

Stranger Things – Exemplar essay – shocking and surprising opening scene

Stranger Things is a series made for Netflix by The Duffer Brothers. It is about a boy who disappeared mysteriously. The opening scene is very effective at giving the viewer a sense of the series, which is Science Fiction Horror. This essay will be about how the director's created a shocking and surprising opening scene, by using lighting, sound and camera.

At the very beginning of the episode, before the credits have even come up, we get a long angled shot of a dark starry sky. The pace of the camera movements is slow and we hear soft, outdoor sounds such as crickets. We are then given really important title cards, which tell us the date: "1983" and the location: "Hawkins, Indiana". The camera then pans down to show us a big building, which we are then told is the "National Laboratory." This very slow quiet opening is complete contrast with what is about to happen.

The next shot is inside the building itself. We find ourselves in a dark hallway. A low-angled shot looks up at the ceiling where we see flickering lights. This combined with eerie music immediately makes us feel on edge. The camera pans down again to show us a door at the end of the hallway. It is a heavy metal door with a secure seal, like those found on a ship, which gives us the sense that this is somewhere that there are things that need to be contained. There is a slight pause in movement before the camera starts to zoom in on the door. Suddenly, a man, dressed in a white lab coat, slams open the door and runs very quickly past the camera. The use of camera here makes us feel as if we are part of the action. At the same time, a loud siren can be heard, which is quite shocking after the near silence at the start. We can also hear the man's heavy breathing. His speed and panic are emphasized now by the camera shots and the fast editing. The camera follows behind the man, but it is low down, showing his running legs.

Next, we see him run to a large industrial lift and we see a close-up of him quickly and repetitively punching at the buttons. The editing here is very fast: there is a long-shot from in front of him with the empty corridor stretching behind then it reverses and we have a mid-shot of him in front of the lift looking back down the corridor to see if whatever he is running from is in sight. The clever use of the camera allows us to share his panic. There is a close up of his hand as he hammers the call button repeatedly. When there is a 'ting' we can't wait for him to get safely inside. The director's very clever use of camera, sound, lighting and editing have us rooting for someone we don't even know and we don't even know yet why he is running.

The next shot is a longshot of the large elevator interior with the man standing nervously in the centre waiting for the doors to close. Time slows again as the shots space out a little. We zoom in, watching his chest heaving and listening to his panting breath starting to slow as the siren continues blaring. Then there is a reverse point-of-view shot as we watch with him, back along the empty strobe-lit corridor. The camera reverses one more time to a mid-shot as his frightened face tilts up and

back. We hear a soft but horrible gurgling animal sound from above. There is a sudden cut - the camera is directly above his head as he tilts it back so his eyes in his upside-down head are looking directly at us. It is now almost as if we are looking from the monster's point of view, which is unsettling for the viewer. We hear a gulping sound, before the camera cuts to a long-shot looking into the lift from the corridor. Before, finally, we hear a roaring sound at the same time that the doors begin to close and we see his struggling legs, as he is drawn up into the high part of the elevator, out of our sight.

At the end of this sequence we already know that something awful has taken place and we are completely intrigued to find out the explanation for these shocking and surprising events. The directors have made excellent use of camera, editing sound and lighting to create a compelling exciting and engaging opening that makes the viewer want to keep watching.