

DIE HARD (1988)

written by Jeb Stuart and Steven E de Souza
based on the novel Nothing Last Forever by Roderick Thorpe
directed by John McTiernan
running time: 128 minutes

BASIC SCREENPLAY ANALYSIS

PROTAGONIST: John McClane, 40's, NYC detective.

CHARACTERIZATION/MAIN MISBEHAVIOR: Selfish; unable to compromise

EXTERNAL GOAL: To save Holly and the Nakatomi hostages from Hans Gruber

INTERNAL GOAL: To be selfish / To support his wife

MAIN DRAMATIC CONFLICT: Hans Gruber

THEME: Don't judge a book by its cover.

CENTRAL DRAMATIC QUESTION: Will McClane learn to support his wife's ambitions and save her from Hans Gruber?

ENDING: McClane risks his life and saves Holly from Hans.

ARC: McClane goes from a man with a marriage paralyzed by his selfishness, to a man who realizes marriage is about compromise, and in the end, risks his life to save his wife.

STORY ENGINES

ACT I

McClane arrives at the Nakatomi Christmas party. Moments later, the party is taken hostage by Hans Gruber. After witnessing the murder of Holly's boss, McClane escapes to an upper level and pulls the building's fire alarm to alert the authorities.

ACT II-A

After Hans calls off the fire alarm, McClane fights and kills one of his men, taking a walkie-talkie to alert the authorities again. McClane is forced to throw a dead bad guy out a window and shoot up a cop car to fully engage the LAPD.

ACT II-B

Now with LAPD on the scene, McClane uses the C4 and detonators (stolen from a dead bad guy) and takes out Hans's men killing ill-prepared SWAT teams. Impersonating a hostage, Hans stumbles upon McClane and manages to get his detonators back after an intense gun fight.

ACT III

Discovering Hans plan to blow the roof, McClane saves the hostages, but finds his wife has been taken hostage by Hans. McClane goes up against the odds, and ultimately, kills Hans and saves his wife.

FULL SCREENPLAY ANALYSIS

ACT I

1 - As his plane lands at LAX, **JOHN MCCLANE**'s hands are tense on the airplane arm rests.

NO SHOES SETUP: A passenger tells McClane to take off his shoes to lessen anxiety.

FEAR OF HEIGHTS SETUP: McClane's anxious about the plane landing.

2 - Passenger notices a gun on McClane. McClane set him at ease and tells him he's a cop.

3 - Nakatomi Christmas Party. **ELLIS LOWE** hits on **HOLLY GENNARO**.

5 - Holly's on a call with her kids. It's revealed McClane is visiting for the Christmas holiday.

6 - Holly slams down a family picture on her desk: she has contempt for her husband.

7 - **ARGYLE**, the limo driver, discovers McClane's a working class guy: his first time in a limo and he sits up front. McClane reveals he's been separated from his wife for six months.

ARGYLE

So, you divorced?

MCCLANE

She had a good job, it turned into a great career.

ARGYLE

So, why didn't you come?

MCCLANE

'Cause I'm a New York cop. I got six months backlog of New York scumbags I'm still trying to put behind bars. I can't just pick up and go that easy.

ARGYLE

In other words, you thought she wasn't gonna make it out here and she'd come crawling on back to you, so why bother to pack, right?

MCCLANE

Like I said, you're fast, Argyle.

9 - Argyle and McClane hit it off. Argyle will be waiting in the parking garage if things don't go well with his wife.

10 - INCITING INCIDENT (internal): McClane discovers Holly is not using his last name.

11 - INCITING INCIDENT (external): McClane finds his way into the Nakatomi Christmas party.

13 - JOSEPH TAKAGI, Holly's boss and president of The Nakatomi Corporation, introduces himself to McClane. Takagi takes him to Holly's office, where they find Ellis snorting cocaine.

14 - Holly walks into her office. Awkward moment, but she hugs McClane. Ellis, insulting McClane's social status, insists Holly show him "the watch."

GOLD ROLEX SETUP:

ELLIS

Show him the watch.

HOLLY

Later.

ELLIS

Well, go on. Show him. What, are you embarrassed?
It's just a small token of appreciation for all her
hard work. It's a Rolex.

MCCLANE

I'm sure I'll see it later.

16 - GENNARO vs McCLANE SETUP: Holly takes McClane into Ellis's private office. She asks him to stay at her house for the kids, but McClane argues over her use of Gennaro as a last name. Holly needs the name, as Nakatomi is a Japanese company.

- McClane's more focused on his needs, not Holly's desire to have career.

17 - Their argument's interrupted -- Holly must give a speech to the employees. Still angry, McClane refuses to support his wife and stays in the private office.

