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John McTiernan's Explanation of 'Die Hard' as a Christmas Film Is a Lot to Unpack

For years, a mostly tongue in cheek battle has played out in which fans argue as to why it should be a holiday movie, and the director has his own thoughts.

BY RYAN PARKER DECEMBER 16, 2020 3:44PM



PHOTOFEST



John McTiernan has offered up his explanation as to how *Die Hard* became a Christmas movie, but viewers may need to remove their shoes and make fists with their toes because there is much to unpack.

For years, a mostly tongue-in-cheek battle has played among fans who argue whether *Die Hard* should, or should not, be considered a Christmas movie. The events of the film take place on Christmas eve, but the film was released in the summer of '88.

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McTiernan's take on why the film became a Christmas movie is way deeper — with multiple moving parts.

The director begins his *Die Hard*-Christmas conversation by saying the explanation will be presented in a particular sequence, just like the shots in one of his films.

“Telling a story is not a random-access activity. There is a particular word in a particular place in a particular order that is the right word. And if it's a movie, there is the right shot,” McTiernan says. “And if you have any nerve, you'll try to figure out what the right shot is.”

From that point, McTiernan moves to a discussion of paintings. The painter, he says, had to discover a tiny element of the piece they could focus on to find satisfaction or escape. He points to the late 18th century painter Jacques-Louis David, who gave the nobles he painted “trustworthy faces” even though they were not rich or noteworthy.

“And that was, in effect, the king's losing control of the content,” says the filmmaker, who also ties David's work to the French Revolution.

After the somewhat confusing preamble, McTiernan gets into the *Die Hard* connection. He notes that he drew inspiration from the Bedford Falls becoming Pottersville moment in *It's a Wonderful Life*, which he believes was meant to represent rampant capitalism.

McTiernan says he only signed on to direct *Die Hard* after producer Joel Silver agreed to allow John McClane to be a normal, everyday person, who would make the people in authority look foolish. McTiernan says he had an agenda that was mostly understood by the cast and crew, who took joy in the subversion.

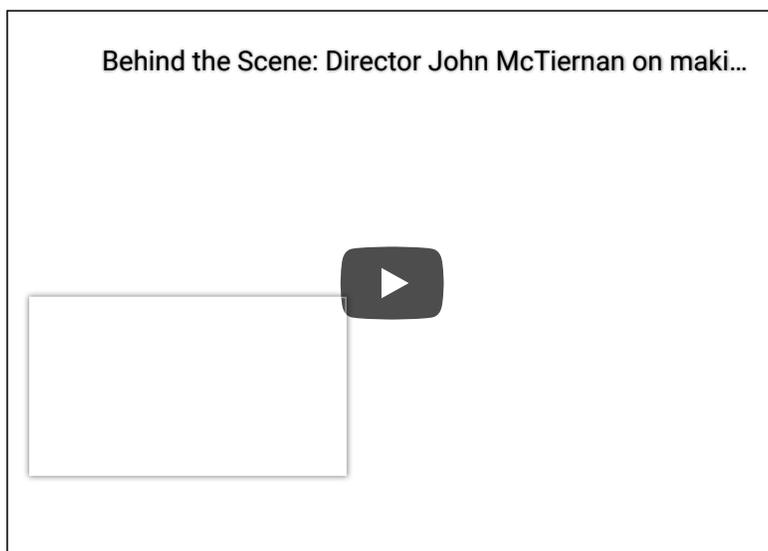
“We hadn't intended it to be a Christmas movie, but the joy that came from it is what turned it into a Christmas movie,” says McTiernan.

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But the video doesn't end there. McTiernan then draws a connection between *Die Hard* and the current state of American politics.

"There are genuinely evil people out there," says the director. "My hope at Christmas this year is that you will all remember that authoritarians are low-status, angry men who have gone to rich people and said, 'If you give us power, we will make sure nobody takes your stuff.' And their obsessions with guns and boots and uniforms and squad cars and all that stuff. And all those things you amass with power meant to scare us, meant to shut us up so we don't kick them to the side of the road and decent people of the world get on with building a future."

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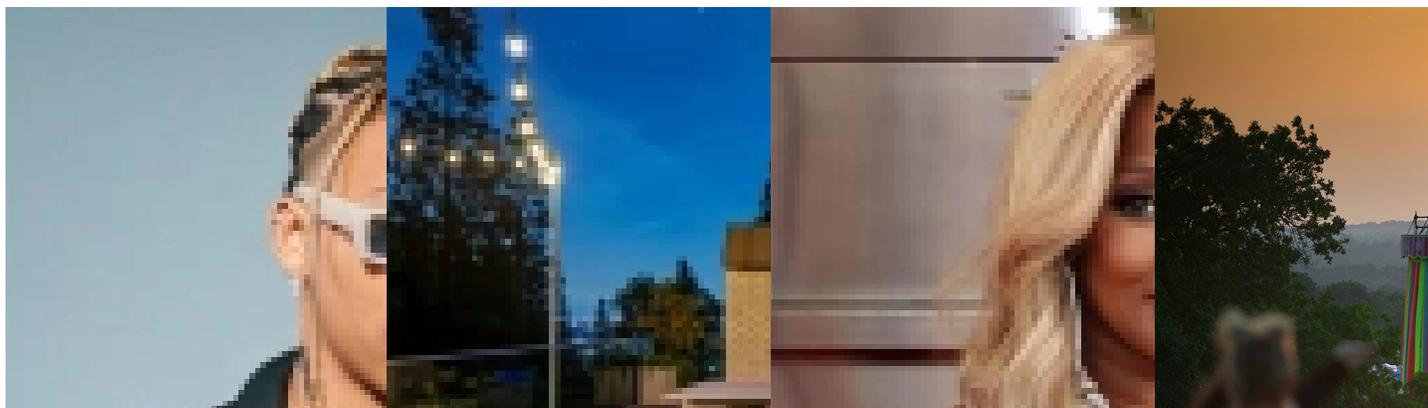
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