Why is this a separate Document?

Before we start I just want to answer the question as to why I made this a separate Document from the "Unit 1 Skills building" document I'd made earlier, the reason for this is so that I can more easily keep track of what I'm doing without fumbling between two different bits of work on the same document. Now that that's been established we can discuss the topic of this document.

What is this "Tension," And how do we build it?

Tension is when the audience that's engaging with a piece of media (be it a game, movie, TV Show, Music Video, Website, ext) starts to feel a little bit on edge about the current situation, be it a character ending up in an unfamiliar location or even in a situation where they could die (either by a monster/killer in a horror movie or an army of bad guys chasing our hero down in an action film), lots of practitioners from across the media landscape try to build some form of tension in their works. (whether it's Alfred Hitchcock, Charles Dickens, Errnest Hemmingway,The Coen Brothers, Walt Disney, Shigeru Miyamoto, John Carmack and even Matt Stone and Trey Parker) There are lots of different ways that many of these guys (and many more) build tension in all their works, although we'll mainly be focusing on visual storytelling for this piece of research.

One main way you can build tension (this doesn't apply to books) is by using the power of camera angles and movements (as well as other forms of visual and auditory trickery such as sound effects, clever colour grading and lighting), one way to do this is to not immediately tell the audience where we are in a particular scene, this can be done in lots of ways from showing lots of close ups of things very quickly (or slowly depending on whether or not you want the audience to only take in certain points of interest in a scene), give the camera some jittery movements to simulate the human eye looking at stuff quickly, messing with the camera's focus during a scene to make everything blurry that way the scene is even less clear much like what The LEGO Movie did when Emmet stumbles into reality.

You could even do a single camera shot that never moves (like that of a stationary security camera for instance) but keep the villainous character in the shadows by playing with the lighting (yes even lighting can be used to build tension) as seen in my 3rd camera exercise I did in Dreams: [Camera Exercise 3: And Knuckles](). The tension here is supposed to come from the main subject (that being my big evil Cartoon Cow, Hex Moother. Super Sheep's main nemesis) being represented only by a vague (not even full) silhouette that's cast on the wall (and the fact the audience can see a horn would likely make them think of the devil) in combination with the Robotic Cartoon Sheep (which the audience should presume to be what Hex is maniacally laughing about) that's in the room should get the audience using their imaginations to imagine what Hex wants to do with the Robot Sheep (aka.

Syntha-Sheep), because the audience's imagination will always be scarier than anything even the best people in the industry could conjure up with real (or animated) visuals

Example 1: The Interrogation Scene from The LEGO Movie (2014)

Scene uploaded by IDK What My YouTube Name Should Be (yes, that's the actual user name):Bad Cop's interrogation Scene from The LEGO Movie (2014)

Getting Analytical

In this scene, the first shot we get is that of an out of focus first person shot as Emmet (the construction worker getting interrogated by Bad Cop) wakes up to find himself in a strange room that he's never seen before (and at this point neither have the audience) so the fact

this shot is out of focus means the audience can't immediately gouge where the scene takes place which means like Emmet, the audience questions where they are exactly, but what little the audience can make out at this point (mostly grey and some kind of chair like object) might make the audience feel slightly uneasy about what's about to happen. (which is also aided by a rather echoey voice asking a bunch of questions)

After Emmet's piece of clever callback dialogue (that being "Good morning apartment?" which is framed as a question here to contrast the way he said the very same line earlier in the film) we then quickly do a vertical turn upwards to meet Bad Cop via a quick jumpscare (nothing too intense though because this is meant for all ages) which turns this shot into a brief close up and then we have a cut away to Emmet's reaction and then it's back to his perspective with Bad Cop getting up close and personal (thus making the audience uneasy, much like Emmet would probably feel), in fact, most of the first quarter of the scene where Bad Cop is involved in the shot is done in a first person like manner to really put the audience on edge.

Another little diddy they do here is that whenever the camera is in shakey first person (the shaking is mostly subtle in this scene as to really get the audience feeling really tense), we actually see Emmet is looking up at Bad Cop ever so slightly which facilitates some very subtle high angle shots and subtle low angle shots whenever we're looking over Bad Cop's shoulder to make Emmet seem weaker than Bad Cop in this scene, despite them both being the same size with the same body type.

The Camera actually tries to hide The Piece of Resistance (the big red thing stuck to Emmet's back) by mainly showing Emmet from the front, and even when they do need to show Emmet's back for some over the shoulder shots of him and Bad Cop (some of which are actually done at a dutch angle), we see that Emmet himself is out of focus so that the audience can't clearly see The Piece of Resistance yet. (they even cut to some robots in one of the other rooms as a form of foreshadowing for when the robots themselves are needed later in the film) It's only when Bad Cop asks "then why is it permanently stuck to your back?" that the camera reveals the piece in focus because now Emmet's seeing the piece stuck to his back to his back (almost as if the piece is saying "peek-a-boo")

Another Important thing that makes this scene even tense is the context in which it takes place, this scene actually happens right after Emmet has already had crazy visions after touching the piece, which leave the audience very confused which creates a prime situation for all the other tension building techniques to be plopped on top of the initial confusion the audience already feels. (considering the fast paced nature of this whole film)

Example 2: Woody and Buzz being chased by Scud (From Toy Story)

Scene Uploaded by ABC TV (and their little watermark on the top right corner): [Scud Chasing Woody and Buzz](#)

Getting Analytical Again

Ah yes, this classic scene. Everyone remembers this one like the back of their hands (myself included), let's see how tension gets built up in this scene.

So the first thing that happens here is that Scud gets established as a threat right away when he wakes up, this threat is established via him waking up in one shot, the camera cuts

to an over the shoulder shot of him looking at Buzz and Woody chasing after the truck and then we get a close up of him growling to establish his lust for plastic and stuffing, this first bit of tension building is important because right away the audience can tell that Scud's not quite out of the picture yet. (and Woody and Buzz won't know what hit them)

Now before we move further into the scene, I just want to note how the camera isn't quite as up close and personal with the characters in this scene (nor does it do as much jittery movement in this scene) as it did in The LEGO Movie's Interrogation scene (probably because they both take place at different points in their respective films), That's because while yes, a lack of clarity can build tension, so can having clearly defined stakes and well placed moments where characters could be killed (especially with clever camera work)

Now anyway, once Buzz and Woody do eventually make it on the truck, we actually end up hearing Scud coming towards us (and Buzz even notices this before Woody) but we don't see him until Woody looks behind him because only then does the camera actually cut to a backwards pan with Scud running towards the camera at full speed, then we get a quick J-cut to a first person shot with Scud and then a low angle of Scud just chomping on Woody's leg (likely animated at this angle because they're trying to get us to see it from Buzz's Perspective) now the camera is rather clever here because when Scud is on screen at this moment, the main focal point is actually his mouth, because when he's running towards the camera it almost gets eaten (because his mouth opens as he runs) and when he chomps Woody it's one of the first parts of him that even enters the frame (well besides his nose but that's part of his snout)

Afterwards we get a long shot (because this film is from a toy's perspective, but if this exact same shot was of some human characters it'd probably be more of a close up of some legs if nothing was changed to adapt to the new perspective) to establish the characters stageline (with Buzz being to the right and Woody being left) for the next cut to a two shot where we can't see Scud (which means the tension now comes from whether or not Woody will remain on screen long enough for Buzz to assist him), after Woody almost goes off the screen we get a close up of his hands slipping to the bottom of the flappy bit on that moving truck and then we cut further away to really drive home the stakes of the situation.

