

An underwater photograph showing a diver in silhouette on the left, swimming towards a large, glowing, circular object in the center. The object has a textured, almost crystalline appearance with internal light patterns. The water is dark blue with some ripples and light reflections.

# **Building a Blockbuster**

**RTF 308 // Kathy Cacace**

A person is swimming underwater in a deep blue ocean. Above them, a large, dark shadow of a shark is visible on the water's surface, creating a sense of tension and danger. The water is slightly rippled, and the overall atmosphere is mysterious and suspenseful.

# Key concepts

**blockbuster**  
**Stephen Spielberg**  
***Jaws***  
**marketing**  
**high-concept film**



A photograph of the Hollywood sign, which consists of large white letters spelling 'HOLLYWOOD' mounted on a hillside. The hill is covered in green and brown vegetation. In the background, several radio towers with multiple satellite dishes are visible against a cloudy sky.

HOLLYWOOD

## **What happens to the film industry during the 1960s?**

- 1. Final collapse of studio system; but studios themselves persist**
- 2. Poor performance after *The Sound of Music* (1965)**
- 3. Loosening and eventual demise of the production code**
- 4. Increasing reliance on the “calculated blockbuster” (T. Schatz)**



**blockbuster\***

**a popular & high-earning film; often meant to appeal to a wide audience**

**\*based on well-known 1940s terminology about a certain kind of bomb**



Hollywood has been **increasingly hit-driven** since the early 1950s. This marks a significant departure from the classical era, when the studios turned out a few “prestige” pictures each year and relished the occasional runaway box-office hit, but relied primarily on routine A-class features to generate revenues. **The exceptional became the rule in postwar Hollywood**, as the occasional hit gave way to the calculated blockbuster.

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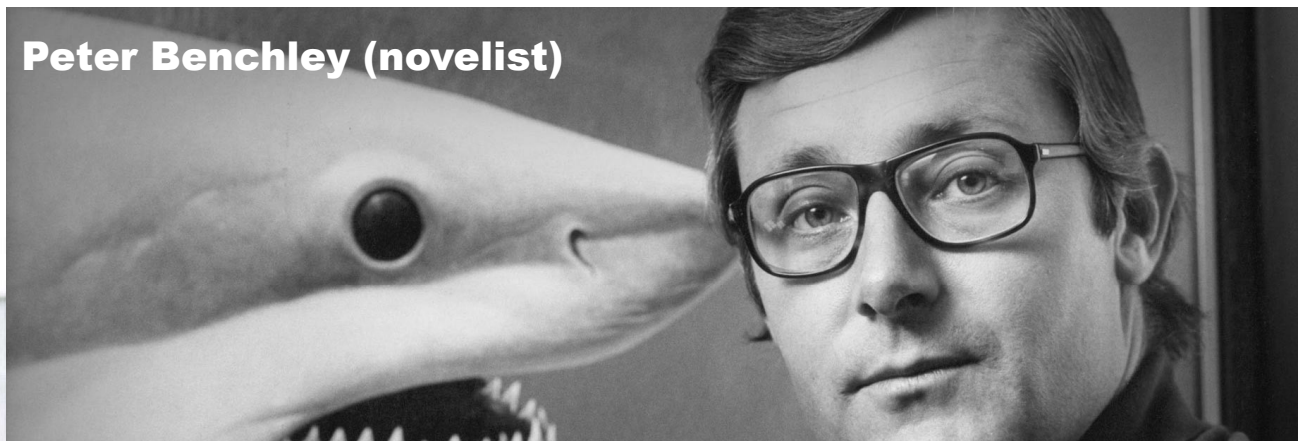
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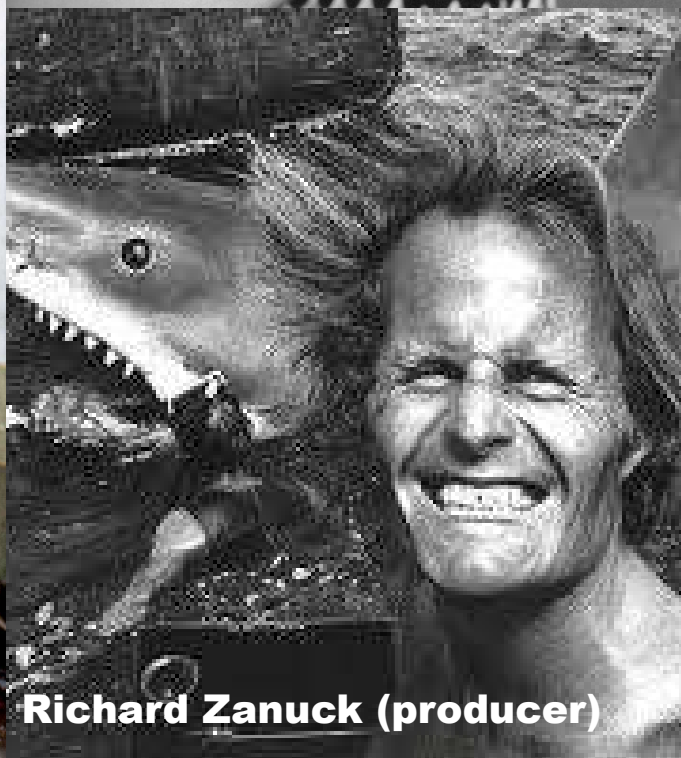