18 - Two men, **KARL** and **THEO**, enter the lobby of Nakatomi and kill two security guards.

19 - A truck arrives in the parking garage and more men appear. **HANS GRUBER** leads the pack.

20 - The bad guys go to work. Disguised as security, they shut down Nakatomi plaza access from the outside, not to mention, prevent anyone in the building from leaving.

22 - McClane follows the advice from the plane passenger and takes off his shoes. He calls Argyle, but the call is cut short -- the bad guys have cut the phone lines.

24 - STRONG MOVEMENT FORWARD: McClane hears gun shots and immediately grabs his gun: the bad guys have invaded the party with force. He spots an exit...

25 - The bad guys sweep the offices, but McClane escaped to temporary safety upstairs.

27 - Hans Gruber addresses the party, criticizing The Nakatomi Corporation. He finds Takagi and takes him to elevator...

28 - McClane notices the bad guys have brought heavy weaponry -- a rocket launcher.

29 - Hans takes Takagi to the upper level offices. Noticing models of new Nakatomi developments...

HANS

And when Alexander saw the breadth
of his domain he wept, for there were no
more worlds to conquer.

30 - Hans demands the vault code key from Takagi, as it contains \$640 million in bearer bonds.

32 - TURN / PLOT POINT#1: McClane, gun drawn, spies on Hans and Takagi. Takagi insists he doesn't know the code and Hans kills him without hesitation. McClane sees Takagi's brains splattered across the glass and darts out of the office.

- It's not kidnapping or extortion -- it's life and death.

34 - The bad guys wire the roof with explosives.

35 - DECISION: A few floors above, McClane pulls the fire alarm. The bad guys now know what floor he's on.

ACT II-A

36 - The bad guys call 911, report a false alarm and McClane sees the inbound fire trucks turn around.

37 - **TONY** sweeps the floor McClane's on. McClane gets the drop on him, but Tony knocks the gun from his hands.

38 - FIRST TRIAL / FIRST CASUALTY: Tony and McClane fight. They wrestle down a flight of stairs and Tony breaks his neck.

39 - McClane now has a walkie-talkie and machine gun, but unfortunately, no shoes that fit.

41 - McClane sends Tony's body down the elevator with a Santa hat and note written on his chest: "Now I have a machine gun. Ho, Ho, Ho." Both the bad guys and the entire party see the body.

42 - McClane eavesdrops from above the elevator. He has a rough count of their numbers, a few of their names and that they are German.

44 - Tony happened to be Karl's brother and now Karl wants blood. Hans calms him down and insists he focus on the job, but there's a rage inside.

- Karl will stop at nothing to kill McClane.

44 - Holly and Ellis observe Hans and Karl and know McClane is responsible. Ellis is upset with McClane for endangering their lives. Holly defends her husband: "he's doing his job."

45 - McClane makes an emergency call from the roof with the walkie talkie. Hans and Karl overhear it and immediately know his location...

46 - While communicating the police dispatch -- who believe his story is a prank -- McClane takes fire from Karl and crew. Dispatch overhears the commotion, not believing it's gunfire, and send a police officer to Nakatomi.

46 - Buying twinkles, **OFFICER AL POWELL** gets the call for Nakatomi.

46-48 - COMBAT: Gun battle between Karl and McClane. McClane manages to out maneuver them, but in the process, traps himself inside an unused elevator shaft.

52 - Dangling in the elevator shaft, McClane uses the machine gun and strap as a rope and anchor, attempting to reach an air duct along an adjacent wall. He slips and rockets a few floors down, barely managing to make it inside another duct. Hearing the commotion, Karl sees the light from McClane's cigarette lighter and knows the floor he's on.

53 - Searching, Karl sprays bullets into the air duct McClane's in, barely missing him. Just as he's about to stumble on McClane, Karl is summoned away by Hans.

55 - Officer Powell enters Nakatomi and the impostor security guard plays it off, claiming they've been having problems with false alarms all night.

57 - McClane spots Powell's car. While attempting to break a window to alert Powell, McClane is fired upon and takes out two bad guys.

58 - MIDPOINT: Powell finds nothing wrong at Nakatomi and leaves. Noticing Powell begin to leave, McClane throws a dead body out the window and it lands on Powell's car hood, shattering his windshield. McClane then opens fire on Powell's police cruiser and screams...

MCCLANE
Welcome to the party, pal!

ACT II-B

59 - While talking to his girlfriend about dinner plans, **RICHARD THORNBURG**, news reporter, overhears "shots fired at Nakatomi" through the police scanner and abruptly cancels the plans.

59 - Police show up in droves. Hans assures his men everything is okay.

60 - McClane calls Hans over the walkie talkie. While talking with Hans, McClane discovers he now has explosives, but unfortunately, still no shoes that fit.

