

“Breaking Bad”

Season 4, Episode 13

Actors and Acting

This scene is riddled with an underpinning of resentment between two characters. The moment they meet, it is apparent that they have a past. Gus (Giancarlo Esposito) is a prominent drug distributor who wants to kill Hector (Mark Margolis) because he believes that Hector has ratted-out Gus’ drug operation to the police. Hector, a retired Mexican drug kingpin, also shot Gus’ friend Max years ago. Gus has often taunted Hector, saying that he will kill all of his family. Hector believes that “family is everything,” and will not look Gus in the face, even when last taunted to do so in this scene.

Hector (Mark Margolis) brings power to the scene with his intense expressions. While making a very convincing stroke victim without words or free movement, it is obvious exactly which feelings are boiling under Hector’s face. When Gus (Giancarlo Esposito) uses the poison on him, Hector’s face is filled with painful loss and hopelessness. Gus and Tyron (Ray Campbell) have merciless cold business-like composes as they murder the old man. There is no twitch or sign of nervousness or remorse. Gus is clearly in charge here, and has a presence of unflinching dominance. There is even a faint gleam in his eye reflecting his quiet enjoyment of the event. The certainty and resolute faces of Gus and Tyron leave the audience to rest on the inevitability of the helpless old man’s death.

Suddenly, a crazed and possessed fury erupts in Hector’s eyes. The stroke victim is livid. The audience can almost hear Hector screaming in rage. His breathing is intensified and his ringing of the bell, deliberate and urgent. We, as an audience, are lost. Our confusion is mirrored on the faces of Gus and Tyron, who unassumingly search for the cause of the ringing. The lingering confidence still rest in their faces, but not for long. Gus steals a quick look at the bomb, and then shrinks back into his chair. This movement shows how in that moment, the old man has become much greater and menacing. Gus then jumps out of his chair, screaming in a mix of surprise and rage. This delivery is believable and shocking.

After the explosion, the stature and strut of Gus is deceptive. He looks natural and composed. As we see his disfigured face, his expression is hopeless, meaningless, and vegetable-like. His limp body leaves no doubt. The formerly confident and sleek drug lord has now met his end.

For his portrayal of Gus, Giancarlo Esposito won “Best Supporting Actor in a Drama” at the 2012 Critics' Choice Television Awards. He was also nominated for an “Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Drama Series” award at the 2012 Primetime Emmy Awards. Mark Margolis was also nominated for the Primetime Emmy Award for “Outstanding Guest Actor in a Drama Series” for his work in this specific episode.