**Stephen Spielberg  
(director)**



**Peter Benchley (novelist)**



**Richard Zanuck (producer)**

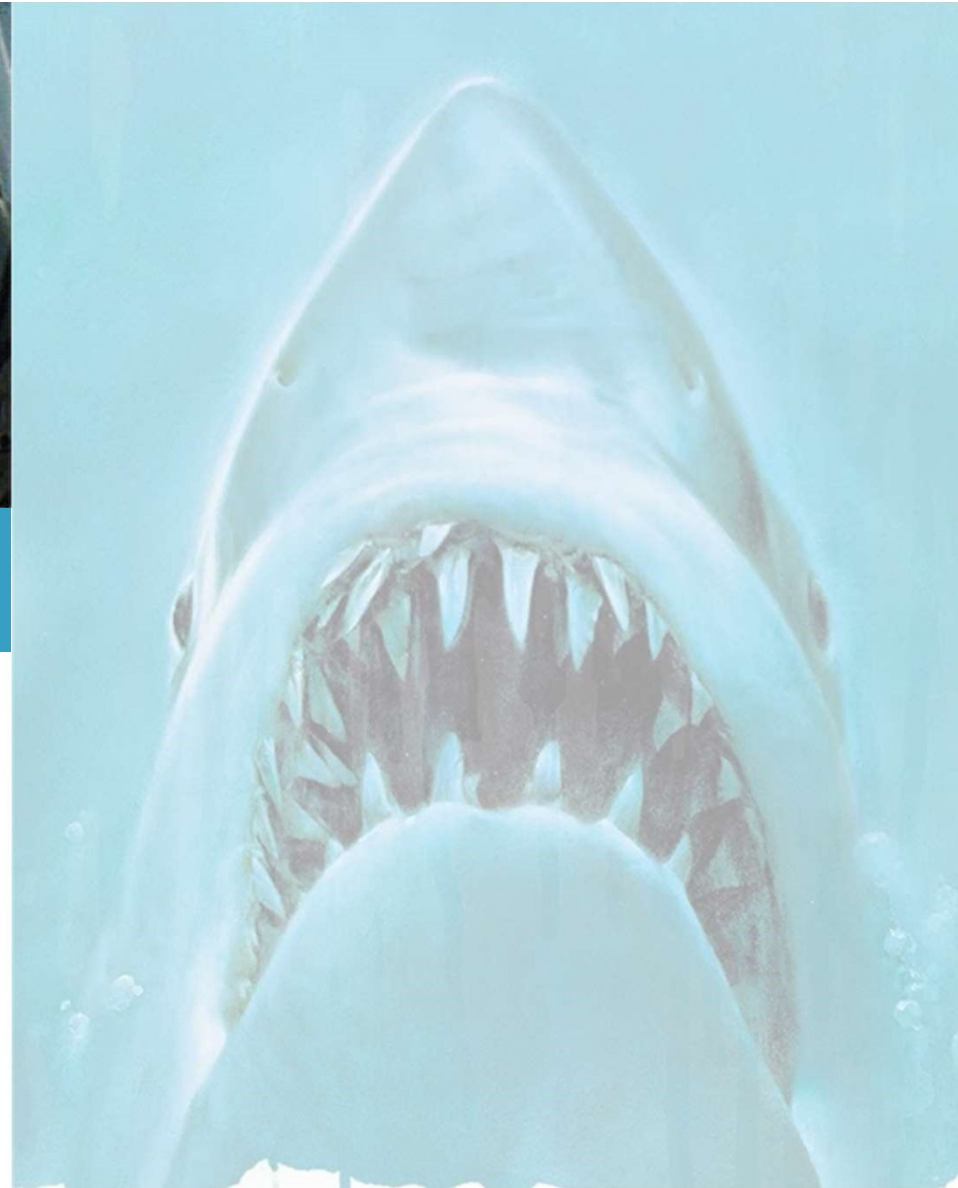


**David Brown (producer)**

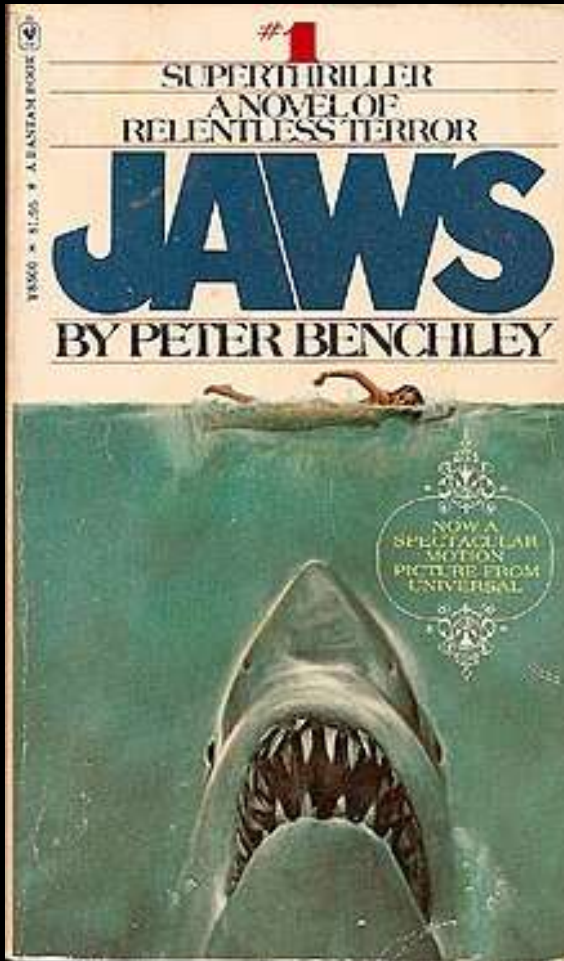


# Five-part strategy

**The book**  
**The buzz**  
**Promotion**  
**Release strategy**  
**Merchandising**







## Step 1: We're gonna need a bigger book

Having acquired the *Jaws* manuscript for approximately \$175,000, Zanuck and Brown's **first concern was to help make the book a best-seller.**



## Step 2: We're gonna need bigger buzz

Zanuck and Brown decided to take the film to Cannes, though not as a festival entry despite numerous invitations to do so. **"We went to the Cannes Film Festival almost a year early because the press is always there looking for a story,"** observed Zanuck. Also arriving in Cannes to promote the film were Peter Benchley and the film's director, Steven Spielberg.

