Die Hard The Movie – Action Film Subtexts Essay, Research Paper

Die Hard, the original in the series, stars Bruce Willis as John McClaine, and Bonnie Bedelia as his wife, Holly McClaine. The movie is about a group of terrorists who take over the building where Holly works in L.A., so that they can rob the company of $600 million worth of bearer bonds. Unbeknownst to them, John McClaine has just flown in from New York, where he is a cop, and has come to get her after work to spend the holidays with her and their children. The entire movie is about how he nearly single-handedly overcomes the terrorists and saves the hostages, including his wife.

The movie is full of subtexts, that add information about the characters and make them more human. We can relate to the characters because they are people like us, and we know this through the subtexts.

The first subtext that runs throughout the movie is the marriage of the McClaines. It is obvious from the beginning that they have been separated, and do not have a good marriage. He is a cop in New York, and she has taken a job in L.A., and brought the two kids with her. She is an executive for a Japanese company, and has changed her name to her maiden name, instead of her married name. Even though they are separated, it looks like Holly wants to try to work things out over the holidays. She asked him if he wanted to stay in their spare room, instead of staying at someone else’s place.

Also, John seems to be a macho cop, and doesn’t like that his wife has gone off to pursue her career. She is probably making more money than he is, and his pride is offended by this. Her boss has arranged for him to be picked up at the airport in a limo, and he has never ridden in a limo before. When he gets to her office, he is amazed by how fancy it is. Her co-worker shows him her new Rolex watch, and she seems embarrassed by this, because he could never afford this on a cop’s salary.

At first when they see each other, you can tell that things are tense between them. They are glad to see each other, but hold back their feelings. Soon, they begin to fight. It does not seem that they will be able to work through their problems, after all.

As John battles the terrorists, it is clear that he is fighting so hard because he wants to save her. In the end, she sees how hard he wants her back, and everything turns out better than before. Their love has grown because of this predicament.

Another subtext is the fact that nearly all of the cops in the movie are incompetent. The L.A. police don’t respond at first to John McClaine’s call for help over the walkie talkie that he took from a terrorist that he killed. They finally only send out a squad car to check out the scene even though he told them there were terrorists with explosives who had taken hostages. He has to throw a body out the window to get the attention of the cop who responds.

When the L.A.P.D. finally sends in the troops, they don’t trust him, and don’t use the information he gives them. Only Al, the first cop on the scene, trusts him and becomes his friend, encouraging him all the time. The FBI finally gets involved, but all they do is cause more trouble. They take over the situation, and just make matters worse. And the L.A.P.D. don’t trust them either.

Another subtext is that the characters who are black are portrayed positively. Al, the first cop on the scene, initially looks like a cop who doesn’t get any respect, who only does what he has to. But he turns out to be a hero, as well, helping John McClaine as he fights the terrorists. Al only has a desk job, because he once killed a kid by accident, and never wants to shoot a gun again. But in the end, he shoots the last terrorist who tries to shoot McClaine. Also, one of the terrorists was black, and he was a genius with computers. He basically was the most important member of the terrorist squad because he had the capability to crack the vault code and figure everything out. He was the brains behind the operation. And the limo driver, Argyle, starts out as a slacker, who just wants to talk to girls and get out of doing work. For most of the movie, he is clueless about what is going on. But at the end of the movie, he makes a crucial move to stop the terrorists, himself. In all of the Die Hard movies in the series, the black characters end up as unlikely heroes.

The movie also told how the workplace can be such a criminal and deceiving place. In the beginning of the movie there was a party for the employees and the workers were going berserk. There were some workers doing drugs in the offices as well as some others getting intimate with each other. These offenses obviously were against company rules, but this shows how crooked a workplace can be.

The employees also felt very safe and secure – they never expected to be in danger, either from breaking the rules, or from terrorism.

Another subtext was the unethical journalist. He would do anything for a story, and didn’t care who he stepped on to get it. He threatened to call Immigration on Mrs. McClaine’s housekeeper to get her to let him talk the their kids. He also released information about their family that put them in further danger.

In summary, the movie is full of interesting subtexts. If you are aware of the subtexts, the movie is more interesting to watch.