

For most superheroes, the true test of a relationship is whether someone can handle their secret identity. For Oliver Queen, that test requires repeated passage as his loved ones gradually uncover more and more of his storied life. For the most part, they've all come through for him, so there's little doubt that Thea, the latest recipient of Ollie's cornucopia of secrets, will too. The only question is how many times Ollie can afford to reopen the wound of deception, and how willing we are to endure the inevitable conflict that bleeds out. At a certain point, "How could you not tell me?!" gets old. Happily (for us—not so great for Thea), this episode brings Thea pretty much to the same place as the rest of Team Arrow by exposing her to every major Ollie secret before the hour is up. Processing in a day what the others had years to grapple with is mind boggling, to say the least, and it's really amazing the siblings' relationship remains mostly intact after such revelations: Slade Wilson, Shado, and Sara—yeah, including that doozy about Sara's death. Actually, not much changes for the characters after so many revelations. The closeness Thea and Ollie had at the start of the episode dissipates a little, and Thea's distrust of Merlyn has risen to full-blown hatred, but these are minor tweaks in the status quo. The trip to Lian Yu and the subsequent threat of Slade, rather than sharpen the Queens' killer instincts, winds up showing how strong their aversion to killing is, and thus their need for Merlyn's aid. And as much as Thea learns, there will always be more Ollie's holding back. For crying out loud, even as several major secrets come to light, the flashbacks simultaneously generate another, one that'd have the biggest impact on Thea. I was afraid adding Starling City to Ollie's list of pre-Arrow destinations would be too much for us to swallow, but his stay is brief and limited (thanks to Waller threatening to eliminate anyone Ollie comes into contact with) enough to just skirt around the edge of disbelief. It's also significant that Starling is where Ollie makes his first truly pitiless kill and comes across his dad's list of corporate targets. Ollie says Lian Yu reminds of him what he became, but it's Starling where all the facets of Oliver Queen—killer, hero, protector of loved ones—really melded. Even though the flashbacks include glimpses of all our usual players,\* they're disappointingly thin, more like cameos than anything else. We get to see the true start to Ollicity as Ollie crouches in a corner, slightly smiling at Felicity doing her trademark awkward ramble to his photo. There's an appearance by Diggle and brother Andy that reveals how directionless Diggle was before Ollie came back. And it's always welcome to see Tommy back in play, and to see how compelling his chemistry with Dinah was before the show put it to bed. Speaking of Dinah, she and Quentin are the only ones we really learn something about through the flashbacks, mainly because they're in very different places at this particular time than they were even when Arrow started, yet their struggles are the same: dealing with grief, fighting addiction, being true to their desires. When we come back to the present and Dinah and Quentin are once again reeling from Sara's death, we see they're in a better position to cope—both give up the bottle in favor of an A.A. meeting—but there's a different, more substantial conflict between them. Quentin is distraught over what he sees is a violation of the special bond between them. Dinah keeping the secret of Sara's death from him is really not much different from Ollie keeping Thea's involvement in that death from his sister. Both wanted to protect their loved ones from information that would destroy them, but while Thea has gotten used to Ollie's deception (and has some perspective that Ollie's actions are nothing compared to Merlyn's), Quentin may be right when he says this is the worst betrayal he's experienced yet. Some Musings:\* Except for Roy, because I'm assuming it'd have been too ludicrous even for Arrow to have Ollie somehow wandering into the Glades and seeing the young thug parkour around.- "This is Laurel. You know, the daughter that lived." Can I please assume that Quentin Lance reads Harry Potter? Please?- And the Award for Saying It Like It Is

goes to Maseo for mocking Ollie's attempt to conceal his identity by wearing a hoodie: "That disguise wouldn't work even if you smeared grease-paint over your face!" The post Arrow: The Return appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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