

## 3.20 Die Hard, aka The Best Christmas Movie Ever with Kalliope

### Angourie [host]

Before we begin, we would like to acknowledge the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation as the traditional custodians of the land on which this work was developed and is presented. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

[theme music fade in]

### Angourie [host]

Hello and welcome back to The Community Library: a podcast and book club for anyone interested in stories, and how and why we tell them. I'm your host, Angourie Rice.

### Kalliope [guest]

And I'm Kalliope Rice.

[theme music fades out]

### Angourie [host]

The holiday season is upon us, my dear friends, and for my family, this means Christmas. My sister and I love Christmas, but we also have very specific tastes about the Christmas-related media that we consume at this time of year. We don't religiously watch *Elf*, or *Home Alone*, or *The Grinch* every year. We belong in the very special camp of people who like Christmas movies that are not actually that Christmassy. So, to talk about this, I have brought along my dearest sister, Kalliope. She is a popular guest on this podcast, every time I bring her on, you guys seem to love her. I don't know why.

### Kalliope [guest]

How could they not?

### Angourie [host]

So, Kalliope, without much beating around the bush, do you just want to tell people what our all-time favourite Christmas movie is?

### Kalliope [guest]

[In a movie-trailer voice-over voice] It's *Die Hard*, the classic adventure. Featuring great determination and explosions. Starring Bruce Willis. Coming to a cinema near you for this Christmastime.

### Angourie

This came out in 1988 –

### Kalliope

That's so much earlier than I thought.

**Angourie**

Yeah, and it's an action movie starring Bruce Willis. The set-up is, Bruce Willis plays a New York cop who has just flown to LA to see his wife for the Christmas season, and his family. And he – it's Christmas Eve, and he goes to his wife's Christmas party in their big building that they work in. But, at this Christmas party, the building is taken over by German terrorists, and they are holding everyone at the Christmas party hostage. And Bruce Willis, being a police officer, obviously decides to take on these twelve German terrorists, and kill them one by one, and save his wife and all other hostages at the Christmas party.

**Kalliope**

It can never be done!

**Angourie**

It can never be done! All he has is his handgun and no shoes! So, I think, again, the reason why we love this is because it isn't about the 'spirit of Christmas', and it's an action movie that takes place during Christmas but isn't overly Christmassy. And, again, it's set in Los Angeles, so it's not all sleigh bells and snow.

**Kalliope**

Then again, re-watching it, it's more Christmassy than I thought. But yeah, not – it's not about the Christmas spirit, it's about a New York cop taking down German terrorists, which is what we all wanna see on Christmas.

**Angourie**

Arguable, the best Christmas movie ever made. So, to begin with, we should talk about the overall narrative. Do you want to introduce us to why you love this story so much?

**Kalliope**

*Die Hard* is just – God, everything you could want. The narrative involves many ... you know, sort of different issues. It really tackles issues, this film. You've got the need for this marriage, which is broken up by Bruce Willis not coming to Los Angeles to support his wife's career – he stays in New York cos he's gotta put bad guys behind bars. So, you've got – first of all, you've got that problem: falling apart marriage. Problem number one. Problem number two: Alan Rickman's just messing everything up, man. Or, arguably, he's making everything better, depending on your view of the situation. We have – what is it? Twelve terrorists, around thirty hostages, and Bruce Willis has not been found, and he has to fix this. He has to fix this. So we've got the problem of him in the building, trying to kill twelve terrorists. Then, we've got the whole storyline on the ground, we've got this cop, who's – no one's taking him seriously, he's trying to fix this, the people in charge are not doing their jobs properly. That's three different things that are going on that contribute to this narrative. So, that's exciting.

**Angourie**

Well, the thing that I love about *Die Hard* as an action movie, is that you actually have quite a few unexpected things thrown in the plot, the first being this falling-apart marriage. The root of the problem being that Bruce Willis is not willing to make sacrifices for his wife's career. He probably

feels undermined and emasculated because his wife is suddenly way more successful than him, and has this big, high-flying job that has taken her away from New York. And he is not willing to accept that, and he hasn't been supportive. And he takes that out on her, you know. And I think – something that I love about – you know, one of the first scenes where they have a fight at the Christmas party, is that he regrets it immediately after. As soon she walks out of the room, he goes: 'Oh my God, I was such an idiot, I shouldn't have said that to her.' And throughout the course of him running about the building, you know, down elevator shafts and through scaffolding, he's in contact with this cop on the ground through the radio. And he says to the cop, he says: 'You don't need to tell her that I love her, she's heard that a thousand times. You need to tell her that I'm sorry.' So, what I love –

**Kalliope**

That part hit us right in the feels!