Luckily for Woody, Buzz eventually jumps on top of Scud to save him from getting ripped to pieces by Scud, thus releasing all the tension that's built up until this point in the scene, and thus we have another area where our two scenes differ in terms of approach to tension, (and again, this is due to where these scenes take place in the context of their movies, with The Lego Movie's interrogation scene being near the end of the first act while Toy Story's Moving Truck Chase scene is happening in the film's climax) because while The Lego Movie builds it's tension over the course of the interrogation scene with it not really releasing until we reach the western scene later on (I'm calling this slow building tension), Toy Story's climax takes what I like to call the build and release approach where tension is built and released multiple times in the same scene, and the second time this happens starts right around when Woody kicks RC off the truck.
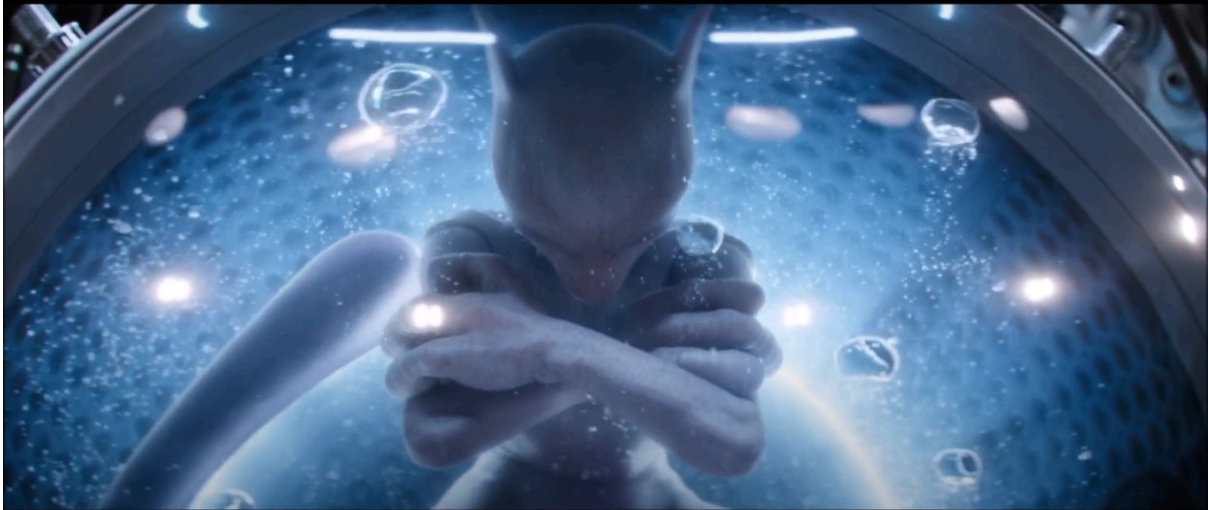
After we see Woody do this, we cut to a Quick Zoom in on the other toys and their reaction to this seemingly heinous crime, which quickly establishes a new threat entering the ring in the form of the other toys' lack of understanding of the situation at hands with a similar foreshadowing approach they'd used with Scud earlier (probably due to how intertwined Woody and Buzz's parts of the scene have become), Once the moving truck gets going, Andy's other toys start their attack on Woody with a close up on Mr Potato Head taking charge and telling the others to "GEEEET HIIIIIIIIIM" and then we get a long shot of the other toys tipping the box over (even the box that says "more toys" gets in on the action), and then afterwards we have a shot of Woody realising he needs to act quick. The tension here come from how the camera is used to tell the audience that Woody doesn't have much time to get Buzz over to the others which forces him to act quickly.

From here on out (until RC does his big jump) we have lots of cross cuts between Woody and Buzz having to deal with their respective threats with what happens to Woody actually having a direct impact on what happens to Buzz (I.E: when the other toys are spinning him around, RC is then forced to move in circles because of his remote controlled nature) so in a way the tension of this scene from here on out is actually a fusion of two smaller tense moments being built that complement each other rather nicely (because if Woody can't deal with the other toys, Buzz and RC are in big trouble) to form one big load of tension.

After RC does a big jump thanks to Hamm's "pig pile" we then get another brief first person shot of Buzz looking backwards and seeing Scud still on his tail after all this time. Afterwards we actually get an establishing shot of the road ahead (which Buzz could get killed by if he doesn't navigate it properly) but the tension here doesn't last for more than a couple of cuts between buzz and the road before Scud gets his comeuppance when he gets stuck between all the cars that crash in his wake (and thus releasing all that tension that had built up over the scene in one big climax)

Example 3: Mewtwo's Escape from Pokemon: Detective Pikachu

Scene Uploaded by Fajar: [Mewtwo's Escape](#)

Getting Analytical for the third time

Ok, so this scene from Detective Pikachu takes place at the very beginning of the movie so we get to see how right away they try and build up tension from their first establishing shot where the camera actually pans across a mountain to reveal the facility where the character of Mewtwo is being held, this helps build up tension because the audience then gets curious as to what this place is and what it holds, and the reveal of this place via a pan across the mountain gives this place an air of secrecy to it which makes the audience feel tense

because they don't really know what's about to go down they only know that whatever's about to go down won't be good (because of the music cues they used here)

Next we get a moving high angle shot that eventually rotates upwards into a long shot of a containment capsule (where we then get the dramatic reveal of Mewtwo via someone turning on the power from outside. This establishes who the main threat of this situation is right away by cleverly keeping some of the human characters in the same shot to make Mewtwo (who's already fairly intimidating from the onset) seem even more intimidating, especially if you're not necessarily a long time Pokemon fan because now you'll be wondering what kind of power Mewtwo has in order to be kept in such an advanced looking capsule, but if you're a long time Pokemon fan you'll know all about his abilities as a psychic type Pokemon and how he's genetically modified clone of Mew (hence the name Mewtwo), and the tension will now come from imagining how he's going to get out of this predicament.

The next thing we get is a mid shot that pans upwards towards the sleeping Mewtwo's face, where he then wakes up looking directly at the camera. (much like the ending of psycho, only it's more sudden and with a rather powerful looking Pokemon) The tension from how up close and personal we get with Mewtwo and when he wakes up, it's quite frightening because it's almost like he's breaking the 4th wall in a way (even if that's not actually what's happening) which is actually quite clever because it really ramps up the tension ten fold because now the audience believe (even if for a brief moment) that Mewtwo somehow knows about our presence as an audience which breaks the security an audience normally feels when watching a movie. (that being how none of the characters in theses movies can actually get them)

After that we get a low angle shot of a hallway with a mysterious shadow (which we later find out belongs to Detective Pikachu, who we follow throughout the movie) running across the wall and some alarms short circuiting. This shot is meant to show the catalyst of how Mewtwo's escape begins and build up tension as to who's shadow this is and why they're seemingly helping Mewtwo escape, are they good? Are they bad? We don't know yet because the camera won't show us the source of the shadow, which builds tension towards this mysterious creature (although if you look very carefully you can vaguely recognise that this shadow belongs to a Pikachu)

Afterwards we get a high angle shot of a mysterious car driving away (and it's filmed from far away so that you can't make out who the driver actually is), the tension here comes from the mystery of who the driver is (thanks to the camera being too far away for us to be able to even make them out) and how quickly they're fleeing this place as if they know what's about to go down (and how it relates to the Pikachu we saw earlier), are they the one responsible for this? The audience is left guessing on the edge of their seat until later on in the film when we get the answer. (which I won't say here for spoiler reasons)

We later cut back to a close up of Mewtwo using his power to deduce exactly where the car is and then it's a cross cut of the car driving away and then back to Mewtwo charging its power in order to escape. The camera here actually does a slight zoom in on Mewtwo and actually shakes a little bit to sell the impending impact of Mewtwo's power thus building up some further tension as to what's about to happen. (will he blow it up? is anyone going to get

killed?) After this we cut to a close up of some glass getting cracked by Mewtwo's power (thus really selling that he's about to do some serious damage), afterwards we quickly cross cut to a screen that's showing an "Alert Condition Red" on the screen to show the dire situation that's going down (because typically in movies, a code red is reserved for the worst possible situations) and then back to Mewtwo finally doing the deed and destroying all the equipment. Now here's where they release the tension that's built up over the course of the scene at this point, and what's interesting is that they do quite a few quick cuts to really show the impact (first a long shot of Mewtwo destroying the equipment on the left from inside the capsule, then a close up of the resulting explosion, and then back to Mewtwo destroying the equipment on the right and then another close up of the resulting explosion, and then afterwards a close up followed by a zoom out of him breaking the glass and a long shot of him flying up out of there as the whole room explodes) now the fast paced nature of these shots actually makes it so that the audience can barely process what just happened as Mewtwo escapes before we really get a good look at what happened (and the camera shaking as the equipment explodes is a really nice touch to help sell the impact and really disorient the audience)