Commenting on their successful effort to woo the international press and public, Zanuck and Brown emphasize, **"The cost of this worldwide promotional endeavor was small in our judgment — although Universal may disagree with us — compared with the results in terms of television and radio air time and print exposure."**





## Step 3: We're gonna need a bigger promotional budget

In the two weeks prior to *Jaws*' general release, Spielberg, Benchley, Zanuck and Brown toured 11 U.S. cities,  **saturating every major market**. *Jaws* star Robert Shaw made guest appearances on *Today*, *Dinah!*, *The Mike Douglas Show* and *Tonight*. And there was, of course, the Time magazine cover story during the week prior to release.

"The cover on *Time* magazine," said Brown, "was the most important. It was a recognition of the film's news value primarily and the building of the phenomenon of *Jaws*."



## Step 4: We're gonna need a...smaller release?

According to Spielberg, once the studio's executives...had seen the film at a March screening in Long Beach, a new releasing strategy was formulated that **pared down the number of situations to 400**. "They began handling the film with kid gloves," remarked Spielberg.

"The decision to cut back [on the number of situations] occurred before the film went out on bid," noted Universal publicity director Clark Ramsey. Reached in New York, Martin confirmed this and maintained that reducing the number of theaters would permit the film **"to play for a longer period** of time at each theater."





