

Story Outline

Die Hard by Stephen E. de Souza

Act I

JOHN MCCLANE white knuckles his seat as he flies into Los Angeles on an airliner. It's the Christmas season, he's a cop, and he's carrying a gun under his civilian clothes.

At a swank executive Christmas party in an LA high-rise (Nakatomi Plaza), a MR. TAKAGI gives his underlings a pep talk. A sleaze named HARRY is hitting on a pretty businesswoman—HOLLY MCCLANE—who blows him off and calls home to see if her husband has made it back from the airport. She doesn't have much faith in his arriving, but she asks her housekeeper to make up the spare room just in case.

At the airport John meets ARGYLE, his limo driver. They chat as they drive through LA, and we learn that John lives in New York. He had decided not to follow his wife to California as she pursued her career, because he didn't think she would make it.

When they arrive at Nakatomi Plaza, Argyle parks in the underground garage so John will have a ride in case he strikes out with his wife.

Inside the lobby, John uses a computer directory to find his wife's office. He discovers that she's going by her maiden name now. He takes the elevator to the thirtieth floor, the party, and his (maybe) wife.

At the ritzy party, John searches the party for Holly. He meets her boss, Takagi, and they catch the sleazebag, Harry, snorting coke on Holly's desk. Finally she arrives, and they have a nearly awkward reunion.

John and Holly get reacquainted in the bath room as he washes up. She offers him the spare bedroom, and he accepts. But they end up arguing, and she storms back out to the party.

On ground level, a large truck pulls up in front of the Nakatomi building. Two gunmen shoot their way into the lobby and one of them goes to work on the computer that controls the alarms and elevators.

Meanwhile, a whole platoon of dark-suited terrorists with ominous-looking metal briefcases disperse throughout the corridors. Two of the men take out the phone system, while downstairs the computer whiz seals the building off from the inside.

From the executive washroom, John calls Argyle on his limo phone. But the line goes dead...

...And a squad of terrorists storms the Christmas party, machine guns blazing. The place breaks into a panic as John watches from the washroom, then escapes into a stairwell while the terrorists clear the offices.

John finds refuge above the thirtieth floor, in a part of the building still under construction. With his gun drawn, he's nervous and alone...for now.

Act II

Head terrorist, HANS GRUEBER, singles out Takagi and takes him upstairs as John slips through the building.

John ends up in the same office as Hans and Takagi. It turns out that Hans isn't a terrorist after all, but a high stakes burglar after \$600 million worth of loot in the corporate vault downstairs. He wants the safe's computer code from Takagi, but the executive refuses, and Hans guns him down in cold blood. John witnesses the brutal murder, (although he can't see Hans) and Hans' henchmen launch their pursuit of him.

Down in the parking garage, Argyle is partying in the well-appointed limousine, oblivious to the situation upstairs, which includes gunmen rigging the roof with explosives.

The computer whiz goes to work trying to crack the vault's security codes.

John borders on panic as he hides upstairs, then pulls a fire alarm. He goes from euphoria to despair as the fire trucks approach, then are called off when Hans dials 911 and claims a false alarm.

But there's no time to get uptight—there's a terrorist hot on John's trail. He plays cat and mouse with the gunman, then takes him out.

The computer whiz breaks his first access code as John rifles the dead man's tool pack, then puts a Santa hat on the corpse and sends it down with a jeering note to Hans and his gang. John hides atop the elevator and gathers information on the terrorists' strength and positions as they talk.

Now Hans and the gang know John is in the building, and they know he means business.

John crawls out of the elevator shaft and checks out another hiding place, while a hulking terrorist with long blond hair goes crazy over the death of his brother—the corpse with the Santa hat. Holly watches the tantrum and knows that John is causing the trouble. To add to that, coke-sniffing Harry sounds like he's going to be a real problem.

On the roof of the Nakatomi Plaza, John uses a walkie-talkie he lifted from the dead terrorist to call for help. The police think he's a crank, but at that very moment a handful of gunmen are heading upstairs, ready to blow John away.

Down the street a few blocks, a cop (AL POWELL) is loading up on Twinkies when he gets a call to check out the Nakatomi building. He looks up at the high-rise from the parking lot of the convenience store. He can't see or hear the gun battle blazing away on the roof.

John puts up a helluva a fight with his stolen machine gun, and leads the terrorists back into the bowels of the building. But he's running out of options...he barely makes his escape down another elevator shaft.

But now he's trapped in an air duct, with the blond terrorist hot on his tail. Again, he barely escapes with his life. As John crawls out of the air duct and looks down into the parking lot, A1 arrives on the scene. The cop doesn't see anything out of the ordinary, but goes in for a quick look anyway. The impostor guard shows him around, and everything seems to be in order.

But tell it to John, who thirty-four stories up is in the middle of a shootout with two more gunmen. After a hellacious firefight, John kills them both.

Just as A1 is backing his car away and calling in a false alarm, John sends a corpse flying down into the police cruiser's windshield. A1 freaks out and calls for reinforcements as he spins out of control down an embankment, in a flurry of squished Twinkies.

Reinforcements arrive—every cop in LA must be there! But Hans is cool as a cucumber—cops are part of his plan. John, however, is not part of his plan, and Hans angrily dispatches another search and destroy mission.

John taunts Hans over the radio while digging through a bag of explosives he lifted from one of his latest casualties.

In a TV newsroom, a REPORTER argues with his boss for a chance to cover the Nakatomi situation.

Hans discovers that some detonators are missing and gets in touch with his computer guy—who has three out of seven vault security systems accessed.