We then get a long shot of the explosion happening from the outside as the car from earlier is speeding down the road to really give the audience a sense of just how big the explosion really was (which then makes Mewtwo seem more imposing) when we cut to him later. This then smoothly transitions towards another moment of tension being built when we do cut back to a zoom in shot of Mewtwo (who we then see can actually fly), and then a first person shot of him finding the car and afterwards a close up where he flies away to (presumably) go kill the driver. The rest is a chase scene where Mewtwo's only represented by a light we see every now and then until we cut behind the car and see that something off camera (which we're suppose to assume is Mewtwo until later on in the story) has finally sent the car flying right off the bridge thus ending the scene before we even find out the fate of the driver. The tension this time comes from the audience not quite knowing where Mewtwo is (outside of a vague light that pops in occasionally) until the very end when an attack that comes from the left hits our driver.
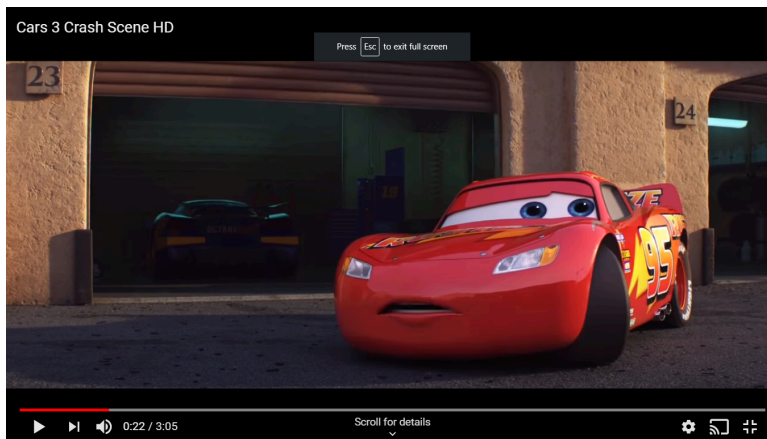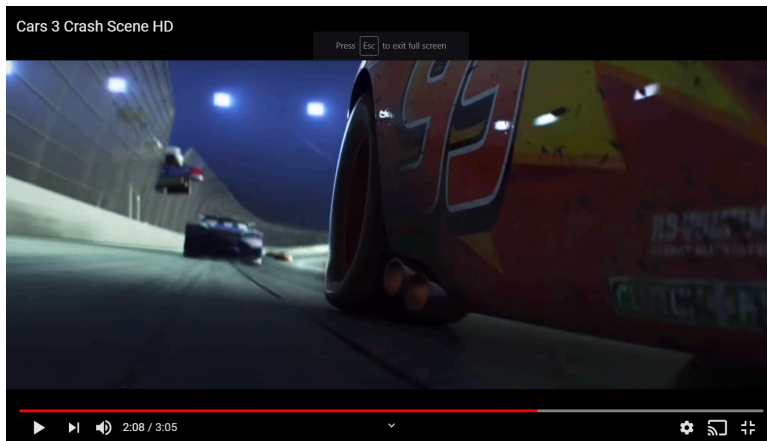
# Practitioner 1: Brian Fee

(Image Sourced from Collider.com)

 Cars 3 is actually his directorial debute (and it's currently the only film he's actually directed)

Brian Fee's Work: Cars 3 (2017)-as the Director. Wall-E (2008), Cars (2006)-as a storyboard artist.

Ok, so I know what you're thinking, "boy why are you picking a director who's only directed a single film so far, you got a death wish or something?" well to be honest, it's really just an excuse for me to talk about how the camera is used to build tension in Cars 3, Particularly this scene where Lighting ends up crashing: Cars 3 Crash scene **(scene uploaded by Jared The Animaniac)**
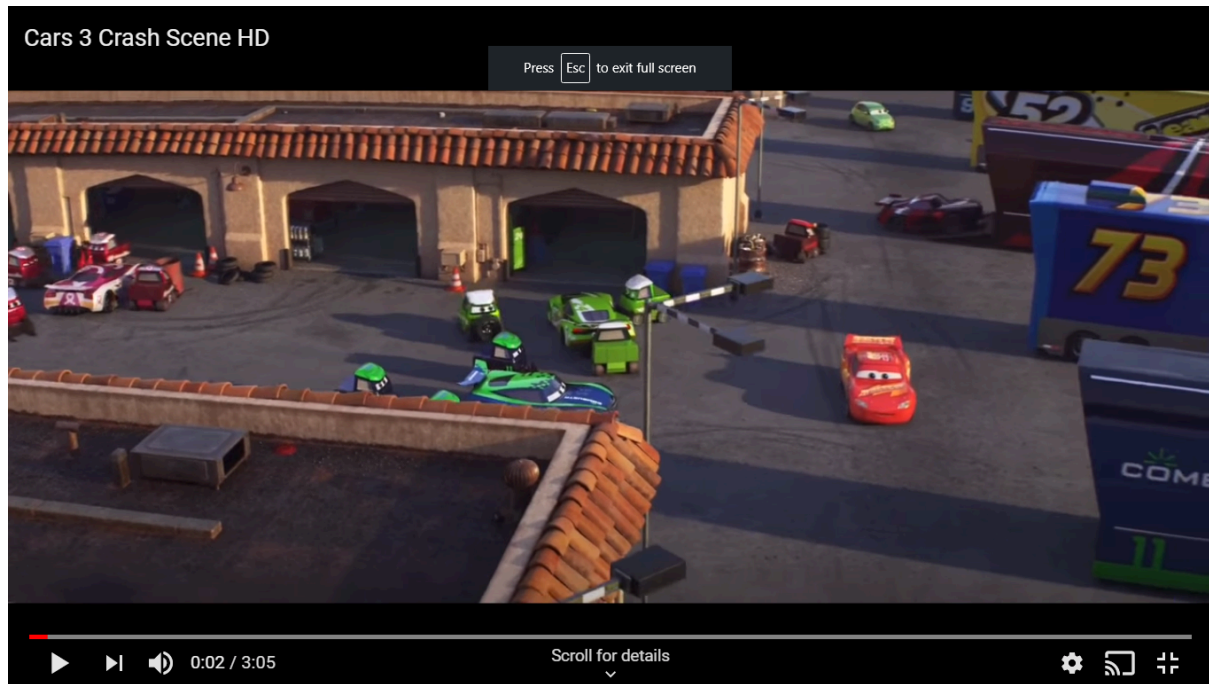
Now here, you can see that the first shot is filmed from a distance (but we do pan and zoom closer to lightning himself) so that we can see all the next gen cars as Lightning scoots by looking for his friends. The fact that we eventually zoom in on lighting makes it so that we only see his emotions in a clear and defined manner with all the next gens either being to far away to tell their emotions or you're unable to see their faces due to how they're facing either away from or to the side of the camera which creates the effect that these guys are rather intimidating due to a seeming lack of nerves, thus making the audience feel similarly to that of Lightning McQueen (and building tension in the process)

