

So what do we all think of Agent Carter? It's been a fun period piece, certainly, and Hayley Atwell proves she should be a star if this show doesn't make her one. But the show as a whole has been built on wobbly scaffolding, at times threatening to send the plot tumbling to the ground in an unconvincing heap. I'm not saying that accounts for the significant decline in ratings, nor that the show doesn't deserve to come back, but it does mean Agent Carter was often not as good as it looked. Blame Howard Stark. I've already grilled the guy for his stunning lack of common sense, which is the source of this entire season's conflict. Commenter Ronald Caterisano saw it more as a matter of pride, which I can subscribe to. That is, until Howard reveals in this episode that the whole fiasco at Finow was the result of his creating something with dangerous applications, which someone stole from his lab and misused. Sound familiar? Maybe locking away his "bad babies" in a private underground vault was his way of learning from past mistakes, but this seems insufficient for someone who claims to feel so guilty that he's willing to die to redeem himself. This latest revelation only reinforces how dumb it was for Howard to keep such things around after realizing the threat they pose, just like how his sudden decision to turn himself into the S.S.R. reinforces how dumb it was for him to run in the first place. No one mentions any of this, of course; that'd be coming way too close to admitting the show doesn't quite have its act together. Instead, Howard is played mostly for comedy, sternly telling off the S.S.R. for not hiring him to do their security system, huffily rearranging his "bad babies" in the lab like a put-upon housewife, and trying to buy/flirt his way out of trouble once things go to the crapper. Aside from some initial distrust, everyone's willing to gloss over his role in past and present disasters, Peggy especially. So I say Dr. Ivchenko, a.k.a. Johann Fenhoff, is doing the story a necessary favor by shaming Howard into submission. Whereas Peggy and even a chauvinist pig like Thompson are instantly convincing in their guilt over lost lives, Howard's not so emotional about the burdens he supposedly feels. It takes Fenhoff's psychological deconstruction of Howard's intellectual exterior to expose the raw turmoil inside. "I am not a bad person," Howard almost tearfully protests as Fenhoff regales him with the suffering he personally suffered at Finow (in itself a necessary rounding of Fenhoff's character). "Yes," is Fenhoff's cool response. "Yes, you are." While Fenhoff is wrong on that point, he's the only one who addresses the matter of blame when it comes to dangerous inventions. When Howard insists that it was someone else who stole and used the Midnight Oil, the gas that sent all those moviegoers into a fatal, violent rage last episode, Fenhoff answers, "And yet it only exists because of you." Yup. All this is to force Peggy into a situation where she has to relive her traumatic radio conversation with Steve Rogers in his last moments, which Atwell plays with great sincerity but feels narratively forced anyway. Between that scene and Peggy dropping the last of Steve's blood into the drink, it almost makes you feel like the point of this entire season has been about her moving on from her great love. But really, it's been all about her standing as an agent. This episode should have put that question to bed forever, what with her constantly flanked by Sousa and Thompson (who look great as a trio) and applauded by the entire agency when it's all over. But the episode also reverses course a bit by having Thompson accept the credit for success (losing much of the progress he made this season along the way) and Peggy's future at the S.S.R. uncertain. It's a good position to spring back from should the show return, and it'd be nice if it does. Hopefully, it can come back with a tighter storyline, with a real contribution from Jarvis (who gets to almost shoot down Howard this episode), and with even more action from Peggy, which has always been the selling point of the series as you see from her intense showdown with Dottie. Some Musings:- "Howard, you are the one person on this Earth who believes in me." Really? So the Howling Commandoes are just

chopped liver?The post Agent Carter: Valediction appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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