

ONCE UPON A TIME IN . . .

NAZI-OCCUPIED FRANCE

The opening scene of *Inglourious Basterds* (0:00-20:12) masterfully sets the stage for Quentin Tarantino's World War II epic, as SS Colonel Hans Landa interrogates a French dairy farmer suspected of harboring Jews. Through this tense, methodical sequence, Tarantino not only establishes the film's high stakes and brutal world, but also the characterization of one of cinema's most celebrated villains in Landa: a brilliantly terrifying Nazi who wields charm and intellectual precision as weapons.

The scene opens with an extreme long shot capturing the peaceful domesticity of the Lapadite family's farm life. Tarantino deliberately builds tension through a series of calculated shots: a low angle captures Monsieur Lapadite chopping wood, emphasizing his physical strength and protective nature, while his daughter hangs laundry in the background. Through this seemingly innocent clothesline, we first glimpse the approaching Nazi convoy. As Lapadite ushers his family inside, Tarantino employs an over-the-shoulder shot of the Nazis moving past the laundry: a visual metaphor for the imminent invasion of their private sanctuary. This two-minute setup, underscored by the tension-building notes of Für Elise, creates a mounting dread before Landa's arrival, which Tarantino captures in a tracking shot that culminates with a handshake and Landa's request to enter Lapadite's home.

As Landa enters the home, he is seen exchanging polite social graces. The first set-up begins with an over-the-shoulder shot, behind Lapadite's daughters. It gives us their perspective. The camera trucks to the left with Landa's movement. This deep focus shot employs a window in the back—similar to the childhood scene in *Citizen Kane*—reminding the audience of the dangerous threat awaiting Lapadite's family, if things go wrong.

What follows is a masterclass in psychological manipulation, as Landa methodically deploys his investigative tactics. He observes the family, suspecting their deception. For instance, Landa makes use of a small misdirection, requesting a glass of milk: a seemingly innocuous gesture that serves multiple

purposes. By affecting the demeanor of a cordial guest rather than an interrogator, he deliberately lowers the tension in the room. This facade of casual friendliness is particularly sinister given his true intentions.

Although he uses the milk to help him present himself as pure and harmless, the next medium shot enables him to dominate the frame, which he also does by chugging the milk entirely—a total power move. It is then that Landa begins his interrogation with Monsieur Lapadite, asking him if they could speak in private.

Tarantino begins this set-up with an establishing shot of Landa and Lapadite sitting across from each other on the dining table. He employs multiple shot angles to help further the discussion: a two-shot, an over-the-shoulder covering Lapadite, another covering Landa, etc. In one of the shots, the discussion transitions from French to English. This transition demonstrates that Landa is well aware that the Jewish family that the Lapadite's are harboring, are within the home.

Landa progresses this scene as a bureaucratic formality. He questions Lapadite about the Dreyfus family—a Jewish family living amongst the Lapadite family's "neighborhood." Landa's calmness allows Monsieur Lapadite to let his guard down as he leisurely smokes his pipe. Lapadite lists the family member, while Tarantino rotates around the room to represent a dramatic change in point of view. Although Landa mentions to Lapadite that it'd be helpful for him to give as much information as possible, granted he barely knows the family, he manages to draw the ages of the family members from Monsieur Lapadite's mouth. Again, Landa's intelligence strikes. This exchange allows him to further confirm his suspicions.

This makes way for a beautiful one that begins as a profile shot of Lapadite—displaying his concealment—to an underground hide-out where the Dreyfuses are hiding. Landa then starts to act like the aggressor he really is, asking Lapadite if he knows his nickname: the Jew Hunter. This lets him reveal his true intentions. He explains that being a Jew Hunter enables him to think like a Jew.

Landa once more displays his intellectual manipulation by comparing Jews to rats and Germans to hawks. He states that, for German soldiers, Jews are akin to rats as they are both "repulsive." Immediately, Landa shifts the tension of the scene by asking to smoke his pipe as well. This time, the pipe

is a power move. It is not like the glass of milk. Landa celebrates his deductive reasoning through the pipe. He knows the Lapadite family is harboring the Dreyfuses. Right as he's about to shift to his most direct questioning, Tarantino finally uses a close up on Landa's face.

Landa mentions that if Lapadite provides any information that'll help ease his work, he'll make sure the Nazi army does not harass Lapadite's family as they occupy France. Tarantino again uses a close up shot to show how Landa breaks the strong man that Monsieur Lapadite is. The scene shifts between multiple close ups that get zooms in closer and closer, building the tension further.

Landa asks Lapadite if he is "sheltering enemies of the state." "You're sheltering them underneath the floor." Lapadite totally breaks down here. He is seen crying as he is well aware that Landa knows everything. He responds to his questions with "yes," pointing out where exactly the Dreyfuses are hiding.

Here, Landa explains that considering the Dreyfuses aren't alarmed at the moment, they probably don't speak English. He uses this piece of information to call in his crew to kill the Dreyfus family. In the shots that follow, the audience witness a violent act of shooting, as the Nazi army kills the Dreyfus family except one of the daughters. Here the music becomes deafening and loud, helping add to the terror of Landa's acts. He is shown like a psychotic as he walks out of the house, letting the living daughter run away.

Altogether, the scene makes way for Landa's characterization throughout the entirety of the film. Here, he is shown as a clever, yet horrific, villain that is ruthless in his mission to terminate the jews. As the film progresses, Landa continues this characterization, while also furthering the brutality of the world he wishes to create. In a way, this scene serves as a snippet of what the audience is about to get into.