See? You can't see anyone else's face except Lightning's, this helps build tension because none of the next gens look like they have much emotion on them (because they're lean mean speed machines), this builds tension because you can't actually determine their emotions (mainly due to the camera) but you can tell they're ready to win because even the parts of their faces you do see, you usually see squinted eyes, which communicates their determination immediately to the audience (and again, puts them in a spot similar to poor Lightning)
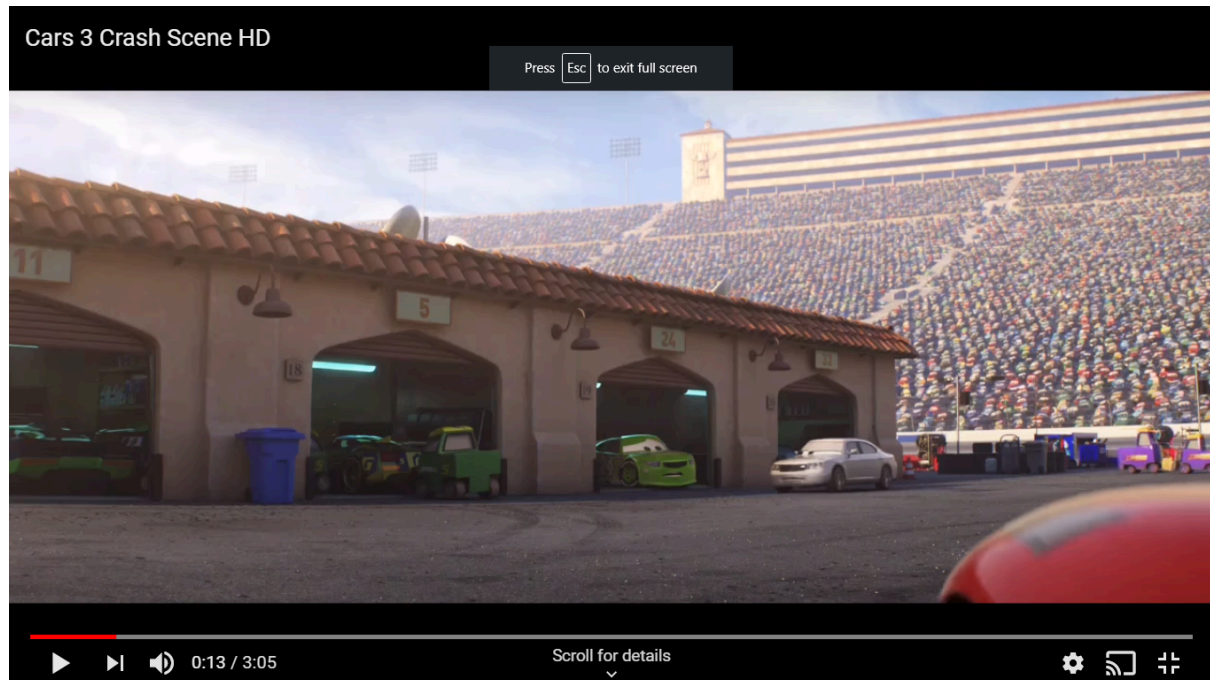
after this we cut to a long shot where Lightning actually witnesses one of his friends (called "Brick") in the process of being replaced by someone new and different (because he's old), now here, the camera is framed just to the side of Lightning listening to the conversation from a distance, this allows the audience to eventually imagine this scenario potentially happening to Lightning if he loses this final race (of this first racing season, not the movie) by showing the same thing happening to another character, I would say that because Lightning interacted with Bobby Swift beforehand,I it would be better (and build a bit more tension for the audience) if he and Brick switched roles (because in this scene, Bobby had already been replaced off screen), but if you think about it from a certain perspective it actually does make sense given what happens next.
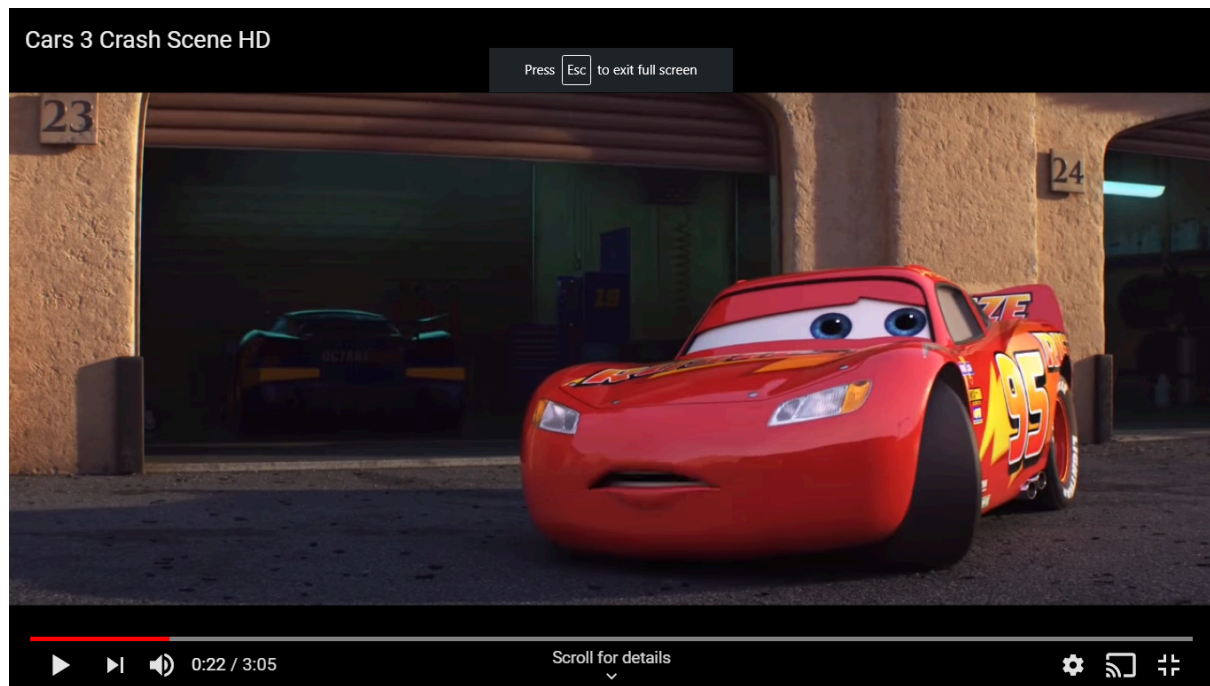
In this shot Lightning and the camera move towards what would be Bobby Swift's garage only for someone else to reverse on out of there (giving Lightning a good spook), afterwards we cut to the other car (who's name is Danny, bro) and we can see he's rather confident and serious just from his face (because how else are these characters supposed to emote, they can't even do any body language) and then we do a few cross cuts to get Lightning's reaction, Danny telling Lightning "name's Danny bro" and then Lightning's look of shock because now he's (as well as the audience) realising these next gens are here to stay.
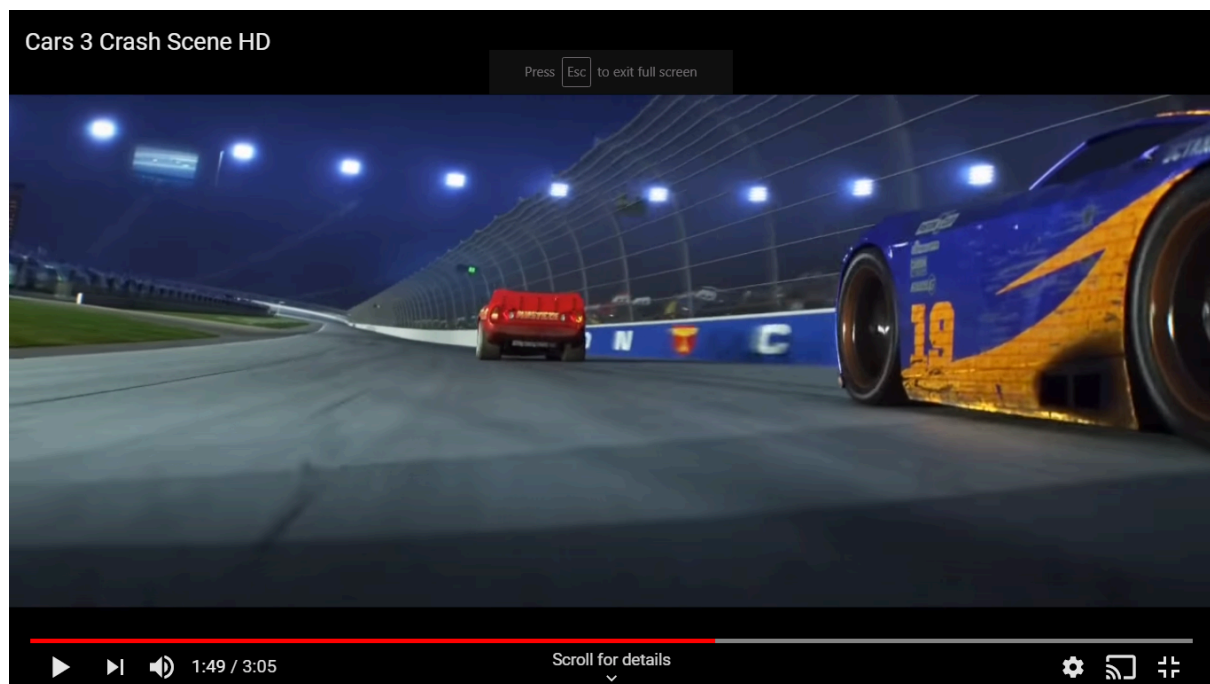
Now skipping ahead a bit (because I want to get this done on time) to where Lightning manages to get the lead, the first shot I want to discuss here is the tracking long shot where

