Arts and Entertainment

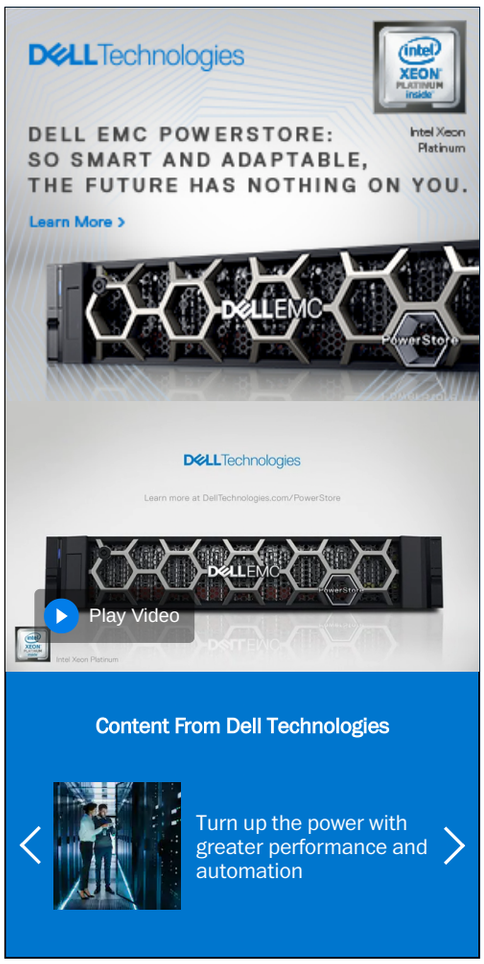
‘Die Hard’ isn’t just a Christmas movie — it’s the best ever, according to its Hollywood distributor

Bruce Willis in 1988's "Die Hard." (YouTube) ((YouTube screengrab))

By Eli Rosenberg and Alex Horton
Dec. 20, 2018 at 2:29 a.m. HST

No matter where you fall in the debate, the statement from Twentieth Century Fox is unlikely to settle it.

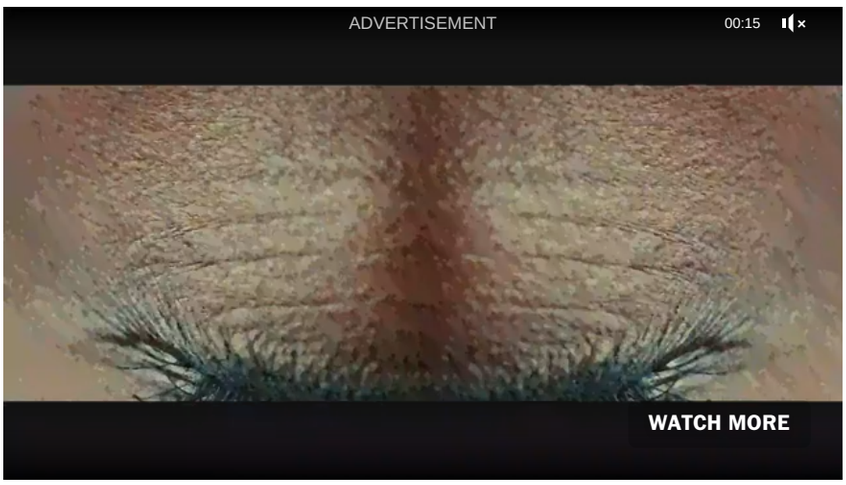
The studio said this week that the Bruce Willis action flick “Die Hard,” which it distributed 30 years ago, is not just any Christmas story, but also “the greatest Christmas story ever told."



The studio made the claim in a new trailer it released for the film this week, with the holiday season in full swing.

The debate over whether “Die Hard” is a Christmas story has raged for years. What was perhaps once a tongue-in-cheek pushback to the G-rated fare the holiday season has typically been known for, has helped give the movie an indelible association with the holidays.

The film now plays in theaters around the country over the holidays. There is a corresponding illustrated book, “A Die Hard Christmas.” Bruce Willis has weighed in: “Die Hard is not a Christmas movie. It’s a g--d--- Bruce Willis movie,” he said in July. And news media articles now chronicle the debate every December.



Google trends show that searches for “Die Hard” and “Christmas” spike every December.

The film was not released around Christmas; it came out in July. But it takes place during Christmas.

[Is ‘Die Hard’ a Christmas movie? Bruce Willis finally has an answer.]

Hero John McClane begins the movie on a trip to California, to visit his children during the holiday and win back the affection of his wife. But the film’s villain, Hans Gruber, uses a holiday party as a setting to take hostages.

Steven E. de Souza, the film’s screenwriter, is firmly in the “ ‘Die Hard’ is a Christmas movie” camp. He told The Washington

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Post's Alex Horton, who has seen "Die Hard" four times and believes it is "the most iconic action flick of the 1980s," that the film's producer, Joel Silver, had predicted the movie would get played at Christmastime for years.

De Souza also made a chart in an attempt to argue that "White Christmas" is not a Christmas movie if "Die Hard" isn't.

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The entirety of "Die Hard" takes place during the holiday, de Souza noted, not just the final reel, like "White Christmas." It has three Christmas songs — "Let It Snow," "Winter Wonderland" and "Christmas in Hollis" — to two in "White Christmas."

['The Big Lebowski' is 20. We reached out to the critics who panned it to see what they think now.]

Academics and historians have weighed in.

"Christmas is a liminal ritualized period of carnivalesque inversion during which underdogs and the powerless are briefly elevated above hierarchical structures," historian Greg Jenner wrote on Twitter. "John McClane is a classic Christmas underdog triumphing over selfish venality."

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By Eli Rosenberg

Eli Rosenberg covers work and labor for The Washington Post. He joined The Post in 2017 after a decade in New York, where he worked at the New York Times, the Daily News, and the Brooklyn Paper. He has covered misinformation campaigns, politics in the Trump era, immigration issues, and disasters across the country. Twitter

By Alex Horton

Alex Horton is a general assignment reporter for The Washington Post. He previously covered the military and national security for Stars and Stripes, and served in Iraq as an Army infantryman. Twitter

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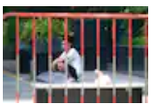

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