HANS

You know my name, but I don't know yours.
Just another American who saw too many
movies as a child? Another orphan of a
bankrupt culture who thinks he's John
Wayne? Rambo? Marshall Dillion?

MCCLANE

I was always kinda partial to Roy Rogers,
actually. I really liked those sequin shirts.

HANS

Do you really think you have a chance
against us, Mr. Cowboy?

MCCLANE

Yippee-ki-yay, motherfucker!

62 - Thornburg gets a crew and news truck for coverage on the Nakatomi incident.

62 - Hans is informed McClane now has the detonators.

64 - McClane gives Powell info on Hans and his men.

65 - **DEPUTY POLICE CHIEF ROBINSON** questions Powell about McClane. Robinson believes McClane could be a terrorist.

67 - Holly approaches Hans, who has now taken command in her office, asking for restroom breaks for her co-workers. Perhaps attracted to Holly, Hans asks her name. Noticing her family picture face-down on the desk, she briefly hesitates and replies, "Miss Gennaro."

68 - Argyle, still parked under the building, overhears Thornburg's news broadcast.

69 - Robinson and Powell argue. The police hit the building with spotlights: they're going in.

70 - Spotlights hit the building and Hans knows the police are coming. His men take action...

73 - The bad guys take out the spotlights. SWAT teams attempt to breach the lobby, but are fired upon and held back.

75 - The police send in an armored tank and the bad guys hit it repeatedly with a rocket launcher.

76 - Over the walkie-talkie, McClane begs Hans to stop, but Hans orders his men to continue barbecuing the officers in the tank.

77 - ASSUMPTION OF POWER: McClane takes the C4, wires it to a chair with a computer monitor, and tosses it down an elevator shaft. The explosion takes out the two guys with the rocket launcher and McClane saves the day.

82 - Ellis, the slick-dick salesman, attempts to negotiate with Hans to bring McClane in.

83 - McClane and Powell bond. As Powell lifts McClane's spirits, Hans interrupts...

84 - Ellis has given them McClane's name and occupation, but didn't reveal Holly as his wife. Ellis attempts negotiating delivery of the detonators, but McClane refuses and Hans kills Ellis.

86 - The police hear the entire incident. Robinson blames McClane, but Powell defends him.

88 - Hans contacts Robinson and demands the release of international terrorists.

90 - **AGENTS JOHNSON & JOHNSON**, with the FBI, arrive and take command.

93 - Hans, searching the rigged roof alone, stumbles upon McClane. Unable to reach his gun, Hans uses an American accent to impersonate a hostage and fools McClane. Noticing McClane's bare feet, Hans and McClane share a laugh.

95 - TURN / PLOT POINT #2: McClane gives Hans his gun. Hans then reveals himself and turns the gun on McClane, demanding his detonators back.

- REVERSAL: Hans attempts to shoot McClane, but discovers he's been given a gun with no bullets.

96 - Just as McClane thinks he has the upper hand, Karl and crew show up. A gun battle ensues and McClane takes out two more of the men.

98 - NO SHOES PAYOFF: Remembering McClane's without shoes, Hans orders his men to shoot all the glass. Machine gun out of bullets, McClane finds himself pinned down.

98 - DECISION: McClane manages to escape, but is forced to leave the detonators.

- Hans outsmarted McClane, now has his detonators back, and can execute his plan.

ACT III

99 - Holly notices Hans and Karl as they come back from the battle. In a rage, Karl trashes a mini-bar and Holly knows her husband's still alive.

101 - Pulling broken glass from his bloody feet, McClane chats with Powell.

101 - POWELL'S MISTAKE SETUP: Powell reveals to McClane his biggest mistake as an officer: shooting a kid with a toy gun.

POWELL

You know, when you're a rookie they can teach you everything about being a cop, except how to live with a mistake. Anyway, I just couldn't bring myself to draw my gun on anybody again.

103 - The FBI orders the building's power shut off. This is the final key to opening the vault, just as Hans had planned.

HANS

You ask for miracles, Theo. I give you the F.B.I.

104 - The vault opens. Hans now has \$640 million in bearer bonds.

105 - The FBI calls in air-support.

106 - Hans contacts the FBI. The helicopters are ready and the state department has organized the release of the international terrorist. Hans laughs...

HANS

They touch down, we blow the roof, they spend a month sifting through the rubble and by the time they figure out what went wrong, we'll be sitting on a beach earning twenty percent.

107 - POINT OF NO RETURN (internal): McClane asks Powell to find his wife and apologize for him. He should have been more supportive, he should have compromised in marriage.

MCCLANE

She's heard me say I love her a thousand times. She's never heard me say I'm sorry.

