

Mise-en-scene is more than just a pretentious french way of talking about film. It is a word that doesn't exactly translate into English, the same way beautifully expressive words cannot. A rough approximation of it "in the scene" or "in the frame" which means that everything seen in the frame of a TV show or movie fits. This can be the set design, the lighting but also acting, makeup and blocking.

What fuels the comedy of "Barry," HBO's new series, is the way in which writer and director Bill Hader plays with what is occurring at the scene, oftentimes simultaneously. In the foreground of a scene the titular hitman Barry, played by Hader, might be having a phone call with a possible interest, while in the background, an extremely physical fight takes place.

This juxtaposition of the serious with the mundane adds both a comedic but familiar sense of the world of the show. Hader infuses his scripts with a clear personal stake in the story, not allowing it to suffer to fulfill a joke.

The premise of the entire show is built on a comedic tension, with Barry caught between being good at his job as a hit man, and wanting to pursue acting after tailing a hit into an L.A. community theater. Throw in volatile Chechens and a world weary acting coach played by Henry Winkler, and the two worlds are built up in the brisk hour and a half.

The show makes the right choice by jumping straight into the routineness of Barry's life as a killer for hire. The way Hader shoots the pilot is in a manner that doesn't glorify the violence that Barry uses, but instead paints it in a mundane manner. Barry obviously suffers from some form of depression, and the episodes pick up on this, without shoving the fact in the face of the audience. The core theme of the show seems to be figuring out if it is better to stick with what you're good at, or to follow something that you want to do.

The show also utilizes its supporting cast to generate a moving story and hilarious bits. The big standouts in the first two episodes are Chechens mobster and father Noho Hank (Anthony Carrigan) and Barry's organizer and family friend Fuches (Stephen Root). Noho Hank is particularly charismatic whenever he switches from his torturing mode to apologetic father for making too much noise, which happens to be Fuches screaming in pain.

"Barry" is the show that represents the trend of HBO's creative choices. It can jump from tone and style in the snap of the fingers, moving through action, belated coming of age and comedy in a matter of minutes. Under Hader's creative direction, "Barry" is a show that begs a rewatch for every episode, if only to catch the distinct and simultaneous scenes taking place in frame.