Jackson ominously moves in effortlessly towards lightning. The reason this part builds a little bit of tension actually has to do with the way the camera is actually moving slightly slower than Jackson Storm to make it seem like he's going faster than he is (which sets up the beginning of the end for Lightning's chances of winning because this is early in the film)
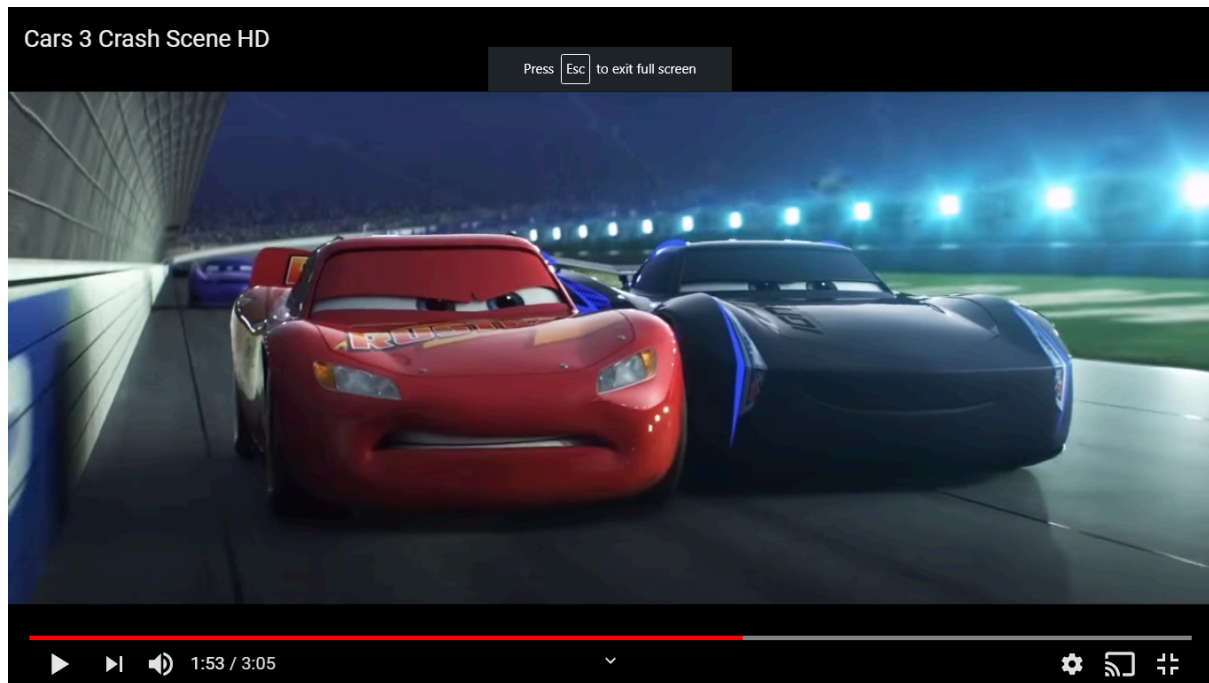

next we get this two shot of Jackson and Lightning, the camera angled so that we can see both their faces (and thus show the contrast of how much effort Lightning's putting in compared to Storm's effortless gliding), this ends up building tension after Storm glides off camera telling Lightning to enjoy his retirement, the tension here comes from the audience being actually being able to determine what's about to happen and thinking "no Lightning, don't do it Lightning! You're gonna crash Lightning!" (that's right, even knowing what's about to happen to a character before hand can build up tension if it's being done the right way) but he doesn't listen

Afterwards we get an interesting cross cut from a first person perspective, to Lightning's reaction and then back again as all of lightning's efforts to take the lead get ripped away before his (and our) eyes, thus tensing the audience up for when he makes one last push for victory before his tires give out. Speaking of the tires, we actually get a quick close up on one of the back tires to establish to the audience that they're about to give out (thus tensing

the audience further for when it does happen)
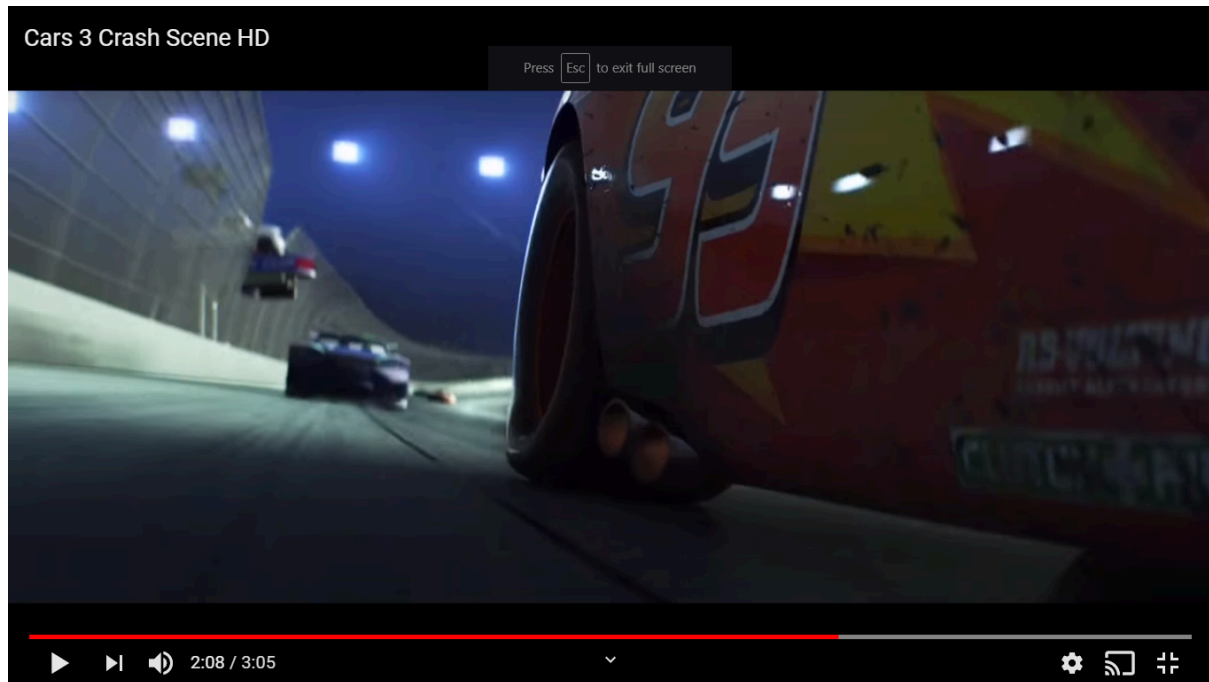

After that shot we get a shot of Lightning from behind, then in front getting closer to the camera, a first person shot of him and then this close up to really show his determination towards his futile efforts despite every first person shot showing the other 3 cars ahead of Lightning getting further and further away, especially in the final first person shot before his tire gives out.