**Angourie**

What I love about his romantic storyline is that it's not about him wooing this woman, or about him, like, being a big hero – I mean, he is being a big hero – but, the thing that makes him a hero in this marriage is that he recognises what he has done wrong, and apologises for that, and is determined to change. And that is amazing.

**Kalliope**

Wow, wow, love it. I mean, we've kind of side-tracked into love story there, but that's okay. Okay, next unexpected thing: the people dying. Big spoilers here, sorry, but – the two characters who you immediately expect – at least, I expected, because I thought this was just, you know, ho-hum your old action story, oh boy was I wrong! The two people who you expect to die straight away, one: Argyle, the limo driver. What an icon, first of all, gotta love him. You think: oh my gosh, he's funny, he's fun, he's driving, he doesn't care about anything, he's gonna die, he's obviously gonna be the sacrificed person who we think, oh no.' But no! He makes it to the end and it's amazing and we love to see it! Next, the cop. The cop on the ground who answers the call. We think, again, fun-loving, he's helping out, he seems hopeless, another person who's gonna die straight away, and he doesn't. And, I don't know, I just think that's really nice to subvert the – what you expect is gonna happen.

**Angourie**

Apart from, ah, the man who is in charge of the company, you know, the boss of the company, who dies right at the beginning – apart from him, the only people who die are people who are actively working against Bruce Willis, which I think is very important, that we don't have any heart-wrenching, sacrifice – sacrificial deaths that give us the low-point of the film.

**Kalliope**

Wait – there's two – there's two that I've just remembered. The guard – the guy on the front desk, he's shot straight away. And then the guy at the elevators. But, you know. There's no – what happens a lot in action movies is, to convey the scale – the severity of the situation, is innocent bystanders that are just dying, that don't really have a storyline, that you're just seeing, like, oh my gosh these are big explosions, people are dying. And that happens a lot, and I don't like it because [it] always seems a bit unnecessary, having this, sort of, tragedy that is not touched on at all, and is not important to the storyline, in my opinion.

### Angourie

Yeah, what they do frequently is they get you attached to a sympathetic character who is usually played by a person of colour, or a woman, or a young person, or an older person. Like, they get you attached to this sympathetic character, and then they kill them off to wrench at your heartstrings and to also convey the severity of the situation. But I really like that *Die Hard* doesn't do this, I think that's really great. Because often, the sympathetic characters who die, they're not the strong, white, heterosexual, buff men like Bruce Willis. There's actually a very interesting *Variety* article that I'll link in the show notes that talks about how certain groups of people are overly represented in terms of characters who get killed off in film and television. And they talk about how, you know, people of colour, LGBTQ characters are often the ones who are killed off to make the leading man, who's usually white and heterosexual, very sad and progress his story. So, I'll have that linked in the show notes if you want to read more about that. But the point is that I like how *Die Hard* doesn't do this.

### Kalliope

Okay, moving on. Good point. I really like how, although, you know, Bruce Willis should have died so many times, and he doesn't, and, you know, he overcomes everything ... You see him a lot in moments of pain and, um, he's just done. Man, he's done. He's been put through the ringer, and you really see him in moments of vulnerability, like when he's pulling the glass out of his foot, he thinks – he genuinely thinks he's going to die. And he calls up the guy on the ground and says, again, you know: 'Tell my wife I said sorry,' because he genuinely does not think he's gonna make it out of there. And I think that's another thing you don't often see with action films, is that real sense of vulnerability with the main hero.

### Angourie

And we see it again once he's – obviously, saved the day! Spoilers, but he does save the day. When he's on the ground and he sees the police officer who's been helping him on the ground this whole time, and he cries. And it's – it's really great because it's ... yeah, you don't have that – he really leans into that vulnerability, as opposed to that constant stoicism. And that vulnerability isn't used in a way that like, oh no this is his breaking point, like, this is so bad, he's gotta pull it back from this. It's like, no this is true vulnerability and that is okay to show because he's literally just saved a building from attack and explosions.

