

One of the show's many paradoxes is how Peggy, a hyper-competent and self-assured woman, would ever allow herself to wind up a glorified secretary in the first place. This episode suggests it was a lack of opportunity, by which I mean a mission tailored to demonstrate all of her unique skills. For that, maybe we should thank Howard for drawing the attention of Leviathan and going on the run. As the conspiracy against him grows, so do the needs of the S.S.R. to get to the bottom of it, forcing them to rely on every resource at their disposal, even Peggy. The results make you imagine that Peggy's regretting more than ever that she ever accepted Howard's secret mission in the first place. It may have been fun to get back into action and play both sides of the field, but it didn't do anything to bolster her standing in the S.S.R., change its demeaning culture, or exonerate Howard, really. Devoting herself fully to the S.S.R. here jumpstarts all three. This is more like it, and what she should have been doing to begin with. True, it takes her ability to deliver the Howling Commandoes to guarantee her spot on the mission, but maybe that's also exactly the reminder everyone needs that she led and fought beside the finest soldiers and their illustrious captain for a reason. Suddenly, everything changes for Peggy and the men reveal a capacity for open-mindedness they've kept pretty well-hidden until now. For no one is that truer than Thompson, who, once he has no choice but to accept Peggy's presence in the field, proves to be a surprisingly amiable and candid* comrade, even in the locker room. Chief Dooley makes a sarcastic remark about Thompson's "crush on Carter" early in the episode, but after she psychs him up for a parachute jump, snaps him out of a daze during a firefight, and avoids (or withholds) judgment when he confesses to a war crime treated as an honor, it's not difficult to believe Thompson has feelings for her now if he didn't before. Thompson isn't alone in his only slightly begrudging respect for Peggy, as the gruff praise from Dooley and the invitation to join the other boys for drinks prove. This integration is a far cry from how the S.S.R. looked at the start of the season, but it also results in a far more cohesive episode than when she had to split her time between work and her extracurriculars for Howard. Working alongside her peers, rather than a well-meaning but unqualified butler, allows the show's political and military elements to take center focus, instead of being set dressing for a spy caper. In fact, when Jarvis does pop up later in the episode, he already feels like a distracting outsider, a recurring character instead of a lead. Peggy's rising star in the S.S.R. isn't the organization's only major turnaround. When Dooley set them on a manhunt for Howard, effectively presuming his guilt, the S.S.R. became a caricature of an investigative unit, its guilty-until-prove-innocent mindset paving the way for future McCarthyism. But after hearing a journalist buddy recount a series of suspicious coincidences—Howard's conflict with a U.S. general at Finow, the general's subsequent resignation and Howard's rejection of a huge military R&D deal—Dooley seems to treat the implications seriously, even noting Peggy's two cents about Stark's innocence after the Russian mission ends. While it does feel like we have a new, more compelling show in development, the effects of the initial double-agent nonsense linger and have yet to be completely disposed of—if that's the plan. All of Peggy's newfound value at the S.S.R. is threatened by Sousa's realization that she shares the same shoulder scars as the woman in his photos. It'll be interesting to see Sousa, the man who's backed Peggy from the start and all but admitted his interest in her, weigh the cost of threatening her with the opportunity to bolster his own standing. Some Musings:* Although we knew that from last episode's fatalistic speech about sexism.- Dum-Dum Duggan is the Cisco of Agent Carter, pitching Peggy's new codename: "Miss Union Jack! What do you think, fellas, huh?" You can only hope that someone, preferably Harrison Wells, tells Cisco the same thing Peggy tells Duggan: "Never speak again."- Dottie may not be as distracted as her name suggests, but she's

definitely as crazy. For good reason, however.- I know she's just a little girl, but if she's going to stab people to death, burying some lead in her leg seems perfectly fine to me. The post Agent Carter: The Iron Ceiling appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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