Speaking of the tire, to give the effect that all this is happening quickly the camera quickly cuts between several already established angles (and spending the least time showing his eyes) to heighten the tension even further as everything is suddenly happening at breakneck speed. That is, until he crashes into the wall. There we get a long shot where Lightning flies over the camera in slow motion, a quick zoom in on Sally, and then the classic moment from the teaser trailer
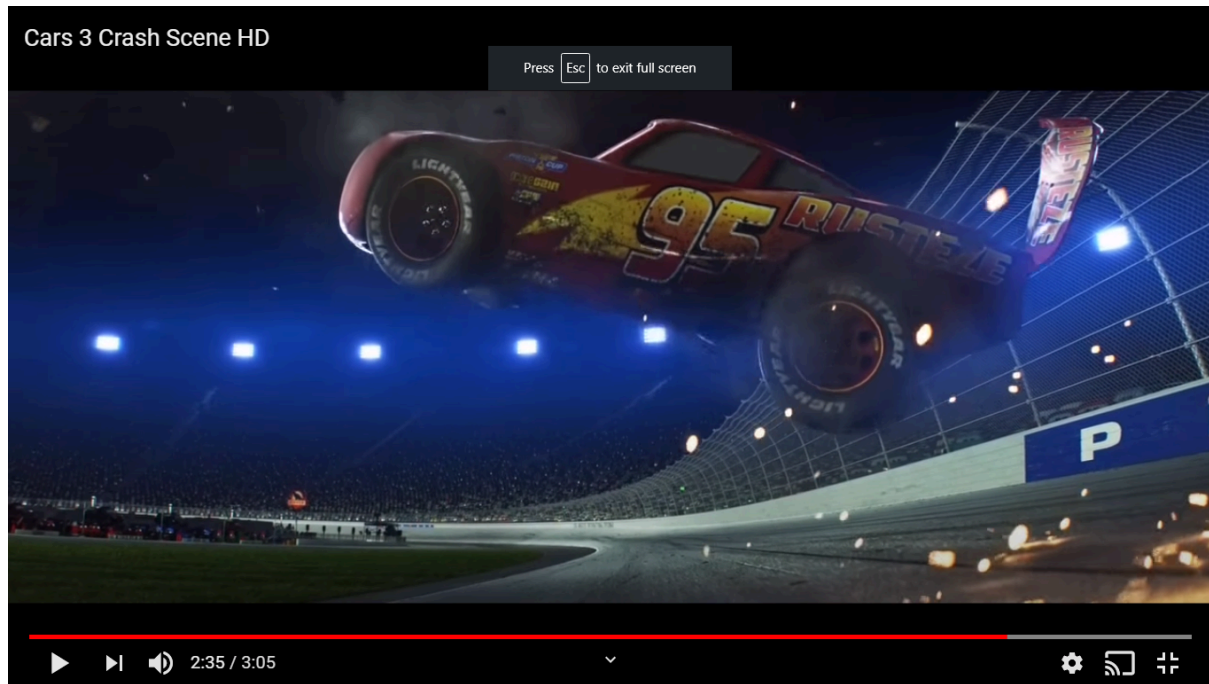
Now this is the part I really wanted to talk about (and the entire reason I even chose Brian Fee as the first practitioner to delve into {even though it mostly turned into a bit about Cars 3} in the first place), in this long shot, everything's happening in slow motion so that the audience can actually process what's going on and really feel the tension build up to when he hits the ground (especially if you're a long time fan of Cars like me), now slow motion can be used in lots of ways, whether it be to highlight two characters re-uniting (like Marty and Alex from the first Madagascar) or it can be used to really show the details of an intense moment that's just happened. (like here, in Cars 3) as you can see, Brian really used his experience with storyboards when Directing Cars 3 to really bring out the tension with his team's camerawork.

Practitioner 2: Steven Spielberg

(Image Sourced From Wikipedia)

Steven's Work: Jaws (1975) E.T: The Extra Terrestrial (1982)

Ok, so since Steven's actually directed more than 1 film this next bit shouldn't randomly turn into an analysis of a single scene from their movie. (instead we'll be looking at random shots from various films he's made)

First I want to take a look at this first person shot from Jaws:
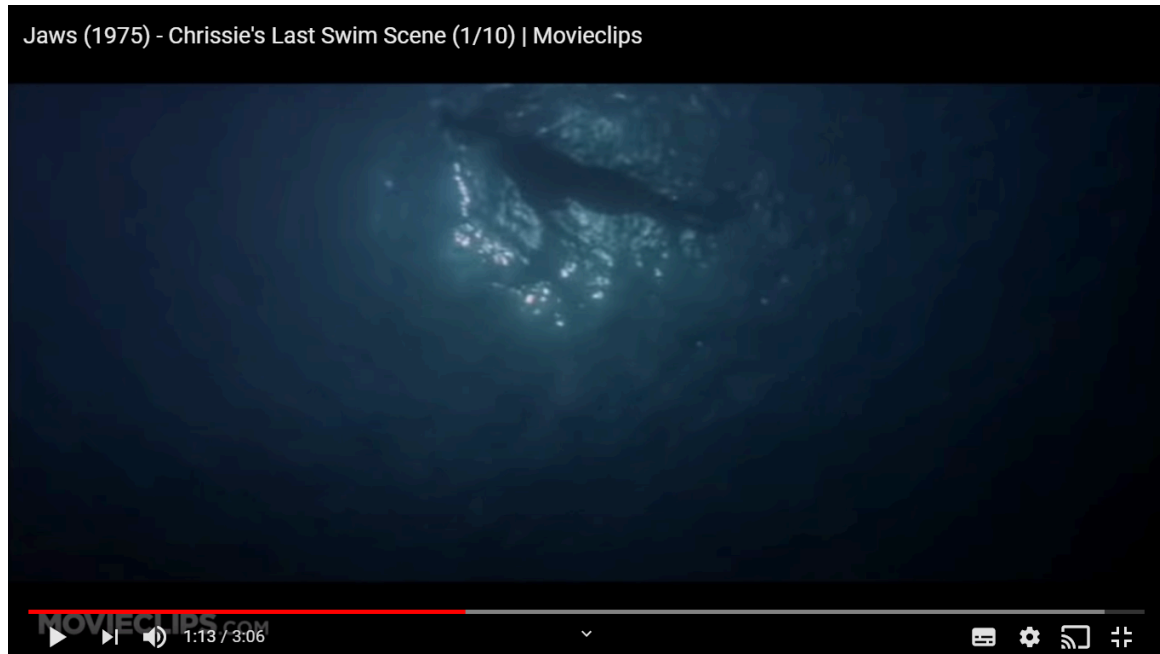
In this shot, we're viewing the character swimming from Jaws' perspective as the camera slowly tracks the character's movements whilst ascending towards her ominously, the tension here comes from just how low the angle is to give off the appearance that we're in Jaws' head. This builds tension because the audience can see that this woman is unknowingly in danger (but this shot exists to clue us in on that fact before the character can realise), in fact, you barely ever see the big threat of the film (at most we get the fin and maybe the odd appearance here and there, but other than that, it's mostly clever camera work. The reason for this is actually because the shark animatronic they used kept breaking in the water (that's right, in a twist of irony, the shark couldn't handle the waves) so they had to minimise how often he appeared on screen as to not appear hockey, and it actually works to the films advantage in the end because whenever the shark does actually appear, the audience knows thing are about to intensify, so the tension actually comes from the audience not knowing when the shark's going to appear next.

Another classic spielberg shot I want to discuss really quickly is this travelling mid shot near the end of E.T.:

In this particular shot we have one of Elliot's friends looking behind him as a police car suddenly comes into view around the corner during this chase scene (now, chase scenes can be a good way to build tension while heightening the action, but our focus is on the camera), now this shot builds tension because it shows that the police have quickly gained on our characters as they realise they need to think of a different strategy to outmaneuver the police. (which luckily for us this character later comes up with the idea of splitting up) The tension here actually comes from the police car veering into view (given how they were already established as a threat beforehand) causing the boy to actually look behind him briefly. (although you can't really see his eyes due to his sunglasses but I'd imagine they'd widen after the first look and then light up once he got his idea) Now there are many more examples I could go over where Steven uses the camera to build tension (I.E: Jurassic Park, Indiana Jones, Schindler's list and many more) and the different approaches that have to be used, but this is supposed to be a quick little diddy into how Steven (and the other practitioners) use the camera in their movies.
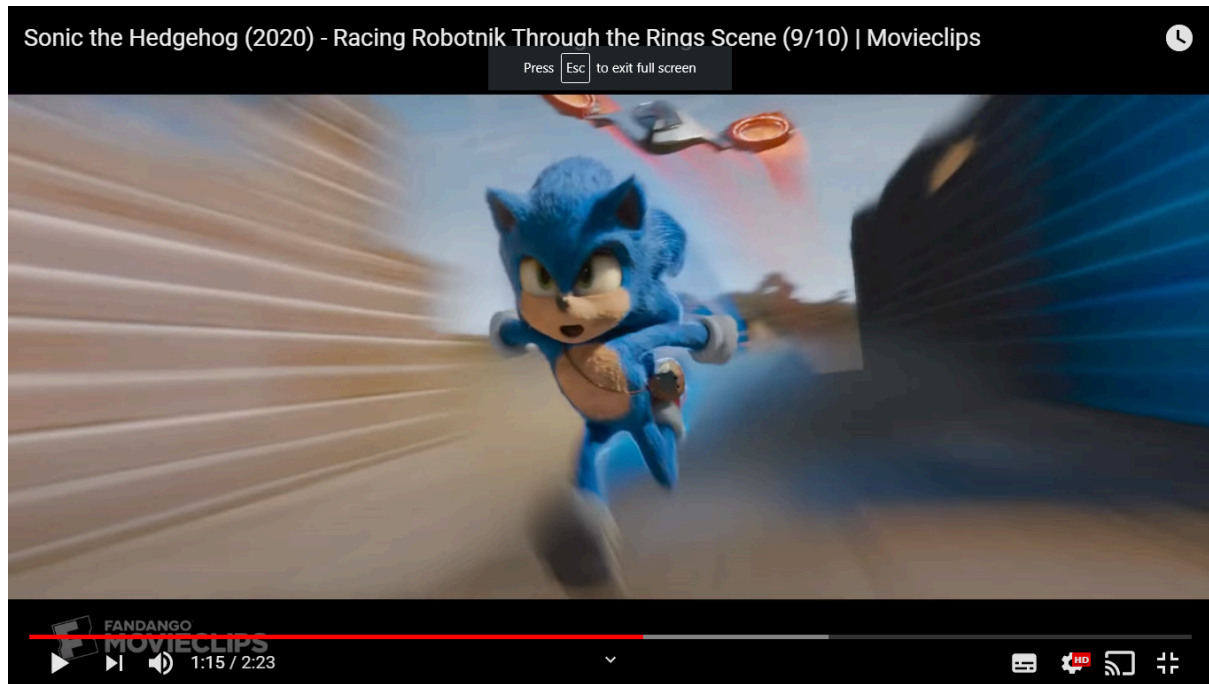
Practitioner 3: Jeff Fowler

Sam Gordon   Tension Building (Dedicated Document Edition)
15/9/20-20/9/20

(image sourced from Sonic News Network.Fandom.Com)

Sonic the Hedgehog (2020) - Racing Robotnik Through the Rings Scene (9/10) | Movieclips

(now this film's actually Jeff's first feature film, and yes, I put him in here as an excuse to talk mainly about Sonic)

Jeff's Work: Gopher Broke (2004) Sonic The Hedgehog (2020)

Now in the case of ol' Jeff Fowler (because he was directing a Sonic The Hedgehog movie), a lot of the tension here has to be build up while keeping the fast paced nature of the film intact, and I'd say the best example of this actually comes in the final chase scene during the climax because in there, Sonic's always running away from Dr Robotnik so a lot of the time, the camera's actually on the move with the action (which makes the grand majority of these shots the travelling versions of themselves), one example of tension being built is actually

when Sonic narrowly dodges one of Robotnik's laser bursts:
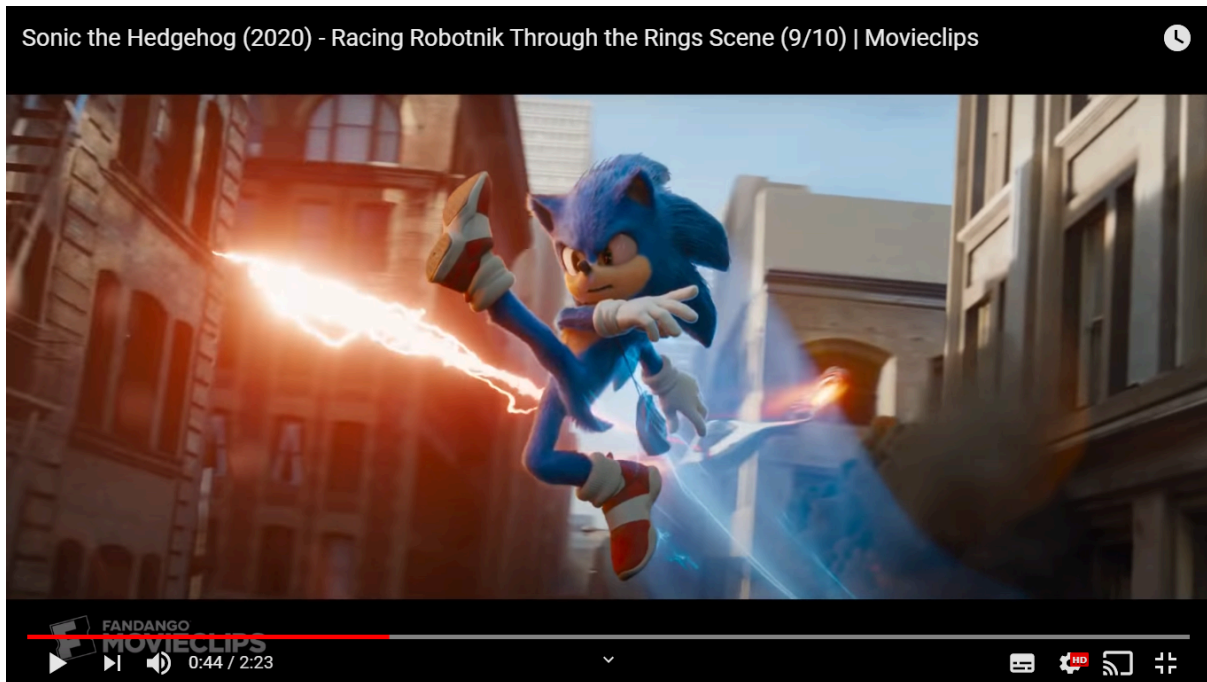
Here, the camera actually goes into slow motion very briefly so that you can actually take in how quickly Sonic had to think in order to dodge this one (also, Smash Ultimate references), this also shows how cunning Dr Robotnik himself can be (anticipating where the Sonic would be by the time the laser hit where he was aiming) which is a good way to build tension from just a brief moment of slow motion. We also have the part where Robotnik's actually in Sonic's sand tornado trying to find him, particularly the over the shoulder shot that does a zoom and track once Sonic becomes visible:
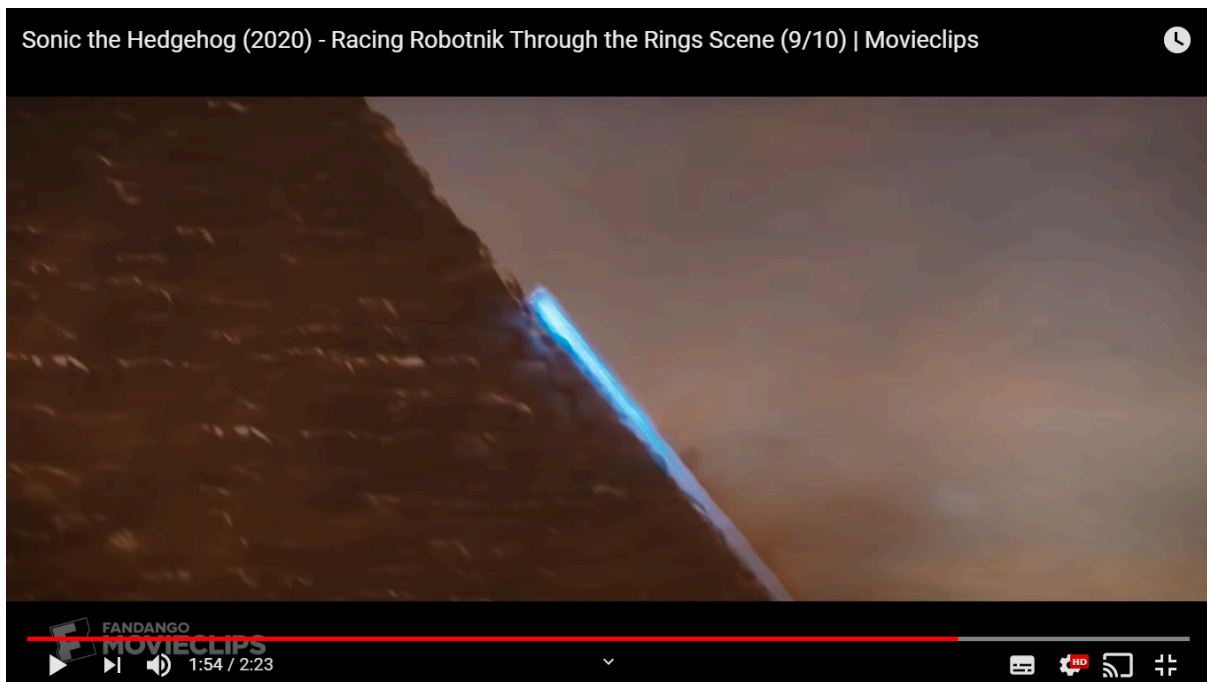
Here, the camera transitions nicely into an almost first person like shot once Dr Robotnik sees Sonic The Hedgehog (who has no Idea this is even happening) running up one of the pyramids in this scene, this part builds tension because of how quickly the camera (which the audience can infer to represent Robotnik's eyeline) picks up Sonic again as Robotnik begins to regain the advantage again. (which has the audience feeling tense because of what Robotnik's going to do)