### Kalliope

Okay, now we can move on. Dialogue. Oh, boy. This – the one liners in this film, so quotable. So incredibly quotable. You've got the 'Yippee Ki-Yay', absolutely classic. 'He won't be joining us for the rest of his life.' Oh my god. Okay, side-track, Alan Rickman's performance in this is incredible. 'Come to the coast, get together, we'll have a few laughs.' I mean, come on, he's a New York cop, they lean into that so much with his sarcasm, his dry sense of humour. 'Welcome to the party, pal.' Yes, this is the one I was thinking of: 'Now I have a machine gun. Ho ho ho.'

### Angourie

I mean, that's the thing. This movie is not about the monologues, it is not about, you know, long dialogue scenes. It's about the action, and it's about one liners. And they deliver on both of those things. You have these great one liners that, I think are delivered with this certain sense of like, self-awareness. So it's not always totally serious. When John McClane says 'Yippee ki-yay,

motherfuckers,' it's not like – contrary to what you might believe or might remember – it's not yelled with, like, machine guns blaring. It's when he's talking to the lead German terrorist on the walkie-talkie, and at the end he's just like: 'Yippee ki-yay, motherfucker.'

**Kalliope**

Because, Hans Gruber calls him a cowboy. He's like – another great line when he's talking about Bruce Willis thinks he's some American cowboy from all the action films, and he's like: 'You're not that, you're not this,' and he's like: 'Well, yes I am.' And yeah, it's ... oh, gives me chills.

**Angourie**

Yeah, Bruce Willis delivers every one liner that could have been cheesy and serious and heroic, with like a little hint of cheek. Like, he's playing along, cos he's – yeah, he knows he is playing the character of the guy who's saving the day. And we really see that contrasted with when he feels like he's lost all hope, and he's in the bathroom, and he's suddenly – he's suddenly not delivering these witty one liners because he's – he doesn't want to put on the show anymore. But he – yeah, something I love about both the hero and the antagonist in this action movie, is that they both have such a flair for theatrics. I think this really plays into ... segwaying into our next discussion point: special effects. Because the special effects in this movie are, first of all, brilliant, brilliant. Like, just blowing shit up and it's great. But also very theatrical, you know, in the way that people die, and the way that action sequences are choreographed. They are going for some sense of realism, I guess, but it's very heightened and dramatic, I think.

**Kalliope**

Also, something I love is, in a movie, when you get shot – I mean, I guess this is 1988, so you'd expect it – but, if you watch modern action films, they are all using CGI for the blood. Because it's cheaper, it's easier, if you can, why not. It's cleaner, you can reset straight away. But in this film, there's a lot of blood, which is kinda gross and violent, but I think it really adds to it, when – in the gunfights, when they have the actual, the real fake blood squirting, I think it really adds to it. I also like how they totally play into what the audience wants and they are very theatrical, and you know when it's coming. When, you know, they throw something and they're looking down the elevator shaft where he's just thrown a bunch of explosives, and you just think, I know what's coming! It's fire! And then they just deliver it perfectly, because they know why you're watching it, it's for the excellent action and the special effects, and they totally deliver. Yeah, in a very theatrical way, not in a way that like, oh my god, these explosions, man, they're like, so real, this is really dangerous. But in a way that's just like, yes, I love to see the entire top of a building explode into flames.

**Angourie**

Shall we talk about music?

**Kalliope**

Yep.

**Angourie**

Because, what I noticed re-watching this yesterday – yes, we watched this yesterday. [laughs]

**Kalliope**

I was December first, that's what you're meant to do!

**Angourie**

It was December first! Of course we watched *Die Hard* on December first! So, here I'm gonna talk about diegetic music and non-diegetic music. So, diegetic music means that it is in the world of the story. So, for example if you see a character dancing to a song on the radio, the song on the radio is diegetic because it's in the world and the characters can hear that music, too. Non-diegetic music is something like a film score, where we, as the audience, can hear this film score, and it heightens our experience of the scene, but the characters can't hear the swelling music when they kiss. In *Die Hard* we have a combination of diegetic and non-diegetic music, but the fascinating thing is that the non-diegetic music, so the film's score, actually uses Christmas music –

**Kalliope**

Like, the whole time!

