Attack the Block (Joe Cornish 2011)
Knowledge Organiser

Institutional information

Director:	Joe Cornish
Release:	October 27, 2011
Production company:	Film4, Studio Canal, Big Talk Pictures, UK Film Council
Country of production:	UK/France
Starring:	Jodie Whittaker, Nick Frost, John Boyega, Luke Treadaway
Genres:	Sci-fi; comedy; action; horror.
Other information:	Produced by Edgar Wright, Director of Shaun of the Dead. Joe Cornish's feature film debut.
Award nominations:	BAFTA nominated: outstanding Debut by a British Writer, Director or Producer

Characters

Moses:	**Protagonist:** 'Gang' leader. A teenager. Age unknown for most of the film. Criminal as he mugs Sam. Kills the first Alien that lands and as a result is responsible for the alien invasion. Becomes the saviour by the end of the film.
Sam:	Young trainee nurse. Begins films as protagonist. Is mugged on her way home on fireworks night. Resents the young gang who mugged her but comes to work with them for the greater good.
Pest:	One of the gang members who looks up to and takes 'orders' from Moses. Is often the comedic relief in the film and offers audience some insight into life of a teenager by expressing what Moses does or cannot.
Brewis:	Zoology student stoner who comes to the Block to buy drugs. Is very much the 'fish out of water' in the situation.
Hi-Hatz:	**Antagonist:** feared gang member who runs the Block in terms of crime and drugs. Psychopathic, prone to violence and owner of the weed grown by Ron at the top of the Block.

Context:

Set in a South London, 2011.

Idea for film came from Joe Cornish being mugged by a teenage gang in similar setting.

Joe Cornish was a fan of creature features and Sci-Fi films growing up, including Star Wars.

Cornish interviewed various people in youth groups in London in order to find out what kind of weapons they would use if a real alien invasion occurred. He also used these interviews to develop the colloquial language for his characters.

The fictional locations and surrounding areas in the film are named after British sci-fi writers.

Film was released two months after the London riots of 2011. The representation of the working classes in the British Media has always been pejorative, but this event gave rise to iconic images which were used to demonise certain people.

"Hoodie Horror" films such as HARRY BROWN (2009) and ILL MANORS (2012) offer a negative view of a similar setting.

Narrative (The method and means by which you construct the events of a story into a plot)

Narrative structure:	Linear narrative, three act structure.
Narrative viewpoint:	Teen POV, young adult POV.
Binary oppositions:	Create conflict. Key oppositions are children vs. their parents, teenagers vs. adults and young people, in particular black teenagers and young adults and police oppression/profiling.

Film Style	Urban Realism	Classic sci-fi	Horror
Lighting	Low-key. Light provided via ambient elements such as lamp posts, fireworks and car headlamps. Whole block is bathed in shadows.	Inside; corridors are generally high-key; almost unnaturally so. Block itself features spotlights that resemble lights from a spaceship. Blacklights create unusual and unsettling light in the 'weed room'.	Many scenes either use low-key lighting, heavy shadows or very little lighting at all. As with other horror films, this is designed to restrict the audience from seeing every aspect of a scene to create tension.
Mise-en-scene	Recognisable items for teenagers; BMXs, moped, mobile phones, hoodies and caps. Fireworks and other weapons are 'realistic' in their origin.	Aliens as puppets are recognisable as a key sci-fi trope. Weapons are 'realistic' but weapons in general are key for sci-fi, especially when establishing or creating conflict.	The aliens themselves are often in-camera practical effects either as puppets or as stunt performers in suits. Practical effects have long-been used in horror films as way of producing visceral reactions and a 'realistic' style. This is continued with the use of the make-up and effects of the blood and gore throughout the film.
Camera angles, movement, shot size & lighting. [Cinematography]	Grey, dull and drab. Very reflective of typical high-rise estates. Colour palette reflects brutalist architecture and the atmosphere of social anxiety. Night-time evokes sense of criminality and hostility.	Teal, UV whites, silver & "blackest black" on the alien 'fur'. Smoke used in corridor to create tension, restrict view but also to resemble key scenes from other sci-fi films. Shots in corridors framed to resemble interior of spaceships.	During key scenes of horror, shot sizes can often be quite 'long', allowing audiences to see far into the distance to suggest where an enemy may come from. Some extreme close-ups are used to show reaction and the effects of people being attacked.

