctions of the last few years.

This is an action film first and foremost, and the stunts, chases, gun battles and explosions are of the most spectacular kinds imaginable. Wiseman and Willis both wanted to rely less on computer effects and more on physical action and stunts, and the resultant set-pieces often have a hair-raising intensity about them. There's a dab of CGI as well, of course, particularly during the climactic chase and showdown, which involves, at various points, an 18-wheeler, a speeding van, a fighter jet and a collapsing freeway. This sequence alone is worth the price of admission.

It's satisfying for me, as a member of that original cinema audience who marvelled at the original Die Hard in 1988, to be able to say that almost 20 years later, a new filmmaker has made an entry in the series that stands proudly alongside its forefather. Die Hard 4.0 is non-stop spectacle done with a well-judged mix of real stunts and amazing CGI, and it's a hell of a blast from beginning to end.

Nick Prescott