

How is tension  
created in jaws the  
film essay sample



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Jaws, (1975) was directed by 27 year-old director Steven Spielberg himself and Carl Gottlieb, however Mr Spielberg was not quite the legend as we know of him now. He was only at the beginning of his career and his directing skills were yet to mature. Fortunately for Steven Spielberg Jaws was a massive hit, as Spielberg realistically captured tension throughout the film, keeping his audience clinched on to their seats. Right through the film the director introduces tension in different techniques to keep the mood of anxiety up.

The main character that creates all of the tension and commotion is the Shark. The Shark was at least 40 foot in length. The skin was made of heavy latex which was waterproof. Altogether they had made three whole sharks, the first one got missing in the ocean, the second wasn't tested properly and sank, but the third one was the one that was used through out the film. In those days there was no such thing as computer graphics to make the shark look realistic so this film was the first of its kind. One of the best ways to create tension is through the use of music.

The famous Jaws theme " da-dum ," the two notes e and f played in a continuous however highly effective fashion one after the other. Something as simple as this has been planted into the audiences mind to be remembered even when the film had ended. This theme would be played just before the ominous under water creature would appear on the screen, just to start the tension that is about to occur so that the audience could prepare themselves for the unknown killing of some poor defenceless victim. The shark theme was also played in different ways, for example, playing around with the tempo or playing around with the volume.

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This technique would make the viewers heartbeat race along the theme. Other music techniques are used to compliment the sudden death, as the music would come to sudden halt, to emphasize the victim's death leaving a long lasting shocking thought in the minds of the viewers. Now I'm going to tell you about opening sequence one. It starts with a mouth organ and a calm guitar playing on the beach with a big bonfire in the middle. The people on the beach are having a good time and they think that they are out of danger. A girl from the beach, followed by a boy, goes skinny dipping by herself.

It is then the first attack takes place, it shows the point of view of the shark and the shark theme starts. As this is the first time the shark theme is used the viewers are practically closing their eyes. The attack takes place and in an instant the music is stricken dead and by now the audience is opening their eyes. All you are left with is the ringing of a bell on a buoy, which are very effective, because buoy's are there to tell people to stay away. The next time the music has played a big role in the tension is in opening sequence two.

Whilst the girl is swimming there is no music all you can hear is the sea and her breathing. The director has done this to build up tension and suspense before the attack. Another device the director uses is to have the background sounds only playing straight after an attack. The use of the camera can show and create a lot of built up suspense and tension through the way it is used. The camera angle can be shot in many different ways for example; close ups, jump cuts, point of view shots, zoom and also panning.

Majority of those shots are used just before an attack takes place to create tension.

At the beginning of the scene the panning view is used to show a wide whole view of the beach and to show how busy it is on the 4th of July (Independence Day). They use that day because the more people on the beach the more panic there is going to be during an attack, all the busyness is building to the tension. Also in this shot there is a clear view of the mother and her son whose to become another victim of the shark. This panning view is used again when the director wants the audience to see the whole picture, not leaving anything out. Another re-occurring shot which is often used throughout the film is close-ups.

This is when the director just wants the spectators to focus on one particular character or object. This camera shot is also used just before the second attack happens, when there are several close-ups of the various character who are vital in this scene as their lives are in danger, so Spielberg wants us to keep a close eye on them, hence the close-ups of the dog swimming with a stick, boy swimming on lilo and of course Brody who too like us is watching the water suspiciously waiting. At this point it is the viewers and Brody who actually know about the viscous attacks therefore suspecting something to happen.

Jump-cuts are used when the camera rapidly cuts through any character or objects to show the main point. In this particular scene it's when the niece man in the black hat is swimming and starts up an alarm about a shark then the camera quickly jumps cuts through several people on the beach and

straight to the horrified face of Brody, there is a lot of tension at this present moment, which then he is relieved that it was just a false alarm. An important camera shot used when creating tension and suspense is when the spectators get to see the point of view of one particular character.

