

Two Episodes In, 'Stargirl' Proves To Be A Fun and Enjoyable Watch

By **Murjani Rawls** - May 26, 2020



Photo Credit: DC Universe

DC's forever growing roulette of T.V. shows has a lot of developing pieces to it at the current moment. This ranges from shows like *The Flash* and *Supergirl* on The CW to *Titans* and *Doom Patrol* on DC Universe's streaming service. There are different flavors for everyone. From those who prefer more family-oriented programming to something a little more gritty. These stories and crossovers have grown to become more grandiose as the years have gone by. It's an ideal time to introduce a lesser-known character into this ever-expanding multiverse. This is where *Stargirl*, a character co-created by Geoff Johns and Lee Moder comes into play.

The pilot episode of *Stargirl* begins with a prologue of sorts that sends us ten years in the past. There is a huge brouhaha between the Justice League of America and the Injustice League that the audience is placed in the middle of. Right from the start, the show shows off its well-funded production design and special effects. It's a treasure trove of deep-cut DC character shown like Solomon Grundy and Hourman. The bad guys' win and a dying Starman (Joel McHale) entrusts his sidekick, Stripsey/Pat Dugan (Owen Wilson) with his cosmic staff with instructions not to give it up until he finds a successor. Concurrently, we see a young Courtney Whitmore waiting up for her father who never shows for Christmas. This concept of loss is a theme that gets expounded upon through the first two episodes.

Once we arrive in the present day, audiences will find themselves to be very familiar with the story beats. Pat is currently married to Courtney's mother, Barbara (Amy Smart) and the family decides to move to Blue Valley, Nebraska. Growing pains occur with the family trying to adjust to small-town life. The now-teenage Courtney (Brec Bassinger) does not take kindly to all the numerous changes that have occurred. The struggles with being a part of a blended family, the new girl at school, and missing a father are all a lot to handle. After the pilot episode sets the stage, Courtney stumbles upon Pat's past and thus, the cosmic staff. Everything gets kicked into high gear from there.

The cosmic staff itself takes on a consciousness of its own. It's fun to observe the relationship between Courtney and this entity grow. There are brief training sequences, but get interrupted by frequent threats. On-the-job training provides the best tests and both episodes have plenty. As with any superhero origin story, the "learning to walk" stage is very shaky. Nobody just walks graciously into their power. By the end of the second episode, you see how both the staff and Courtney can work together better provided more time.

The two connecting threads regarding character development that makes the show enjoyable occur between Courtney and Pat. On one hand, Pat still has his wounds to mend. He observed an old friend die and is now a stepfather where he tries to accept the head caretaker role. When you think of the word sidekick in superhero lore, you picture someone who does all the grunt work with no glory. Courtney even mentions this to him and jokes on him, in jest. However, Pat's character arch in these two episodes demonstrates to us just how important that title is. Being 'the backup' can be just as important as being on the front lines.

With the cosmic staff choosing Courtney and the possibility that Starman could be her father, he struggles with the proper way to handle both these revelations. That the paradox of being a superhero – you have to balance defending those you love coupled with the anxiety of always being in the line of fire. Pat tries to take the lead, but both he and Courtney need each other to combat the coming threats. Both characters bond over their shared secrets and losing someone they hold dear.

It's possibly eluded to that the original Starman could be Courtney's father. She believes it in so much and takes up the mantle of Stargirl with such zest, that you can't help but root for that possibility. There's a quest for justice for the deaths of the original JSA, but also a possible

continuance of a legacy. One can't help wondering if this is going to unravel down the road because the insinuation is there. Even if you wish for something with everything inside you, it doesn't mean that it's correct. Perhaps finding out the truth either way will assist Courtney in defining the hero she wants to be without strings attached. For a little while, this is good enough motivation.

Stargirl is mostly light-hearted and takes its stabs at humor that land for the most part. Whether it be a montage of Pat trying to use his run down robot or the constant ribbing about his hero name. The show also offers instances of a darker tone than would normally apply to shows like Titans and Doom Patrol. Particularly, with the members of the Injustice League of America. Sometimes, these contrasting styles could clash and muddy up an episode's message. Here, they are both utilized effectively to further display the distance between good and evil. The characters of the ILA are usually shown in speaking at night or conversing within shadows as they have ingratiated themselves within the town of Blue Valley.

This is depicted the best with Brainwave's/Henry King Sr. (Christopher James Baker) character. He comes off genuinely creepy and obsessive. A particular succession of scenes in the "S.T.R.I.P.E." episode shows the difference between parenting styles. When Henry Sr. talks to Henry Jr. (Jake Austin Walker) about the first Stargirl incident, he's extremely numb and emotionless. This is in contrast to the family atmosphere of the Whitmore/Dugan household. He treats his son more akin to a continuation of his abilities in bloodline than an actual person that can be loved and nurtured.

Choosing Brainwave as the first villain in the first two episodes was a worthy choice to indicate what our protagonists have to rise against. Another benefit of having this show as a DC Universe production is the authenticity of the action scenes. When characters suffer damage, it shows in bruises and slight blood. It provides a real-life consequence flavor to what would be considered a teen show. These enemies will stop at nothing at making sure nothing gets into the way of their grand plan – even if it means killing a teenager.

Stargirl creator Geoff Johns writes the first two episodes and you can tell that there was meticulous care given to both story-wise. He sets up the main conflicts and interjects various characters who will be future players within the story. Villians like Wizard/William Zarick (Joe Knezevich) have regular jobs and are come off as regular people in

the nucleus of Blue Valley. It's the masks they wear. As we learn more about 'Project New America,' there will be more villains deep within the DC comic archives that will come out of the woodwork. You root for the heroes, but also can't help worrying about the insurmountable odds that are going to seem to greet them.

A good start in tow, Stargirl tells a self-contained story of a girl who wants to take over the world, a stepfather faced with helping her grow into that role and the forces conspiring against them.

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