

These days, I gauge the progress of a superhero show using Arrow, particularly its first season, as a standard. And around episode six of that season, Arrow was just starting to gel together into the show it is today: a highly caffeinated blend of action, crime, family, romance, adventure. That episode also revealed how intent the writers were at fixing Arrow's shortcomings: the blandness of the Queen family drama; the lack of chemistry between Ollie and Dinah; the repetitive quality of Ollie's CEO-of-the-week formula. The Flash is already ahead of the game in that it has a lot of solid moving parts that run well together; it's just a couple of wonky gears keeping the machine from operating as smoothly as it should. Of most concern is Iris, because I'm not sure the problems with her can really be fixed. Her current configuration as a Flash—yes, the name's official—evangelist works for now, but that still leaves her in the role of Lois Lane rip-off, a passive observer who occasionally enters the action as a damsel in distress. Smallville got over that hump thanks to Erica Durance's biting performance and her character's take-charge attitude. Her Lois was a hardcore, ambitious reporter even when working for the tabloids. Iris is just too nice and thinks too small; even when she gets face-time with the Flash, she's happy to resign herself to softball questions worthy of a nascent blog: "Hobbies, pet peeves, favorite color..." Allowing her to get the final crack on the episode's villain helps, but otherwise, she spends the hour doing a whole lot of nothing. Even Eddie, who already gets to be part of the action every week, insinuates himself even deeper by teaming up with Barry to track down the steel-skinned thief and bully that is Tony Woodward. Eddie's been playing the bland, golden boy for so long that even the discovery that he's actually a pretty nice guy is a pleasant surprise. His dynamic with Barry, in many ways, has more going for it than either of theirs with Iris; their sweaty, homoerotic boxing scenes, sadly, have a tingle of electricity that kissing/gazing woefully at her does not. Developing a friendship between Barry and Eddie can actually pay a lot of dividends down the line. Eddie is a macho contrast to the S.T.A.R. crew* and it can only give their fated enmity that much more vigor later on. But the most compelling relationship introduced in this episode is the one between Barry's surrogate fathers. Joe and Wells share the same grounded/cerebral contrast as Eddie and Barry, but the maturity of these two men and their actors leads to far more powerful moments. As Joe coolly tries to suss out Wells' potential role in the murder of Barry's mom, Wells waits and watches with appraising eyes for his moment to counterattack. If Joe is a still water than can quickly roil into rapids, Wells is a smoldering fire ready to burst into flame, and contact between the two is exciting to watch. You can't say the same for Woodward, who falls headfirst into the lower tier of villains that consist of grown-up bullies. The episode makes no effort to give him subtler than the lumbering hunk of metal that he is. Basically he was a bad egg when he terrorized Barry as a child; he's a worse one now that he's using his powers for crime; and he's certainly not going to improve trapped in a secret prison, licking the wound inflicted by his former victim. Thus we arrive at a narrative misstep so large that I doubt the series will fully recover from it. How stupid can Barry get, revealing his identity like that to Woodward? Unbelievably, no one else, not even the usually cautious Caitlin, sees the shortsightedness of that admittedly satisfying decision. No amount of disbelief-suspension can overcome a total breakdown of common sense, and it's an unavoidable sign of the show abandoning thought to get the emotional beat it wants. Some Musings: * This couldn't seem truer as Barry, Caitlin, and Cisco compare notes on bullies. Caitlin: "I had a childhood nemesis: Lexie LaRoche. She used to put gum in my hair." Cisco: "Jake Puckett. If I didn't let him copy my homework, he'd give me a swirly." Barry: "Now that we've established that we're all uber-nerds, what are we going to do about Tony?" - I appreciate it when Barry's screaming bloody murder over an injury. That's what makes him one of us. -

Caitlin: "Check the math; your dispersal models don't correlate." Cisco: "Uh, they do if you factor in the seasonal fluctuations of reproduction cycles." Wells: "What exactly are we debating?" Cisco: "The average number of bugs Barry swallows in a day of running." Wells: "I look forward to seeing you accept your Nobel." And then there are some things the show gets perfectly right. The post The Flash: The Flash Is Born appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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