**Angourie**

The whole time! The whole time, it's just Christmas music. So, when we see Hans Gruber – played by Alan Rickman, brilliant performance – the evil villain, you know, walking in and he's, like being evil, you have, in the music score, a Christmas carol played in a minor key to make it more dramatic. It's – it's actually genius.

**Kalliope**

Brilliant film-making. Also, shout out to Alan Rickman's squad, because that shot of them all walking in with his, like – it's amazing. It's such a great shot. Money shot right there.

**Angourie**

Me and the girls rolling up to the club be like.

**Kalliope**

Yes!

**Angourie**

So, I think that's what really makes this a Christmas movie, is that you have Christmas music throughout the entire thing. And also, at the end, you know, they play ... what do they play at the end?

**Angourie and Kalliope**

[singing] The weather outside is frightful ...

**Kalliope**

*Let It Snow.*

**Angourie**

*Let It Snow!* At the end they play *Let It Snow* as part of the film score. But also, you know, diegetically, within the world of the film, you have Christmas music playing in the background, you have characters humming Christmas music. Like, literally, when they're breaking into the safe, Alan Rickman is humming a Christmas song. This – oh my god, I love it so much.

**Kalliope**

In other news, the set is – it's a Christmas party. It's set at an office Christmas party, you have Santas, you have a ginormous Christmas tree, that very much contributes to the Christmassiness of it, I think the set decoration.

**Angourie**

And also the fact that they reference Christmas in the script –

**Kalliope**

All the time –

**Angourie**

All the time! Like, everybody is well aware that it's Christmas Eve, he references it in his little quips. Again, as we mentioned, when he kills that first guy and he writes on his shirt: 'Now I have a machine gun. Ho ho ho.' [laughs] And he puts a Santa hat on him. So it's very much, like, in the dialogue.

**Kalliope**

And like, everyone working on the ground is like, 'Oh my god, Christmas Eve.' Like, 'It's Christmas, we can't shut down the power, it's Christmas.' And, yeah.

**Angourie**

And, at its core, this story is not about explosions, it's not about machine guns, it's not about German terrorists, it's not about, you know, blowing up a big office building. And it's not about Bruce Willis being a hero for the sake of being a hero. It's just about a man who wants to get home to his children for Christmas. That's what it is! That's all it is! It's a very simple story. And that is why it is a Christmas movie. So, on a scale ... so, out of, like – out of twelve Christmas trees –

**Kalliope**

Why twelve?

**Angourie**

Twelve days of Christmas!

**Kalliope**

Oh.

**Angourie**

[laughs]

**Kalliope**

It's just a weird –

**Angourie**

Duh!

**Kalliope**

Obviously!

**Angourie**

Obviously! Okay, out of – what is it? Twelve ... twelve maids a-milking? Twelve ... [singing] Five gold rings! Ten –

**Kalliope**

Ten drummers drumming.

**Angourie**

Ten drummers drumming, eleven ... dancers dancing?

**Kalliope**

Or is it –

**Angourie**

I think it's actually nine maids a-milking. Hang on, let me google this.

[smooth jazz elevator music plays]

**Angourie**

Twelve drummers – eleven ... oh, okay. We were, like, way off. Okay, so it's twelve drummers drumming, eleven pipers piping, ten lords a-leaping, nine ladies dancing, eight maids a-milking – I thought there were way more maids milking – seven swans –

**Kalliope**

But as you said, that'd just be too many maids –

**Angourie**

There'd just be too many maids milking. And, think about it, that's –

**Kalliope**

That's a cow, as well.

**Angourie**

That's eight women plus eight cows, unless you've got two women per cow.

**Kalliope**

I don't think you can milk the cow twice at the same time, though.

**Angourie**

There are four teats on the udder, so –

**Kalliope**

Well, there you go, so –

**Angourie**



So can you have two? I don't know, farmers, let me know. Seven swans a-swimming, six geese a-laying, five gold rings, four calling birds, three French hens, two turtle doves and a partridge in a pear tree.

**Kalliope**

In case you wanted that cleared up by us and not Google.

**Angourie**

But here's the thing, right, it's really just –

**Kalliope**

What were we talking about?

