

Around the halfway point of the first season, with its routine and personalities well established, a TV show needs to branch away from things that already work and start experimenting. For The Flash, this means leaning less on Barry, who's proven he can pair comfortably with everyone else on the show, and working on finding interesting connections among the other characters. If the show wants to make it for the long haul, it's got to be able to stand strong even if it happens to lack the support of its star. The search for Ronnie Raymond is ideal for that purpose. Since its origins predate Barry, it's a storyline in which he has only a distant interest and that has stakes for the S.T.A.R. crew alone. The past couple episodes sort of touched on that, sending Caitlin and Cisco to look into Martin Stein and F.I.R.E.S.T.O.R.M. whenever they had a free moment from Barry's stuff. You'd think putting Ronnie front-and-center would lead to more concentrated S.T.A.R. interaction, but it doesn't end up being that much more, quite honestly. At one point, Wells and Caitlin are left by themselves to stake out Stein's home, sitting together in a van and making small talk while munching on fast food. The set-up is all there for them to get real with each other, and Wells in particular seems more human than he's ever been, scarfing down a burger, offering Caitlin his fries, and talking about love being a home. But just as the conversation starts getting really deep, they're compelled to call Barry in and we're back to a more typical Flash plot—more specifically, the one from the Plastique episode some months back. We are talking about a mostly well-intentioned metahuman facing tragic circumstances and self-destruction. Barry's presence is especially unwelcome because of the way he's shoehorned into the plot by a random past encounter with Stein just before the particle accelerator exploded. Such coincidences are the bread and butter of shows like The Flash, but this one feels really manufactured in the way it forcefully steers the episode's direction towards Barry's girl troubles. With Linda being an obvious placeholder for Iris, things are bound to go south between her and Barry. Still, I was looking forward to a little stability in the relationship before the inevitable love triangle nonsense. Barry's difficulties with vibrating through sex* would have been enough of a serious impediment to his and Linda's romantic future, but Iris sabotaging things by transparently mentioning Barry's crush on her starts the breakdown just as they get started. All this so Candice Patton can nearly pull an acting muscle feigning jealousy. On the plus side, it makes Robbie Arnell's attempts to channel Victor Garber seem positively masterful by comparison. Arnell is just about as rigid an actor as his brother,** tersely delivering every line with a taut wire around in his jaw. He gets through the ordeal of playing a middle-aged academic with just as much dignity intact as Zac Efron did playing Matthew Perry in 17 Again. There's not a huge difference between Arnell as Ronnie and Arnell as Stein beyond a reference to pretentious wines, but the fact that it's not a painful viewing experience should be considered a victory. You might be wondering where Cisco is in all this. As the lead on this Ronnie business for the last couple episodes, it's odd to see him taken off the case to work on another. Putting him and Joe together was a better idea in theory (it's like Lethal Weapon, but Riggs is a nerd) than in execution, but like Wells and Caitlin's van scene, it's a necessary change of pace for the show. Joe and Cisco work well together, and it's important that Cisco is now aware of Joe's suspicions against Wells, putting another set of eyes on Wells even if Cisco vehemently defends his mentor. You just feel like there should've been more to their team-up, especially with bored stay-at-home cougar Sherry shamelessly throwing herself at Joe the whole time. It's a setting ripe for comedy, but Cisco and Joe keep it surprisingly (and disappointingly) professional as they push ahead with their investigation. Some Musings:* And I'm so glad the show has taken the step to depict this outstanding problem in such frank detail. It's brave, really.** For those who don't know, Stephen Arnell, a.k.a. Arrow's Oliver Queen.-

“He’s Martin Stein walking around in Ronnie’s body. Like a vampire.” Caitlin, you need to brush up on your monster lore.- Of all the elements of the episode, the fakest by far is how easily Joe peels away that wallpaper in one seamless piece.The post The Flash: The Nuclear Man appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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