108 - McClane wonders what Hans was doing on the roof. Instructing Powell to keep radio silence, McClane goes back to investigate.

109 - Thornburg strong-arms the McClane's maid: he'll have her deported if she doesn't allow an interview with the McClane children.

110 - McClane finds the roof rigged with explosives. As he attempts to warn Powell about the explosives, Karl gets the drop on him. McClane knocks the run out of his hand and a bare-knuckle brawl ensues.

111 - *THORNBURG vs HOLLY SETUP*: As the helicopters approach, Hans notices Thornburg's interview with the McClane children. He turns over the photograph on Holly's desk and discovers she's McClane's wife. Sending the hostages to the roof, Hans takes Holly with him.

112 - Trigger happy FBI men close in on the building, aiming to kill all the terrorists on the roof, with a potential 25% casualty rate for the hostages.

113 - Karl manages to get McClane's gun. As McClane's flees, he's grazed by a bullet.

114 - McClane, disarming Karl once again, manages to hang Karl from the chains of a turbine.

115 - POINT OF NO RETURN (external): McClane makes his way to the roof and kills a guard. He orders all the hostages off the roof and hears Holly has been taken to the vault by Hans.

115 - The hostages panic and McClane fires warning shots above his head to get them moving. This gets the attention of the approaching FBI helicopters and they open fire on McClane.

116 - Pinned by the FBI on the opposite end of the roof exit, McClane, knowing he has mere seconds before the roof blows, ties a fire hose around his waist.

116 - One of Hans's men spots the hostages coming back down. Hans orders the roof blown immediately.

117 - *FEAR OF HEIGHTS PAYOFF*: Standing on the roof's ledge with a fire hose secure around his waist, McClane jumps just as the FBI opens fire and Hans blows the roof. The FBI helicopter goes up in flames and McClane plummets down the side of the building...

118 - Falling to his death, the fire hose mounting stops McClane in mid free-fall. He shoots out a window and manages to swing inside to safety. Just when McClane thinks he's safe, the mounting falls over the building's ledge. Inches before the weight of the mount pulls him out the window, he unties it.

119 - Argyle spots Theo backing an ambulance out of one of their trucks.

120 - Near the vault, McClane overhears Hans and Holly, but he's only got two bullets left.

120 - Argyle crashes the limo into the ambulance, taking out Theo.

121 - McClane, bloodied to all hell, gets the drop on Hans and his guard, but Hans gets behind Holly and puts a gun to her head. Hans orders McClane to drop his machine gun and McClane does so. McClane starts laughing...he's got his Baretta taped to his back.

122 - Distracting Hans with his laughter, McClane pulls the gun from behind his back, shooting Hans in the chest and the last bad guy in the forehead.

123 - Hans falls out the window, but manages to grab hold of Holly's wrist with the gold Rolex.

123 - *GOLD ROLEX PAYOFF*: McClane releases Holly's watch and Hans falls to his death, taking a symbol of materialism -- the gold Rolex -- with him to the pavement.

123 - CLIMAX: McClane saves Holly from Hans.

EPILOGUE

125 - GENNARO vs McCLANE PAYOFF: Outside, Powell immediately recognizes McClane. McClane, with Holly in his arms, walks to Powell and they embrace.

MCCLANE

Powell, this is my wife, Holly...Holly Gennaro.

HOLLY

(correcting McClane)

Holly McClane.

126 - Robinson appears and reprimands McClane for Ellis's death. As McClane reaches back to punch him, people scream. Karl, just as bloodied as McClane, draws his machine gun on McClane. McClane covers Holly with his body as gunshots ring out.

126 - POWELL'S MISTAKE PAYOFF: Karl falls to the ground, dead. Powell stands confident, holding his smoking .38 Special steady.

- Powell finds the courage to use his gun in the line of duty again.

127 - THORNBURG vs HOLLY PAYOFF: Thornburg attempts to interview the McClane's on live TV and Holly punches him on the nose.

127 - Argyle bursts out of the underground garage and picks up the McClane and Holly.

128 - In the limo, McClane and Holly drive off into the new day...

128 - THE END.

A note from the author:

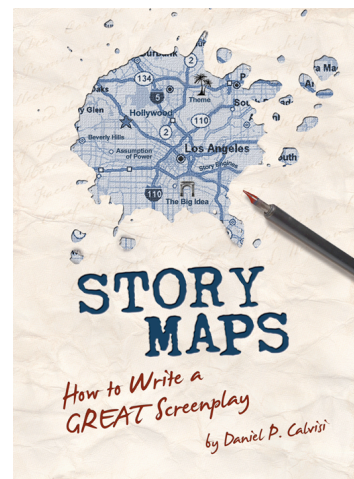
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