

At what point does drive become addiction? That's the question you're asking yourself when Jess and Jack, despite their rough night last time, open this issue already prepping for the next night. Watching Jess fret over the mechanics of her next combat suit and Jack trying to get Black Rapier's serum to work on him, you get the uncomfortable sense you're watching two adults desperately grasping for their lost youth—because that's exactly what they are. All this talk about combat suits and serums is a marked contrast from the way Jess and Jack would have handled a setback back in the day. As a non-powered, it takes a hell of a lot of work to keep up with the Honor Guard's level of work. Even right after a rather serious injury, she's back in the training saddle, working out with fractures in her hip and ankle. Although neither acknowledge it, you know that's not a feat either can repeat again. They don't have the physicality nor, really, the drive anymore. That's truly a crisis for people who are so defined by that quality. As Jess keeps saying, the one thing she has going for her is drive, and from all appearances, Jack's the same. It's the one thing they have in common, the one thing that grounds Jack amidst all his jocular B.S., and the one thing that allows him to show how intimately he really does know Jess in spite of all their relationship drama. So what's left when they realize it's gone? For Jess, this is yet another crossroads in her costumed life. Her first came when she arrived in Astro City, expecting a backlash for her dad's history and receiving none (as a result of a "time travel thing. I'd jump to '82 for a few weeks when fighting the Chronarch in '88 and help found the Omega Rangers."). After that, she was working to keep her brothers buckled down, and succeeded astoundingly, with one respected in the Army, another going to Cornell on scholarship, and the youngest heading to law school. Busiek's steadily pruning away the extraneous motivations for Jess' superheroism; what's left after sheer drive is anyone's guess. Aside from these deep questions, Jess' life is just a fascinating narrative. Busiek always puts so much heart into making his characters fully dimensional, their backstories rich with detail. If the issue was nothing but Jess talking about her getting mentored by Street Angel (whom she presumably mentored herself during that aforementioned time travel thing), working as a bounty hunter, phoning home to her siblings, winning the lottery, you'd be perfectly invested. By far the most entertaining part of the issue is Jess and Jack's relationship, mostly because Busiek nails the volatile, on-again-off-again romance between two strong personalities. Weird as it is to say, I love that Busiek makes Jack just a bit of an unrepentant ass and that Jess laughs and screams at it by turns. It just feels real,* and as crazy as they make each other—well, as he makes her—you have faith there's a cord of genuine feeling between them, one that's endangered when Jack pushes Jess too far. Anderson's strengths and weaknesses are what they've always been: alive and powerful when the characters are at rest, awkward when in motion. You can see the difference when Jess is struggling through a push-up and when she's swinging through her gymnastics exercises. The strength and tautness of her body is present in both images, but fully concentrated and focused in the former, while the latter looks loose, static, and vaguely unnatural. Some Musings: * Though I wonder if Busiek has ever jokingly asked his girlfriend/wife to get him a sandwich in the middle of the night. - Jack's various origin stories calls to mind an old acquaintance who used to tell me all kinds of crazy adventures he's supposedly had. For example, he apparently tipped a yak in Pakistan and earned the wrath of a warlord who later turned out to be the leader of a terrorist cell. You don't believe him, but you want to believe him. The post Astro City #19 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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