John gives A1 all the information he can over the radio, as Hans listens in, still ice cool.

The SWAT team arrives downstairs, along with DUANE ROBINSON, a bonehead cop in charge of the operation. A1 briefs him, while a TV crew sets up and the terrorists tune in.

Holly demands bathroom privileges for the hostages, and Hans grants them.

Down in the limo, Argyle comes out of his party mode with a jerk as he watches the TV news report covering the hostage situation outside.

The cops take their positions and prepare to go in, against the frantic advice of John and Al.

Hans and his team brace for an attack as a police reconnaissance team approaches the building.

Argyle tries to find a way out of the parking garage, but he's trapped.

The recon team gets shot to hell by the coldly casual assassins, who are guided by the computer wizard and his monitoring equipment.

Then the SWAT team sends in an armored car, which the terrorists promptly blow to smithereens with a pair of rockets.

John sends his own batch of explosives down an elevator shaft, setting off a series of explosions that rocks the entire building, much to the delight of the news crew, who gets it all on film.

Al tells John over the radio that he got two more bad guys with the explosives. Then Duane Robinson grabs the radio and tells John to cool it. John blows him off and says he wants to talk to a real cop. Robinson angrily hands the radio back to Al, who wishes John luck.

Inside the building, Harry slimes his way into Hans' headquarters, and offers to deliver John to him.

Al and John pass time on the radio, talking of their personal lives, and getting to know each other. They're interrupted by Hans, who, thanks to Harry, now knows all about John. The TV crews are listening in, and they scramble to find relatives for an interview.

Then Harry gets on the radio and tries to talk John into surrendering. Hans gives Harry a bullet in the forehead for his macho efforts.

Hans finally loses his cool, screams at John, demanding he give him the detonators he stole from one of the dead terrorists, and threatens to kill hostages until he gets what he wants.

Robinson and Al argue over John's fate, and Hans finally speaks to the police. He makes bogus demands for the release of political prisoners around the world—a ploy to buy time.

The computer whiz has been working like a madman, and he only has one security system left to penetrate, but it's a tough one.

As Al and John grow closer over the radio, the media analyze hostage psychosis and the FBI relieves Robinson of his command at the crisis site.

Hans goes looking for John himself, and finds him.

But Hans is separated from his gun, and, under the watchful muzzle of John's machine gun, thinks very quickly indeed and pretends to be just another hostage. In a psychological game of cat and mouse, John gets Hans to reveal who he really is, but the machine-gunning cavalry comes to Hans' rescue.

Another lead-filled inferno chases John through the building, but he manages to bring down two more gunmen before he is cornered in a computer room. One of the survivors shoots out all the windows in the room, sending billions of shards of splintered glass down around John, whose bare feet are sliced to hamburger as he makes his escape from the room under fire.

Hans gets the detonators back.

The TV crew gets Holly's home address, and the blond killer throws a temper tantrum, telling Holly that her husband is still alive and making life miserable for the terrorists.

Over the radio, Al and John talk about Al's past. John is hiding in a restroom, bleeding.

Hans and his evil crew watch and wait as the FBI cuts power to the building...which turns out to be a bonus for the bad guys.

When mainframe power switches to generator power, the safe finally opens. Hans floats inside in a nearly religious euphoria, and as his henchmen loot the vault's treasures, the FBI coordinates a helicopter strike on the building.

All alone and bleeding badly from his feet, John uses the radio to make what he believes is a final request—he asks Al to apologize to Holly on his behalf. Then he realizes that something might be wrong on the roof, and goes to check it out.

Act III

At Holly's home, the TV news crew intimidates its way into the house for an interview with her children.

Up on the Nakatomi building, John discovers that the whole roof is wired with explosives. But before he can alert A1, the blond killer finds him. As helicopter gunships bear down on the building, John is caught in yet another blinding firefight. Hans sees Holly's kids on TV and makes the connection between her and John. He takes her as a personal hostage and orders the rest of the employees up to the roof. John continues his battle royale, while the robbers load the loot into a truck.

The truck is loaded. Meanwhile, John literally hangs his maniacal opponent out to dry, while the hostages are herded out to the helipad on the roof.

Federal agents scream ever closer to the building as John bursts out onto the helipad, takes out another terrorist, and sends the hostages scurrying back down the stairs. He fires a few shots to wave off the choppers, but they mistake him for one of the killers and open fire.

As the roof explodes around him and annihilates the choppers, without a second to spare John grabs a fire hose and swings off of the roof, crashes through a window into an office several floors below. He then makes his way downstairs, through explosion after explosion, searching for Holly.

Down in the parking garage, Argyle spots the terrorists as they finish loading their truck. And John spots Holly, being slapped around by Hans and his cronies.

Argyle rams the getaway van with his limousine and takes out a bad guy of his own. And John confronts Hans, who holds a gun to Holly's head.

John prevails in a tense psychological duel, and the mortally wounded Hans makes one last grab for Holly's life. But he can't hang on, and falls to his death in the street below. John pulls Holly to safety and into his arms.

In the wreckage outside the building, John and A1 recognize each other without having to say a word. When John introduces Holly to him, she uses her married name.

And just as Robinson saunters up to try and play the tough cop one last time, the blond killer, or what is left of him, bursts outside and levels his machine gun at the crowd. But before he can fire, A1 empties his revolver into the gunman and finishes him off.

Argyle finally busts out of the parking garage unharmed, and the TV news crew tries for an interview with John and Holly. Holly decks the reporter.

Argyle drives John and Holly away. They are kissing in the back seat of the limo. It looks like John might not have to stay in the spare bedroom after all...