

How do the opening scenes of 'lethal weapon'

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'Lethal Weapon' is a film that is part of the American detective genre. The two main protagonists in the film are Sergeant Murtaugh (Danny Glover) and Sergeant Riggs (Mel Gibson). There is a certain amount of humour in the film which comes from the absolute opposites in the two characters. Murtaugh is a policeman who is close to retirement and has a wife and children living in the suburbs of Los Angeles, Riggs is on the edge of a mental breakdown, and has lost his wife in a car accident. They are destined to be paired in the film as partners. 'Lethal Weapon' was the foremost 'buddy cop' film. After this, many other detective films were created and a whole new genre of film was made where many of the protagonists are shown by contrasts and parallels.

The opening shots of the film contain such contrasts and parallels to introduce the two characters. The director has chosen to show this by visual imagery. For example, Murtaugh lives in a nice neighbourhood in a suburb of L. A., while Riggs lives in a trailer on the outskirts of the city. He uses many objects surrounding homes to show the audience the lifestyle they lead so they can precisely know what to expect from the two characters without much dialogue.

The audience is shown the outside of Murtaugh's house. The director has chosen to use a panning shot to lead the audience's eye into the scene; this is mirrored in Riggs' house as the shot follows the dog into the scene where the camera finishes on an eye level medium shot of his trailer. This is one of the many parallels that the director has chosen to show of the two characters.

The lighting in the scene of Murtaugh's house has been done in high key to give the feeling of a warm happy neighbourhood; this is an opposite compared to Riggs' trailer as the lighting has been done in low key which suggests a dull unhappy feeling regarding Riggs' lifestyle. The next scene shows Murtaugh in the bath where his family barges in singing happy birthday. The lighting has also been done in high key to show the exultant atmosphere in his house. Compared to Riggs' scene in his trailer the lighting has been done in low key to give the atmosphere a very depressing feeling.

There is a lot of rich visual imagery as well as elements like lighting and camera shots to show the lifestyle of Murtaugh and Riggs. Murtaugh's house, compared to Riggs', are completely opposite. Murtaugh's house is very large and lives in a neighbourhood of L. A. which suggests he is quite wealthy. While Riggs lives on the outskirts of the city in a trailer park, this represents something about his current mental state; he is on the edge and ready to break.

As the camera moves onto the house the audience can see a boat in the garage, this symbolizes that he can enjoy the luxuries of life, is a very audacious outdoor type and goes out with his family. There is a contrast and a parallel in the scene with Riggs' trailer. Riggs has a surfboard and a wetsuit outside his trailer, surfing is a very much of a solitary sport and suggests he is dejected and has chosen to live away from society. But he enjoys the outdoor water sports like Murtaugh.

A jogger running with a dog on lead goes past the camera outside Murtaugh's house; there is a direct contrast and parallel in Riggs' scene as his dog runs

past but is not on a leash. This suggests that Riggs leads a more relaxed or careless lifestyle to Murtaugh. Another contrast and parallel between them is that outside Murtaugh's house there is a child's bike left in the front garden of their home shows that he has a family and symbolizes he lives in a friendly neighbourhood. Conversely Riggs has an old mountain bike hung up outside his trailer which shows he is unconcerned or careless about his property.

When the audience see the inside of Murtaugh's house and Riggs' trailer they know what to expect from the brief shots of the outside of their homes. A key difference in understanding the contrasts between the characters is Murtaugh's house is in a general state of cleanliness, whereas Riggs' trailer is untidy and in disarray. Another aspect of their lifestyle is shown by Riggs sleeping with his gun in his hand and a lit cigarette still in his mouth, in contrast with this, Murtaugh gets up, cleans and goes to breakfast with his gun in his holster. This represents that Murtaugh is more organised and has more of a systematic lifestyle than Riggs.

What the director has done by using detailed symbolism, lighting and little dialogue gives an impression of the two characters before they have even spoken. Thus the viewers can tell the difference between the lifestyles of Riggs and Murtaugh. This encourages the audience to look ahead towards the rest of the film and see the drama and humour between the characters as the story unfolds.