**Step 5: We're gonna need so much f\* & %ing merch**

**All advertising & merchandise is based on the paperback book cover, creating a recognizable brand**



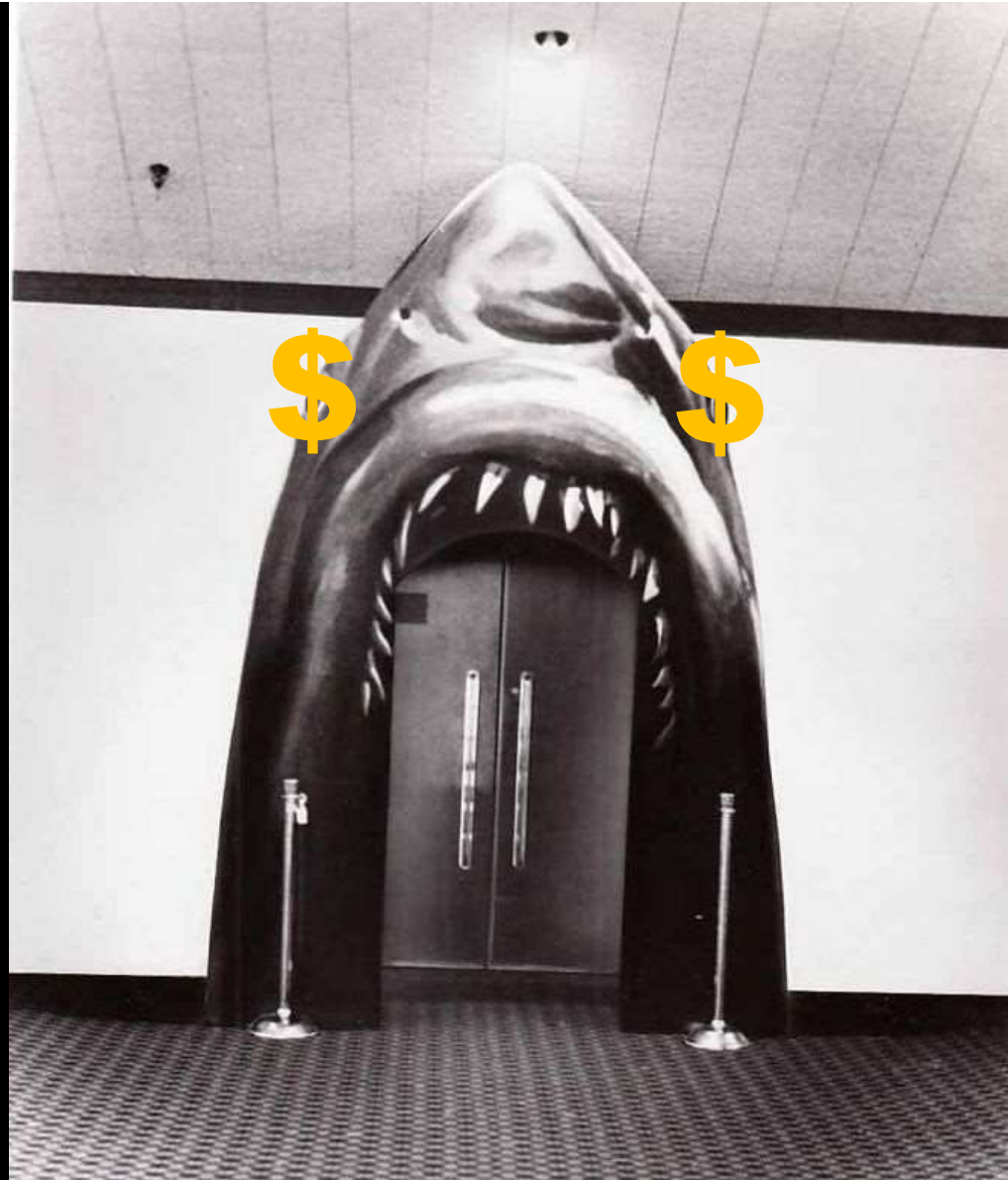


*Star Wars*  
d. George Lucas (1977)





**Production & ad budget: \$7mil**  
**First film to make \$100mil (in 59 days)**  
**Makes \$133mil at U.S. box office**  
**Makes \$193mil in global releases**  
**Highest grossing film until *Star Wars***  
**Adjusted for today,**  
***Jaws* has made a**  
**little over \$1bil in**  
**profit.**





# **high-concept film**

**a film whose simple narrative can be condensed into one sentence (in contrast to a low-concept film, which might rely more on complex characters or relationships)**

**“I like ideas, especially movie ideas, that you can hold in your hand. If a person can tell me the idea in twenty-five words or less, it's going to make a pretty good movie.”**

