



SPOILER WARNING

If you haven't seen the very first episode of Luther then I highly recommend that you watch it, it is probably the best show that the BBC has to offer. Idris Elba is phenomenal as the eponymous anti-hero and thematically this show is much darker than something like Sherlock: it's dark, gritty and brilliant. I will only be covering one of the scenes from the first episode, so if you don't want it to be spoiled then just go and watch it, you won't regret it.

INTRODUCTION

The first episode of Luther introduces the audience to a dark, compelling anti-hero, John Luther; as well as the devilish, Iago-esque Alice Morgan. One of my personal favourite scenes from the entire show is the interrogation scene from episode one. I believe it is the perfect way to present conflict and build tension. John Luther is interrogating the enigma that is Alice Morgan, and through great acting and profound camera work, the scene is strikingly enthralling and tense.

ACT ONE

The first scene of the interrogation acts as exposition, details about the crime are presented and the characters are introduced to one another. Luther asks Alice a set of stereotypical question that would be found in a police interview, such as "do you have any idea who would wish harm on your parents?" This scene is being painted as a standard interrogation, Alice appears distressed and this is done to build sympathy for her from the audience. There are many shots with Alice in them, more than Luther, this is done due to her clear emotion struggle, and she weeps, crying she states "I've done nothing but think, all I do is think. There's nothing, absolutely nothing," she isn't coherent in her speech and repeats herself multiple times, the audience for feel sorry for this "little girl lost". Most shots of Alice are close-up, an intimate perspective allows for the audience to feel insight into her life and struggle, again helping to deceive the audience. The acting in this act is superb; there is a subtle indicator of Alice's guilt. It is a well-known fact that when someone is lying, they feel

uncomfortable and cannot keep eye contact, on many occasions Alice breaks eye contact and stares at the table; perhaps an indicator of her reflective mood but more likely an indication that she is lying.

ACT TWO

The first shot from the second act presents the two characters facing each other from opposite sides of the frame; this is used to show that they are cooperating and that there is very little tension in this shot. A brief close-up of Alice is then shown, she loses eye contact with Luther, again reinforcing the notion that she may be lying. The shot then changes to an over the shoulder, panning shot, it starts on Alice's left shoulder and moves across to her left, the shot is aimed at John's face: he yawns. Also during this shot, music begins to play, it starts off quiet and almost unnoticeable and then it builds up, adding more instruments and rising in volume: this shows John's rising suspicion that Alice committed the crime. Luther leaves the room to confer with his colleagues; in this brief interaction, the other members of the police force act as a conduit for John to transfer data to the audience. He explains his thoughts and rationale, telling them that "she did it", but also that "she's proud of this" and that Alice is a "malignant narcissist," and that "this is about prestige, power: self-affirmation." Luther also further demonstrates his prowess and provides insight into the world of being a detective, by saying "she didn't yawn, yawning is contagious," this seems like an obvious piece of trivia, that anyone could understand: the audience then become more immersed due to the fact that they feel as if they possess deductive nous. This brief interlude is used to build tension and to build up to the final act of this intellectual duel; Luther is going to attempt to breakdown Alice Morgan and save the day.

ACT THREE

John enters the room and sits down at the table. He tells Alice that the police occasionally "shorten one of the legs, so the suspect can never get comfortable," by using the term "suspect" to directly refer to Alice, he is subtly showing that he knows she is related to the crime. Luther gives Alice a cup of tea, a brief shot of Alice's hand touching the cup but recoiling at the heat is shown: Luther's voice can be heard over this shot, saying "is it too hot?" he is pre-empting Alice's movement and can see what she is going to do; he is one step ahead of her. As the scene progresses, we are given insight into Alice's character, Luther describes her as "Practically a genius" for attending Oxford University at just "13" years of age. He then elaborates that she is a "freak" for being "not one thing, or the other". Luther then stands up to show his power, by elevating Luther, the levels present him to be the intellectually superior character; he has hurt Alice's ego and is proud of it. Luther asks Alice, "Are you familiar with Occam's razor," and then walks across the screen. By positioning John in the foreground and placing Alice in the background, Luther appears larger and thus more important, showing his superiority. The shot then changes and breaks the 180° rule. By mimicking one of the first shots, where the characters were shown to be cooperating, but flipping the perspective, the audience is shown that these two characters are now working against one another. John then sits back down when Alice rebuts the notion that she must be the killer because she was "the only person known to have been at [her] parent's house [that] morning." The 180° is again broken, to show that Alice has turned the tables on John after, once again, refuting his comments that "people slip-up, happens time and time again," Alice proves once again to be intellectually superior by stating that "that's just faulty logic postulated on imperfect data collection. What if you only catch people who make mistakes; that would skew the figures wouldn't it?" This rhetorical question is used to reinforce Alice's intellect. The camera pans across to have both characters in shot, previously just showing Alice. Luther bows his head in defeat and laughs; he cannot cope with Alice's intellect and is forced to give up.

COSTUME AND SET DESIGN

Finally, the costume and set design for this scene is expertly executed. John Luther wears bland colours, his shirt is grey and his tie is green, very similar to the surrounding environment. This is used to display the fact that he feels comfortable in this location, his attire matches his environment and he feels in control. Alice's costume design uses bright and vivid colours; she wears a blue top that clashes with the rest of the set, causing a visual disruption in the shots. Her hair and lipstick are different tones of red; this is a distinct clash with the surroundings and shows how she is causing an upset in terms of outsmarting the police, via a visual presentation. Alice and John having such drastically different costumes is a subtle indicator that these two characters will have a rivalry and distinctly foreshadows the following conflict in the rest of the episodes and subsequent series.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, through the use of costume, set design, dialogue and shot composition the initial interrogation from the first episode of the BBC's crime drama Luther perfectly builds tension and grips the audience by presenting two diverse characters in a battle of wits.