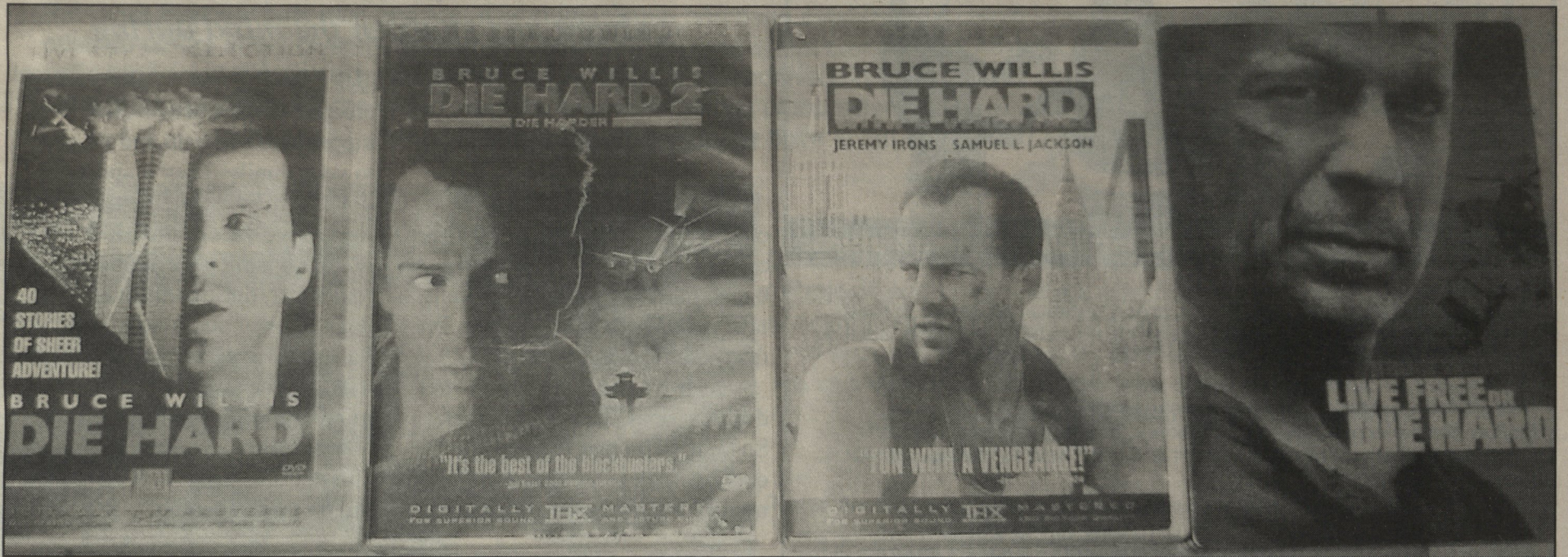


# The wrong guy in the wrong place at the wrong time: The story of John McClane's life continues



By Adam W. Morrison

As a severe movie junkie, the action genre doesn't get more entertaining than the Die Hard series.

Not only do they have tremendous replay value, they give me what I want when it comes to action movies: Hard R-Rated movies that don't skimp on the violence and profanity. Childish, I'm sure. Naturally, these movies are a joke when shown on television.

This summer brought us Live Free or Die Hard, the fourth installment in the series. Here's an example of expecting the worst, but being really surprised when I actually did see it.

First off, Len Wiseman is the director of this film.

He previously directed the Underworld films, which I am not a fan of. Then there was the addition of Justin Long playing McClane's sidekick. This irritated me simply because Long stars in those awful Mac vs. PC commercials.

The final nail in the coffin, as it would seem, was the announcement Die Hard 4 would be rated PG-13. Anyone who has seen any of the previous films will know a PG-13 rated Die Hard makes no sense.

Well, lo and behold, I actually liked it. The film, like the other ones, is full of action but doesn't feel stupid. It's also pretty funny, too. The banter between McClane and Farrell (Long) is good for some laughs, though it was much better when Samuel L. Jackson was the sidekick.

The film's weakness lies in Thomas Gabriel (Timothy Olyphant), who certainly isn't Hans Gruber, or even Col. Stuart. He's just not that intimidating, though he shows a pretty dark side towards the end.

The real reason I love these movies is Bruce Willis as

McClane, who brings likeability to his signature character with his endless wise-cracking attitude.