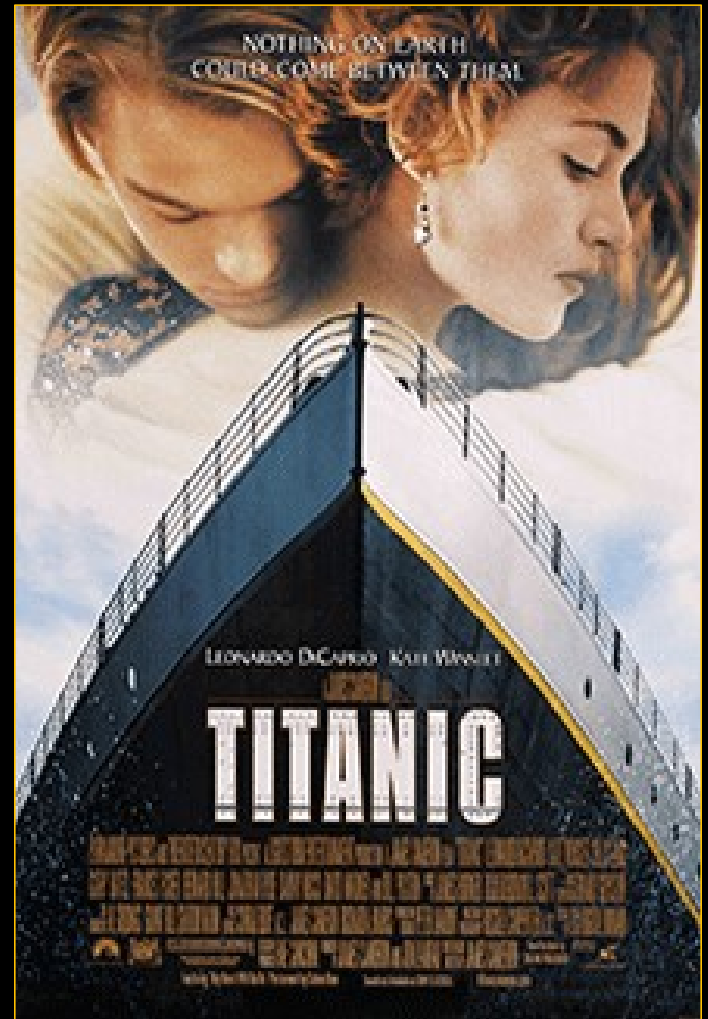
**–Stephen Spielberg**

**OMG  
DINOSAURS  
ARE BACK**

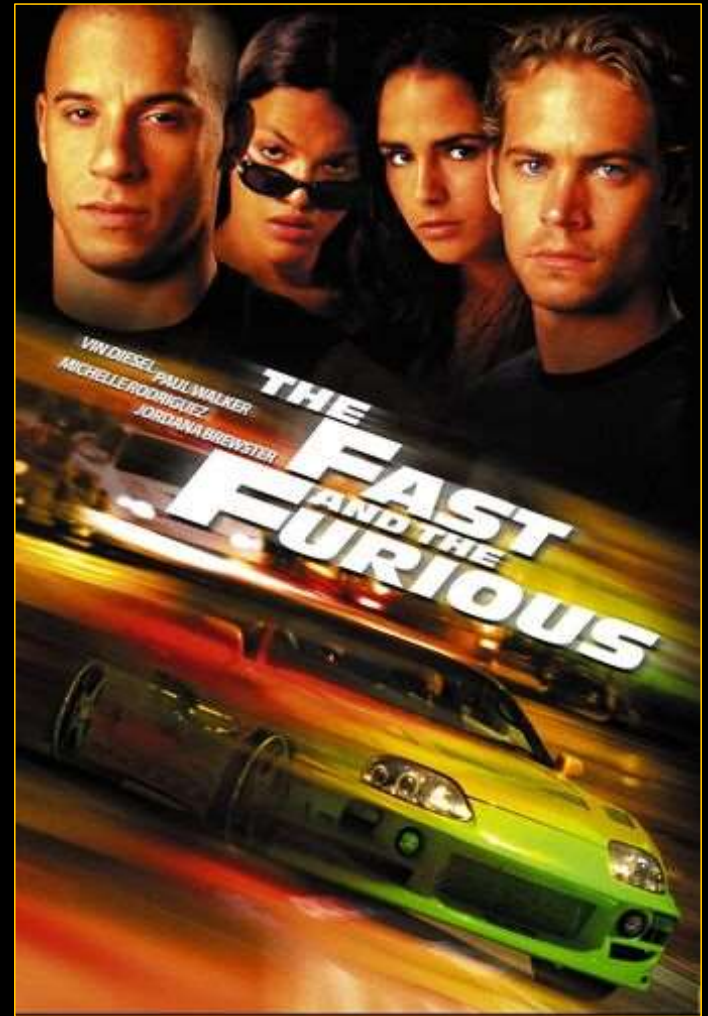




**OMG THIS  
BOAT IS  
SINKING**

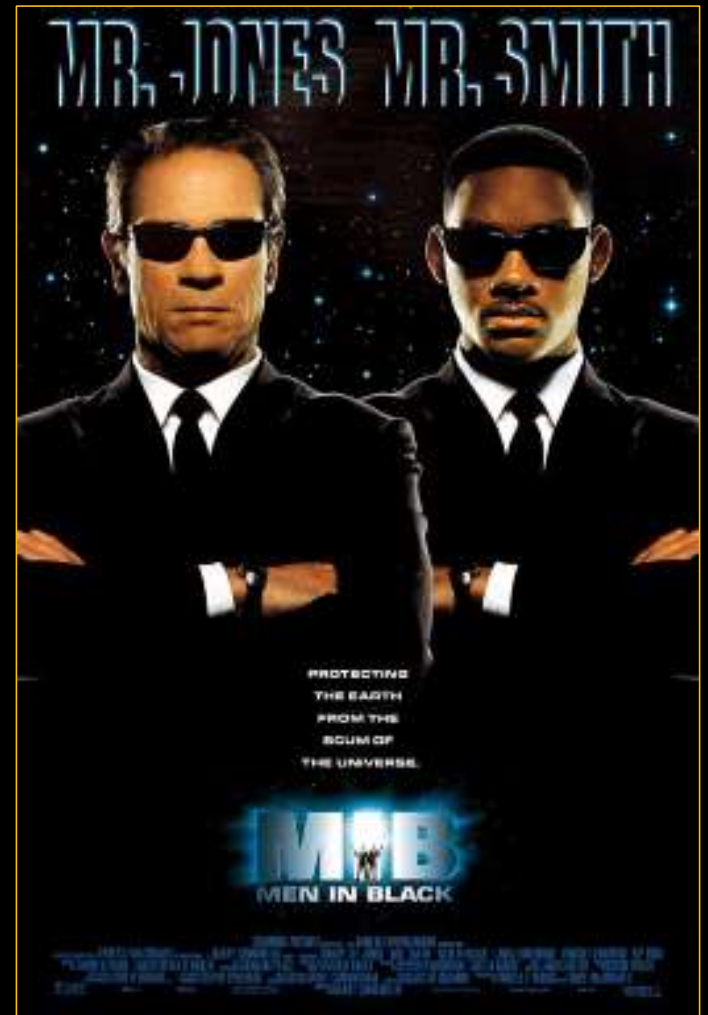


**WE'RE  
*FAMILY.*  
AND WE  
DRIVE  
*CARS.***





**IT'S THE  
FBI BUT  
FOR ALIENS**

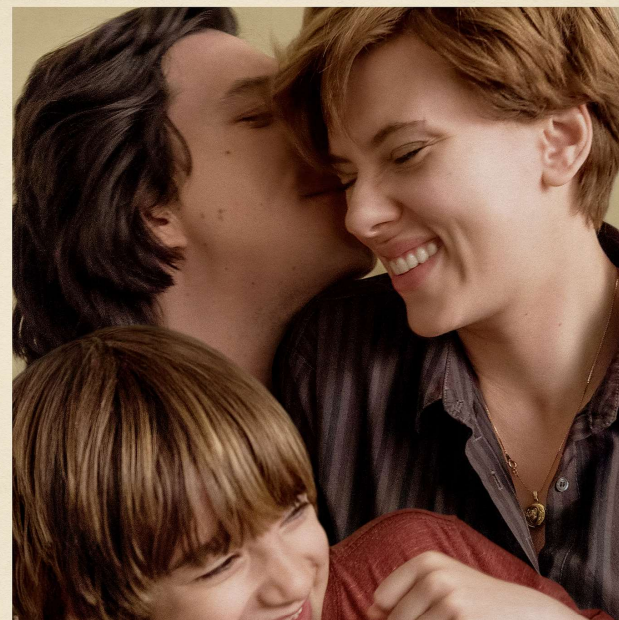


# SNAKES ON A PLANE



academy award® nominee  
**ADAM DRIVER**

golden globe® nominee  
**SCARLETT JOHANSSON**



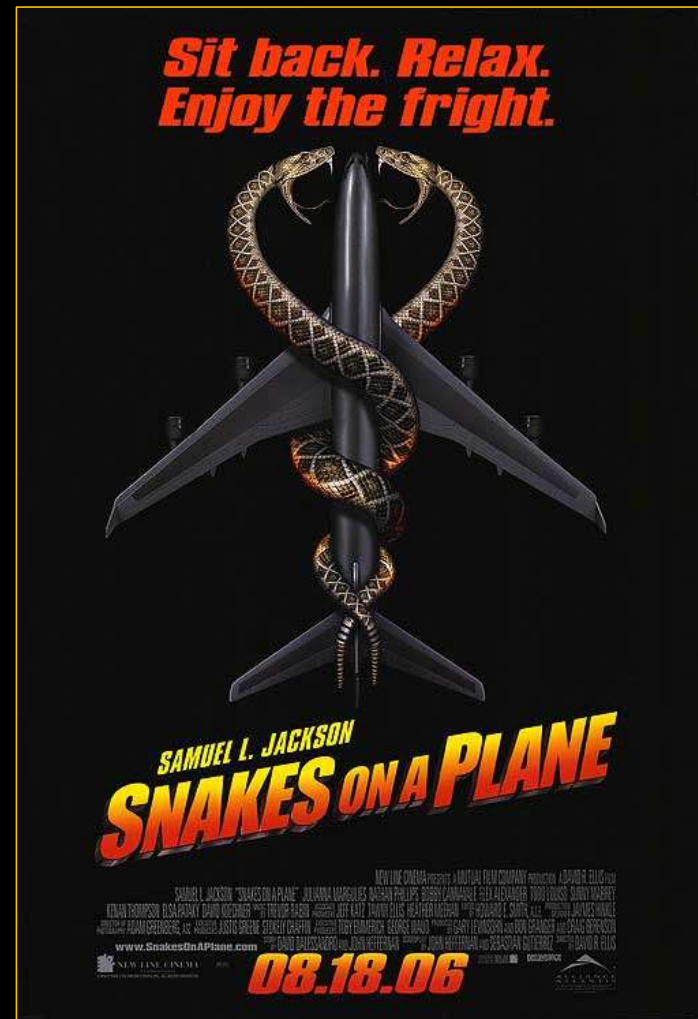
from academy award® nominee **NOAH BAUMBACH**

## Marriage Story

A NETFLIX PRESENTATION A NETDAY FILMS PRODUCTION A NOAH BAUMBACH PICTURE SCARLETT JOHANSSON ADAM DRIVER "MARRIAGE STORY" LAURA DERN ALAN ALDA RAY LUTTA JULIE GAGNETT MICHELE WICKER  
