

There's a defining scene for Peggy Carter in *Captain America: The First Avenger* when she steps out to chase after the men who just murdered Dr. Erskine. After coolly shooting one with a single shot, she plays a game of chicken with another who's bearing down on her in a speeding car. Just before the decisive moment, the newly buffed-out Steve Rogers tackles her out of the way. "I had him!" she yells in frustration, and quite honestly, it looks like she probably did. From that point on, the scene becomes an opportunity for Steve to test-drive his new body, and Peggy gets relegated from special agent to love interest with a gun. Agent Carter gives Peggy a chance to reverse that perception, with her peers at the Strategic Scientific Reserve, who know her as "Captain America's...liaison," but also with the public at large. In "Bridge and Tunnel," she sits in an automat and listens nonplussed to the Captain America radio show, which features "Betty Carver, the battalion's beautiful triage nurse" ("What a beautiful day to mend these pants!"). Hers is a common story for women post V-Day; after getting a modicum of respect and leadership from a desperate, war-driven America, she finds herself getting pushed out by the men she once replaced. Whether it's the raucous, degrading chauvinism of agents Jack Thompson and Ray Krzeminski, or the paternalistic protectiveness of agent Daniel Sousa, Peggy constantly struggles not to be marginalized by the men around her. On the plus side, that gives her a prime underdog battle to fight, which is just one of Agent Carter's many charms. Most charming of all is Peggy herself as played by Hayley Atwell, who brings Peggy's irresistible blend of cool, hyper-competence and dry sense of humor to life. Both elements are essential to her attraction as a protagonist and her ability to navigate the obstacles before her. She uses her martial artistry, marksmanship, and espionage skills to handle the villains and get the mission done, but her wit is no less necessary for puncturing the patronizing treatment she receives. When Thompson tells her to cover the filing because she's "so much better at that kind of thing," she asks calmly, "What kind of thing is that? The alphabet?" With Peggy so well-defined and immediately likable, all the showrunners have to do is give her some truly challenging material to tuck into. Chasing down stolen pieces of Howard Stark's secret technology (his "bad babies") suffices. The mission is built upon a rather weak premise; Peggy dubiously asks why invent such technology at all if it's so dangerous it must be sealed away, and Howard answers vaguely, "I can't help what I think of." Still, the "bad babies" and the enemies they draw are worth Peggy's time, with the additional conflict they present for her relationship to the S.S.R. and her previously peaceful, albeit mundane, civilian life. Atwell almost has to carry the show by herself, given the host of thin generics that surround her, but she at least has James D'Arcy, a kind of poor man's Benedict Cumberbatch, as Edwin Jarvis. He's her equal in verbal smoothness, and together, their impeccably crisp delivery and understated performance offers a higher class of acting than you're used to from this type of show. Instead of sounding forced and written, their repartee has the light, sharp deftness of a fencing match,* even though the jokes aren't much more sophisticated from the kind of thing you get from *Arrow*, *The Flash*, or *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* Jarvis also serves as the out-of-place rookie to Peggy's veteran, both dismayed yet excited by the thrills of her life. His motivations for taking on this mission aren't as well-defined as hers, unless you count taking his job way too slavishly ("An ideal butler provides service without being asked."). There's plenty of time for him to develop some goals of his own, however, ones that make you believe he'd want to upset his happy married life. It's hard to avoid comparisons to Marvel's other espionage show when talking about Agent Carter, but one definitely worth mentioning is how much more fun Carter is. A large part of that is the period, which, aside from being entertaining to look at, also has an inherently theatrical quality that forgives the plot's clunkier moments, e.g., a Leviathan goon

using his dying moments to etch out a clue for Peggy. The setting also spares the show from the obligation of tying directly into the Marvel cinematic universe, freeing it to fashion its own continuity from the start. And its continuity is delightfully free of fantastical elements—for the most part—which means more classic and, frankly, entertaining spy tropes: wigs, fake accents, gadgets disguised as ordinary household items (the typewriter capable of proto-IM is a good one), and thinking on the fly. Some Musings: * I almost compared it to foreplay, but I'd hate to start shipping them already. - "That's Mary; she's a legal secretary, Goodman, Kurtz, Burke, and Holloway... Evelyn is a lounge singer at a club in midtown. That's Sarah; she's a slut." - I have to admit, as a jazz nut, I love the idea of hearing the likes of Jo Stafford on primetime. The post Agent Carter: Now Is Not the End & Bridge and Tunnel appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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