Willis has also brought a sense of reality to the character. In the third film, he really doesn't want to deal with the bad guys this time, as he's got a bad hangover.

Now on DVD, in at least several different versions, comes Live Free or Die Hard.

The version I bought is the two-disc special edition, in steelbook packaging exclusive to Future Shop. Seems these are becoming the rage in the DVD world these days, not just releasing new releases in this style of packaging (Transformers, Ocean's 13, Shrek 3, Spider-Man 3, Planet Terror, Death Proof), but repackaging older titles as well, i.e. Fight Club, The Omen, Platoon. Even the previous special editions of the Die Hard movies were repackaged in steelbook editions. They looked nice, but I don't need them. The versions I have are long out of print.

The film is presented in anamorphic widescreen, with an aspect ratio of 2.40:1. Since I don't have a widescreen television, it makes no difference to me if a DVD is enhanced for widescreen televisions. Even without that added enhancement, the presentation is quite good.

As for sound quality, a Dolby Digital 5.1 track is provided. I can't really say all that much without a surround system. I will point out the back of the DVD (the throwaway insert) says a DTS 5.1 audio track is included. I couldn't find one on the DVD, which is kind of lame. When you do have the chance to watch movies in surround sound, DTS is often superior to Dolby Digital.

Disc one includes both the PG-13 and unrated versions. For obvious reasons, I chose the unrated version. The biggest change in this unrated version is the added profanity, plus some minor bloody moments here and there. Still, it's

tame compared to Die Hard: With a Vengeance. The only extra on disc one comes in the way of an audio commentary with Wiseman, Willis, and Editor Nicolas De Toth.

Immediately, they discuss the PG-13 issue and say they just intended to shoot it like a Die Hard movie. They also discuss early scripts for the film, one that included McClane's son, John Jr., instead of his daughter Lucy. One problem with this track is the amount of dead-air, hearing no comments. When they do talk, some useful information pops up. It's not a great commentary (that would be reserved for Evil Dead II), but not bad, either.

Moving onto disc two, we start with Analog Hero in a Digital World, a 97 minute documentary that is thankfully more than usual PR fluff piece.

Divided into 10 chapters, it starts with an appreciation and discussion of the influence of the 1988 original. Wiseman talks about how he was in high school at the time and being obsessed with it. At some points, it does border on too much praise. Yeah, we all love John McClane and the Die Hard movies, but this seems redundant. Kevin Smith offers some points on how McClane paved the way for a more believable action hero. One that does stupid things like running across broken glass while bare foot, and a character that was bloody and exhausted by film's end.

From there, we learn about how Wiseman became involved with the project, and what direction he wanted to take the series. It's also discussed how McClane is the worst guy to be fighting cyber-terrorism.

He's a Timex watch in a digital age, as Gabriel says. Even the past movies have showed him out of touch with modern technology; whether it is touch screens, faxes, and cell phones.

Also brought up is the danger of wanting to remind people of the

elements that made the previous films enjoyable, but offering something new.

We also hear from the other cast members about they ended up in the film. Most amusing is Kevin Smith talking about his role, from his perspective of also being a director.

The documentary also discusses the stunts, the editing process (which can often make or break a film), visual and practical effects, the digital process of giving the movie its look, sound design, and the music score. Ultimately, it provides a decent look at the film and is more informative than entertaining.

In the 22-minute Yippee-Ki Yay, Motherf\*\*\*\*\*, Smith casually interviews Willis while on the Fox lot.

This interview is more honest than most, especially when Willis mentions he was unhappy with Die Hard 2 and Die Hard: With a Vengeance.

We also get a behind-the-scenes look at Guyz Nite. The whole thing has a comedic tone, referring to the Die Hard movies as documentaries. They talk about how Fox took down the first music video they posted, citing copyright infringement, but later asked them to help them promote the newest movie by adding a fourth verse to the song.

In Fox Legacy, originally aired on the Fox Movie Channel, Tom Rothman talks about how McClane has remained an enduring character. He doesn't say much new here, just really trying to promote the latest movie.

Rounding out this disc are the theatrical trailer, and adverts for Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer, Mr. Brooks, The Last of the Mohicans, and season six of 24.

So, that's the DVD of Live Free or Die Hard, the latest adventure of John McClane.

For me, getting the DVD was a no-brainer. I love the previous films, and enjoyed this one.