COSTUME DESIGNER FRANKIE MASLER COLOUR GRADER ANDREW ADEL CO-PRODUCER GEORGE BRADDOCK PRODUCED BY RANDY NEWMAN EDGAR WARM BROOKS EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS JENNIFER LAIVE  
WRITTEN BY JAKE HEALY DIRECTED BY NOAH BAUMBACH CASTING BY ROBERT FRYAN COSTUME DESIGNER GEORGE BRADDOCK EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS JENNIFER LAIVE PRODUCED BY RANDY NEWMAN EDITOR DAVID HEYMAN EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS NOAH BAUMBACH  
NETFLIX | DECEMBER 6



# SNAKES ON A PLANE





**Concept?**  
**What if the Rock  
was the tooth fairy?**

**Pause and think:**  
**Why do high-  
concept films  
make for great  
blockbusters?**

**Some reasons might be...**

**Simple stories good for all ages**

**Plot-driven and exciting**

**Action takes advantage of big screen**

**High-concept = easy to sell**

**High-concept doesn't mean brainless!**

***Example: Christopher Nolan***





**“I don’t see [Marvel movies]. I tried, you know? But that’s not cinema. Honestly, the closest I can think of them, as well made as they are, with actors doing the best they can under the circumstances, is theme parks. It isn’t the cinema of human beings trying to convey emotional, psychological experiences to another human being.”**

**Martin Scorsese**  
***Empire* (2019)**