Themes/issues.	
Conflict:	Seen all the way through the film, conflict is key.
Adults vs. teenagers:	This is a development from theme of conflict. Doesn't just refer to conflict however-when the gang are seen running home for supplies we see the disconnect between adults and teenagers in a variety of ways. Note how Sam, Ron, Hi-Hatz and Brewis all approach the situation differently to the teenage gang.
Authority:	Police are seen as bullies and people who will not listen. Their authority is undermined by the aliens and their tactics are seen to be unsuccessful compared to the teenagers. Younger people in the Block have no respect for the police and by extension, almost all people older than them.
Invasion:	Whilst the aliens are the most obvious example of 'invasion', this can also be seen via the police 'invading' an area they are not welcome in. Invasion of privacy into their flat is an issue for the young girls.
Consequences:	From the beginning, the film deals with the idea of actions have consequences. The mugging of Sam nearly costs Pest his life when Sam initially refuses to treat him later on. The reckless actions of the teenagers throughout the film, especially Moses, have dire and often fatal consequences.
Redemption:	Moses gains redemption for his life of crime and poor choices. Near the beginning of the film it is established that Moses is a criminal and makes bad choices. We later learn that some of this is due to his need to survival and self-preservation-he appears to be largely alone and in need of support. His reckless actions in killing the alien cause the overall, main invasion and consequently the death of his friends, but his final act and the celebration of him as a hero, serves as a great example of redemption.
Sacrifice:	The most obvious example of sacrifice is of Moses at the end of the film, but we see examples of sacrifice throughout, some of principles others of physical acts.

Links to technology timeline:	
Soundtrack	Featuring a Dolby Surround 7.1 mix, Attack the Block features dialogue, a soundtrack, score and makes wide use of digital sound production.
Colour	Perhaps unsurprisingly, colour is used throughout. Night-time scenes are handled well and some post-production work on the colour grading has been done to create the specific look of the film.
Independent studio production	Not a product of one of the larger film studios .
Widescreen, not 3D	Attack the Block is presented in a widescreen ratio of 2.35:1
Some CGI, but mostly practical effects	Most of the special effects in this film are practical, meaning the use of puppets and models, rather then CGI. Some CGI was used to help *augment* the practical work however.

Key scenes	
The Opening Scene: (http://bit.ly/ATBKS1)	As with all films, this scene establishes character and scenario. In this case, the film establishes that it's set during Bonfire Night in London and, as obvious as it may seem, the mise-en-scene establishes that the film is set on Earth. Notice how the lighting gets progressively darker the more that Sam walks away from the hubbub of the tube station and the high street and towards the block. The mise-en-scene then shows how isolated and vulnerable she is in a recognisably uneasy urban environment.
The gang walk through the estate (http://bit.ly/ATBkeyscene2)	Another scene which helps to see the difference between the style of the world outside the block and the style inside. The gang are initially looking at the things they stole from Sam. As they throw them away it's as if they're getting rid of 'realistic' props. The focus then becomes the alien. As the gang approach the Block the walkways and low-key lighting that cast straight-lined shadows create a strange style. It resembles the retro futuristic style of a 70s sci-fi aesthetic, with muted colours and straight lines. When walking towards the Block, the lighting takes on a strange blue-hue, reminiscent of the aliens' teeth and an unusual colour for Earth. indicating that the Block is much more of a sci-fi setting than the 'real world' outside.
Trying to get to Ron's Weed Room (http://bit.ly/ATBkeyscene3)	This is a great scene in the way that it uses the conventions of horror to help develop the uneasy atmosphere earlier in the film. It also raises the stakes in terms of the on-screen violence and the peril for the main characters. We get plenty of scpecial effects and make-up to show the violence in the lift, but lighting & editing here are also important.
The final scene (http://bit.ly/ATBkeyscene4)	The final scene uses key generic conventions from the sci-fi and action genre films but crucially set in the urban environment which is used to help create the drama in the scene. It's also the most obvious example of Moses' redemption. The lighting is especially interesting here and key aspects of cinematography such as camera movement and the editing decision of having much of the scene in slow-motion is also an interesting choice that is worth analysing.
The Attack on the police-van scene (http://bit.ly/ATBKS2))	In a film full of sci-fi imagery, few scenes are as obvious as this one. The use of the UV light as a 'body scanner' is something that has been used in sci-fi films for decades. The lighting and mise-en-scene too is cleverly manipulated to create the sense that this setting is not 'realistic' or 'Earthly' in style. It also features some interesting interactions between the characters and we get a much clearer sense of who they are as people. The way that Moses offers to be the sacrifice and how people respond to this are great examples of the themes of consequences and redemption in the film.