Before we end things off I just want to mention a quick little invisible edit that happens in this scene (mostly as a reminder for when I do the editing document next time)
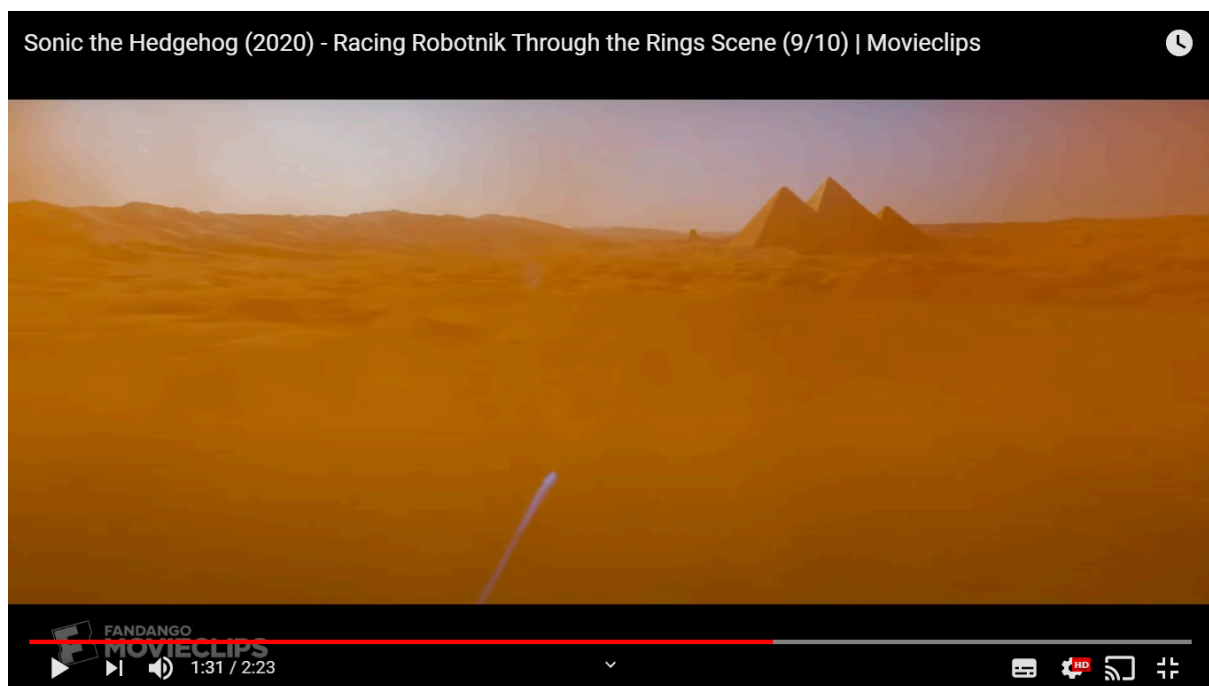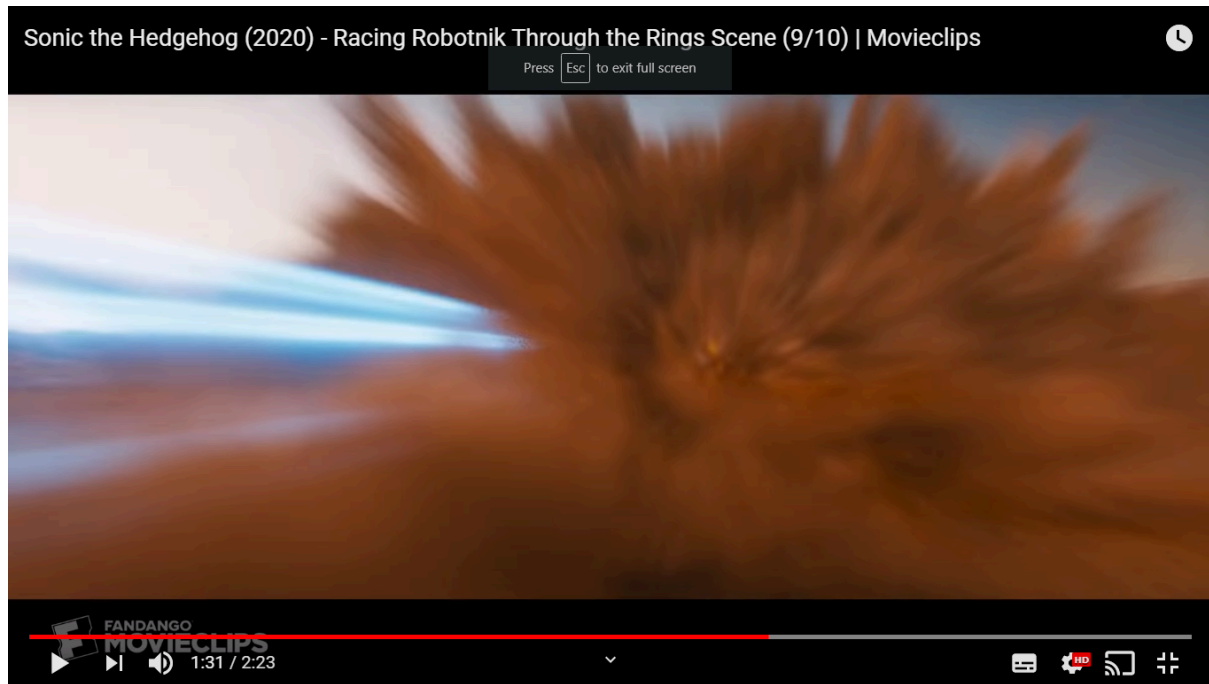
Now here, we go from a long shot to an establishing shot via a cloud of sand Robotnik's laser kicks up while trying to get that hedgehog and I think this is a particularly clever choice because now the audience can see with clarity where the characters are (location wise) without breaking the flow of action.

Closing Remarks

In conclusion, the camera plays a very large role in tension building and how it's used can often mean the difference between a good clear scene where tension can naturally build up

in a film like The LEGO Movie or a poorly thought our scene where the audience can barely tell what's going on like in most modern action movie fight scenes (with their shaky cameras)

However the camera isn't the only tool that's used to build tension as sound, visuals and even editing styles can have an impact on tension building as well (as you can no doubt tell from the way this document also mentions things like the emotions a character is feeling or even the stageline of the shot), as similarly to the way the camera itself is placed, good sound choices, clear visuals and the right editing choices can make the difference between good or bad scenes. See you next time.