**Angourie**

No, before – before we get into, like, our ranking – before we get back to the actual episode that we're actually doing ... It's just – it's really actually not twelve different things, it's just a hell of a lot of birds.

**Kalliope**

Yeah, I know.

**Angourie**

It's just a lot of birds.

**Kalliope**

As displayed in *The Office* Christmas episode, when Andy gifts all of these things to Erin. Excellent episode, and I think a real, you know, slap in the face about what this song is really about.

**Angourie**

[laughing] It's just about birds!

**Kalliope**

It's just about birds.

**Angourie**

That's a partridge, two doves, three hens –

**Kalliope**

That's ten birds!

**Angourie**

Four calling birds, so that's ten birds.

**Kalliope**

Oh my god, sixteen with the geese! That's sixteen birds.

**Angourie**

That's sixteen birds, no, plus the seven swans, which is twenty-one. That's twenty-one birds.

**Kalliope**

So many birds.

**Angourie**

Which is a lot of birds. And, I don't know about you, but geese and swans –

**Kalliope**

I don't even like birds.

**Angourie**

Geese and swans are terrifying if they decide to chase you, which they do sometimes.

**Kalliope**

Also, are turtle doves just pigeons?

**Angourie**

I don't know.

**Kalliope**

Probably not.

**Angourie**

Anyway. On a scale from a partridge in a pear tree to twelve drummers drumming, what level of Christmasiness is *Die Hard*?

**Kalliope**

I'm gonna say ... ten lords a-leaping, because, we've just discussed, it's very Christmassy, it's not an eleven – it's not pipers piping or drummers drumming because it's not about the Christmas spirit like *The Grinch* or *The Polar Express*. It doesn't end with: 'And this is what Christmas is about, and this is the Christmas spirit, and we have to find that spirit within ourselves.' It's not – it's about a guy in a building with machine guns, set on Christmas with very heavily – heavily referencing Christmas throughout the story, but it's not about people's views of Christmas. That's my final answer: ten lords a-leaping.

**Angourie**

I would actually give it eleven pipers piping.

**Kalliope**

Ooh!

**Angourie**

I know, controversial. But I think it's because, like, if you had asked me this before we re-watched it yesterday, I would have said, like, nine ladies dancing. But after re-watching it, noticing all the references to Christmas in the dialogue and the music! The literal Christmas music! I think it's a solid eleven pipers piping, and the only reason it doesn't get a twelve drummers drumming is

because it's not about the true meaning of Christmas. But also, maybe it is. The true meaning of Christmas is getting home to your family.

**Kalliope**

Yeah, but it's not ... it's not a carrying theme throughout the whole movie. Like, that's not what everyone's searching for.

**Angourie**

It's not his motivation. His motivation is literally just to survive. But his motivation is to also save his wife so that he can also go home with his wife to his kids for Christmas.

**Kalliope**

Yes.

**Angourie**

So ... So in conclusion, *Die Hard* is objectively the best Christmas movie.

**Kalliope**

Don't bother with the second one.

**Angourie**

Don't bother with – [laughs] – Kalliope and I watched the second one. It also takes place on Christmas – on Christmas Eve at an airport.

**Kalliope**

But it's much less –

**Angourie**

It's much less Christmassy, actually.

**Kalliope**

I would not say that *Die Hard 2* is a Christmas movie.

**Angourie**

But it takes place on Christmas!

**Kalliope**

Yeah, but it's not ...

**Angourie**

Okay, well, that's obviously discussion for another time. If you liked this episode, then maybe next year we will analyse *Die Hard 2* for Christmas! But thank you so much for joining me, Kalliope, it's been great to talk about Christmas and *Die Hard* with you. [theme music fades in in the background] Thank you, the audience, for listening. If you want to hear more, you can subscribe on iTunes or Spotify. If you like Kalliope, I have a few more episodes with her that I will link in the show notes. But most importantly, I hope you are having a good holiday season. Whether you celebrate

*The Community Library* – Angourie Rice

Christmas or not, I hope you're taking some time off around the new year, and hopefully giving *Die Hard* a watch.

**Kalliope**

Yes, this has been very fun. I always love to talk about *Die Hard* whenever the situation arises, so thank you for having me. Bye!

**Angourie**

Bye!

[theme music fades out]