This is used so that we are involved in the film. The viewers get to see Brody's point of view just before the second attack when the sunburnt man talks to Brody blocking his view of the sea. At this moment the audience are put in Brody's shoes, feeling Brody's anxious emotions, as we too start to tell the man to move out of the way so that we can see what is about to happen. The spectators also get to feel and see the shark's point of view. This is when the shark just appears on scene and the audience gets to see the human legs underwater as the shark would be looking at them.

This creates tension because even though we got to see the point of view of the shark we don't actually know when or who the shark is going to attack, making the viewers nervous and scared for the oblivious swimmers. Then for a split second we feel a sense of reassurance when the shark misses the first boy, but then it unfortunately makes up for it when he devours the helpless boy on the lilo. There is an excellent use of zoom when the second attack takes place when the camera quickly and smoothly zooms in on Brody's face showing the horror on his face as he has let the shark attack for the second time.

The zoom on Brody's face lets the audience feel the horrific impact the attack had left on Brody. As the shark is fake it is more realistic that Spielberg doesn't show the shark's whole body. This works in his favour

because more people are scared of the unknown than the known. He avoids showing the shark by using barrels indicating where the shark is. It is only at the end where the director shows only half of the body of the shark. After the excitement of the first two attacks, the film seems to slow a bit, however there are still parts in this section where Spielberg attempts again to build up tension and fear.

Brody is introduced in this film with a loving and caring family, which he shows a lot of sympathy and love towards. It is because of Brody's sensitivity towards his family which makes the audience care too for his family. The director makes the viewers build up sympathy for the family through Brody, so that later on in the film when his poor defenceless son is confronted with the shark, whilst in the pool, all our emotions that have been building up pour out, making us feel as helpless as Brody. Fortunately we were then just as relieved as Brody when the shark swims smoothly past his son.

The audience feel a lot of fear when Brody flicks through the book of shark attacks. As the book is full of horrendous, unimaginable pictures of various disturbing shark attacks. This is the only part of the film when even someone even with the strongest stomach, would make it turn, because those pictures are designed to make the viewers scared, and they most defiantly serve their purpose. This technique is used by the director, as there was a limit on how much technology which could be used, so therefore it was only through pictures that Steven Spielberg could show the horrific damage the shark was actually going to do to the victims.

And its through this fear created by the pictures that Spielberg manages to create more tension, as now the audience have seen with there own two eyes the terrifying power of this shark. The shark seems to become invincible, as if there's no stopping it, the shark could destroy anything. Even though the shark's purpose in the film is to destroy and devour anything or anyone in its way, Spielberg uses the opposite to create tension. He does this when the destruction of the jetty happens, because even when the viewers predict what's going to happen, it doesn't.

The men fall into the water, however to the viewers surprise after a lot of destruction and effort from the shark, the men luckily survive. Steven Spielberg chose to use this technique because he wanted to erroneous the predictions of the audience, to make them feel uncertain about the remainder of the film. Another scene which creates a lot of tension and fear for the audience is the autopsy scene. As this is another part of the film which leaves us quite disturbed, as we get to see evidence of the sharks destruction, well what remains of it anyway.

The shark's destruction is shown through what remains, which in fact in very little, and this is emphasized by the size of the box shown. However its when we see the left over arm, that when we feel the effect of the shark on us. Now after seeing this seen we feel even more scared towards the shark, as now we know there is no life after the shark has attacked. All these scenes are shown to help build up the tension in the film and also the fear in the audience. These scenes are extremely important to the film, as they are attempts made by Spielberg to build up tension and fear once again after the excitement of the first two attacks.

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I think Spielberg is successful in his attempt, as he does manage to create that tension once again, even without the use of the shark or an attack, and he manages to do this quite cleverly through the evidence left by the shark and through the emotions of the characters. I think that for the lack of technology they had in those days the director has done very well in making this film. I think that the well-known shark theme is synonymous to jaws, as yet to this very day people would relate to this theme tune for me that is exactly how I like my films and also it had a very scary effect to it.

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