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Introduction to Film

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A Face Off at High Noon

Breaking Bad is a series created by former X-Files writer Vince Gilligan. It follows the story of high school teacher, Walter White, who learns that he has terminal lung cancer. With that shocking fact comes the realization that he is going to leave his pregnant wife and son with no money to survive on with after he is gone. To remedy this problem Walter teams up with one of his former students, Jesse Pinkman and together they cook meth to raise funds for his soon to be fatherless family. After several attempts to sell the meth on their own and one comically bad attempt to hook up with a local drug dealer Walt and Jesse move on to bigger and better things.

Breaking Bad has been nominated, and won, multiple awards. It has been nominated for a Outstanding Drama Series at the Primetime Emmys three times but has yet to win that award. Bryan Cranston has been nominated for Outstanding Actor in a Drama series at the Emmys four times and won three consecutive awards in that category, his streak was broken (or robbed, depending on your leanings) this last year when Damian Lewis won for his performance in Homeland. Aaron Pauls has won two consecutive Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Drama series awards for his performances in both season three and four of Breaking Bad. Vince Gilligan (Director), Anna Gunn (Supporting Actress), Giancarlo Esposito (Supporting Actor) and Mark Margolis (Guest Actor) have all been nominated as well, but none of them were fortunate enough to win.

In this particular scene Walter is in a very tight position as his very powerful business partner, an associate of the drug cartels, Gus Fring is taking the steps necessary to have Walt killed. The two of them are locked in a battle of wits and force, where every step could be the last one either of them takes. Walter has garnered the cooperation of one of Gus' old associates, Hector Salamanca, a man who killed Gus' best friend many years ago, Hector has gone to the DEA in an effort to enrage Mr. Fring. As they say nobody likes a rat. Now Gus has been drawn out of his shell to end his relationship with Hector, in his blind rage he has lost his normal cool and calculated demeanor, he does not see how exposed he now is. Now he is hell bent upon vengeance for his dead friend and the transgressions Hector has committed with the DEA, little does he know that he is walking right into the waiting arms of Walter White.

1. Cinematography

- A. Isolation : One of the themes in this scene and somewhat throughout the series is that of isolation. Here Hector Salamanca is framed by the window behind

him, alone against the fury of a powerful drug lord. Gus is framed between the two cars as he goes into the retirement home, much like a traditional western shootout

- B. Anxiety: The specific shots taken on each of the characters faces shows to pure tension that exists between them. The close ups show little emotion in Gus' face but somehow still convey the feeling of the unknown and anxiety. The same close ups in Hector's face show how nervous he is, he is trembling showing he too is anxious and afterwards he begins to cry showing the relief he feels. Each of these shots is perfectly angled and framed to pit the two of them against each other.
- C. Gotcha!: At the end of the confrontation between the two men Gus struts out and straightens his tie. The audience is thinking how did he survive!? The camera pans to reveal that he did not, his face IS OFF! Get it? I'll stop now.

2. Theme and Symbolism

- A. The Wild West: This whole scene is a very obvious homage to the genre of western films. As Gus is sitting in his car the two cars frame the tower on the retirement not unlike many old school shootouts. When he gets out he walks between them as if they were the stores and bars on either side of the street.
- B. Shadows: Throughout this scene there are shadows which are well... foreshadowing. As Gus is sitting in the car he is lit from our right, making the left side of his face dark and menacing, this does two things, first it makes him seem powerful and mysterious, second it foreshadows that he will soon be losing that side of his face. Gus' henchmen are also heavily shadowed, perhaps to show that they are the personification of evil in this scene.
- C. Ding! Ding! Ding!: Hector Salamanca is unable to communicate verbally but he has solved that problem, sort of. He communicates with a bell that is attached to his chair, always dinging it when he is trying to say yes. As Gus and Hector are facing off Hector begins to ring the bell in a feverish manner, almost as if he is saying "YES! YES! YES!" in celebration of his victory.

3. Living on a Lighted Stage

- A. Not a Word: Hector Salamanca is played by Mark Margolis, a talented actor who portrays more emotions with his face in this scene than Kristen Stewart did in three films. As Gus enters the room Hector is facing away from him but as he is turned toward him his face trembles, whether from fear or pure anger we do not know but I would venture, based on their history it is anger. He then relays his relief at finally getting back at Gus with his tears and quivering lip before setting off the bomb which kills his old enemy.
- B. It's Not Just Business: Giancarlo Esposito plays Gustavo Fring so well that I hope to never see him act again for fear of his chops ruining my perception. In this scene he has become more angry than we have ever seen in Breaking Bad.

But he is not outwardly exploding, he is seething, boiling on the inside and these emotions are portrayed with a careful yet careless manner that fans of the show do not recognize from Gus.

- C. Bravo! Bravo!: For both Mr. Margolis and Mr. Esposito's performances in this scene they received nominations and awards. Giancarlo was nominated for both a Best Supporting Actor and a Critics Choice award in the same category, he won the latter but lost the Emmy (to Aaron Paul who plays Jesse Pinkman on Breaking Bad). Mark Margolis was nominated for an Outstanding Guest Actor in a Drama Series Emmy, but he lost, probably to some rube from Homeland or something.

4. Sound

- D. Negative Space: In parts of this scene there is an absence of sound, muted footsteps or the absence of the usual sounds involved with such a tragedy mark the importance of the interaction between the characters and their environment. As Tyrus walks into the nursing home his footsteps are practically silent, the music becomes amplified because of this. After the explosion Gus walks out into the hall but notice that there is no screaming from the women who are watching him, they are silent. The alarm sounds, the music in the lobby continues on and then when Gus falls we really hear the thump of his lifeless body.
- E. Music: The music used in this scene is from *Apparat*, the title of the track is *Goodbye*, a very apt track for this particular scene. The bass drum begins the song and really amps up the anticipation, it is almost akin to a steady heart beat, this track really brings on a sense of the impending. As the strings and the piano come there is a very distinct western feel to them, once again returning to the motif of an old west standoff. This song was perfectly chosen for this scene and is just one facet of a very thoughtful and deliberate attempt to draw the viewer in.

5. Credit Where it is Due

- F. Directed and Written by: Vince Gilligan
- G. Supervising Sound Editor: Kurt Nicholas Forshager
Sound Effects Editor: Mark Cookson
Foley Artist: Gregg Barbanel
- H. Cinematography: Michael Slovis
- I. Edited by: Skip McDonald